## FUTURE OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIANS

## (essay)

There is a lot of debate about the history and antiquity of human settlement in Australia. The question of establishing the date of earliest settlement has become highly charged. There is a raging academic controversy over dating and identifying a whole school of cave art in Arnhem Land. One academic has even asserted that these paintings were produced by some people other than the ancestors of the present Aboriginal inhabitants, implying that these forebears would have been too primitive to produce such complex and spectacular works of art. Tim Flannery has constructed a sweeping narrative, attractive to many, that ancient Australians almost single-handedly, by hunting and with the overuse of fire, wiped out most of the extinct large animals such as the dyptodron. This value-loaded story is contested by other scientists and scholars such as Professor Marcia Langton, Dr David Bowman, Professor John Chappell, John Benson and James Kohen, author of Aboriginal Environmental Impacts. Some of them make the powerful methodological point that it's an extraordinarily wide-ranging, ideologically driven conclusion from very limited and contradictory evidence.

A book by multi-disciplinary scientist Dr David Horton is very important in this context. While Dr. Horton is a little slow to start, and just a bit repetitive, he assembles from a number of inter-related scientific spheres quite convincing evidence that the associated theories characterising ancient Aboriginal populations as "firestick farmers", and attributing to these ancient populations the extermination of the megafauna, are both quite wrong. These two theories have developed among some academics over many years and been broadly popularised by Tim Flannery. Dr Horton advances, and devastatingly documents from archaeology, a much more convincing narrative in which ancient Aboriginal populations were a more modest part of the ecosystem in Pleistocene Australia and used fire more sparingly than Flannery and Pyne, etc, say.

The decisive episode in the extinction of the big animals was the uniquely extreme desertification event in Australasia-Sahul about 25,000 years ago. Horton very effectively points out how the romantic narrative of early Aboriginal populations as "firestick farmers" and successful hunters and exterminators of the dyptrodon and the giant kangaroo is often used to minimise the importance of the devastation of the environment associated with the British conquest of Australia.

Certain basic facts about Australian prehistory are clear. A continent-wide Aboriginal society of considerable cultural complexity and with a number of variations, has existed for a very long time, at least 40,000 and probably even 60,000 years. Secondly, Australia, New Guinea and Tasmania were one continent (called by scientists Sahul) for a considerable part of this time, and were finally separated at the end of the last ice age, about 6000 years ago. A fair amount of contact took place between some parts of northern Australia and other places. For instance, contact and cultural influences from New Guinea and the Torres Straits, took place with Aborigines in the Cape York area, and considerable contact, probably for up to 500 years, existed between Malay fishermen from Macassar and Aboriginals in Arnhem Land, with much cultural interchange, and even a certain amount of intermarriage.

#### Paul Sheehan's book Amongst the Barbarians promotes a dubious version of Australasian prehistory that devalues the cultural achievements of the first Australasians

Part of the methodology of Paul Sheehan's populist book is that he finds "scholars" and "authorities" that generally devalue and criticise the culture and achievements of the people that he regards as divisive: Asian migrants, multiculturalists, Aborigines, etc. His "experts" on Aboriginal culture are David Foster, Tim Flannery and an American academic, one Stephen J. Pyne, who appears on the first four pages of Amongst the Barbarians. Pyne's theory is that the Australian Aboriginals were the greatest firebugs in human history. In passing, Pyne says: "An entire continent bypassed the Neolithic revolution, which had spread agriculture to the Old World. Unlike the Americas no autonomous agricultural centres developed in Australia."

In fact, Australian prehistory is by no means that simple. Pyne discloses a certain ignorance. Australia and New Guinea were one continent until 6000 years ago and all experts agree that agriculture developed in the New Guinea highlands at least 9000 years ago and probably earlier. There are some real puzzles in the prehistory of Australia and Sahul, one of which is why agriculture did not spread overland to other parts of Sahul, and also why there is such a distinct linguistic and cultural break between Melanesian culture in New Guinea and Aboriginal culture in Australia. Nevertheless, there was one independent development of agriculture in Australasia/Sahul, and that was in New Guinea.

Our continent did not bypass the Neolithic revolution, as Pyne and Sheehan say. They might have known this had they read, for instance, A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul by Peter White and James O'Connell (Academic Publishers, December 1982), or the more recent Archaeology of Aboriginal Australia: A Reader, edited by Tim Murray (Allen and Unwin, 1998).

So much for Sheehan's experts, some of whome seem to be ignorant of the basic literature in the field. The inquiry into Australasian prehistory has really just begun. In reality, the achievements of Aboriginal society in Australia, and Melanesian society in New Guinea were quite considerable. The very first, and most amazing achievement, was getting to the continent at all, 60,000 years ago or thereabouts. The ancestors of Aboriginal and Melanesian society seem to have constructed boats or rafts and developed sufficient sailing skills to cross the large sea gap between Asia and Sahul.

From the time of white settlement in 1788, the contact between white Australia and Aboriginal Australia has been brutal, ruthless and imperial, qualified by constant and sometimes fairly effective Aboriginal resistance to white conquest. Keith Willey's useful book, When the Sky Fell Down is a comprehensive reconstruction of what can be deduced about the destruction of Aboriginal society in the Sydney region. Eric Wilmot's wonderful novel, Pemulwuy, the Rainbow Warrior (Sydney Weldons, 1987) is an excellent artistic attempt to re-create the world of the well-documented initial Aboriginal military resistance to white conquest.

This resistance, undermined and finally defeated by a combination of the military superiority in weapons and resources of the invaders, and the devastating impact of the diseases introduced from white settlement into populations that didn't have immunity to those diseases, recurs throughout the history of white settlement all over Australia.

The disastrous impact of European diseases on Aboriginal peoples without immunities, is a common story in the Americas, the Pacific and Australasia, but that does not stop some historical revisionists even attempting to alter this history. There is even one medical historian, who laborioriously tries to construct a narrative in which smallpox didn't spread from white settlement, as almost all the witnesses at the time said it did, but came overland from the Malay contact with Arnhem Land. Predictably he, too, becomes one of Sheehan's "experts".

In this context, Sheehan ignores the definitive book on this topic, Our Original Aggression, by the late Noel Butlin, the distinguished Australian statistician and economist (after whom the Noel Butlin Archives in Canberra are named), published in 1983, and his Economics and the Dreamtime (ANU Press, 1994). In these thoroughly reputable and pretty well unanswerable books, Butlin established quite clearly from the records that the epidemics close to the settled areas of Australia spread from the settled areas.

He also, as part of his research, using his skills as a statistician, satisfactorily proved for most geographers and anthropologists that the number of Aborigines in Australia at the time of settlement was probably between 600,000 and a million, many more than the 300,000 previously accepted as the likely figure.

Throughout the 19th century, as white settlement spread, there was a frequent effort on the part of British colonial authorities in Australia to kill off the Aboriginals, interspersed with much more episodic and less effective moments of attempting to "protect" them. Sometimes the protection was almost as bad as the more overt attempts to exterminate. In Tasmania, the Protector of Aborigines, the earnest and fairly well-intentioned George Augustus Robinson, eventually was forced, more of less by circumstance, to preside over a desperate scheme to create a reservation for the surviving Tasmanians, which ended up being on a bleak and unpleasant island, unsuitable for such a purpose, where the surviving full-blood Aboriginal Tasmanians died out, the last survivor being Truganini.

The present Tasmanian Aboriginal community is descended mainly from a mixed-blood community that developed on the islands of Bass Strait from white sealers and the Tasmanian women who they seized during the brutal era of European conquest of Tasmania. Perhaps the most vicious, appalling but effective feature of this war of extermination and conquest, was the recruitment of Aboriginal mounted police from the most brutalised group of young males from tribal remnants, who were unleashed by white colonial society on tribes other than their own, with a licence and encouragement to kill. Some of these ugly episodes are covered in Bill Rosser's moving book Up Rode the Troopers, The Black Police in Queensland (Queensland University Press, 1990).

#### Sheehan loathes critical Australian historians

The following short piece of purple prose is from the second-last page of Sheehan's book:

"Thirty years of poisoning of the nation's history has taken its toll. Many histories now parrot a hatred of Australia. The politically-motivated accusations of racism, made hollow by overuse, have been pumped up to include 'genocide' and 'holocaust'. The mud has stuck. The nation's sense of certainty at the end of the century has been eroded by the politics of stealth and division."

Well, at the risk of incuring Mr Sheehan's displeasure by further poisoning the nation's history, as he puts it, I hereby read into the record some material from a historian, Sir Hudson Fysh, of whom Sheehan possibly approves.

#### The brutal butcher Kennedy and Sir Hudson Fysh

From the more civilised standpoint that is now happily accepted by most Australians, it is quite difficult to remember just how barbaric was the conquest of Australia from its original inhabitants, and how sickening the celebration of this conquest by British White Australia up until very recent times. I recently acquired at a book fair a standard piece of the Australiana of the 1930s, a book Taming the North by Hudson Fysh (Angus and Robertson, 1933), later Sir Hudson Fysh, the founder of Qantas.

The version I have is the revised and enlarged edition published in March 1950. This book ought to be reprinted as a reminder of the brazen way British White Australia justified its ruthless suppression of all Aboriginal resistance to conquest. The book is a biography of the quite famous squatter, Alexander Kennedy, the Scottish settler who "opened up" the area north and west of Cloncurry for white settlement.

This area was the tribal land of the warlike Kalkadoons. After the Kalkadoons had been constantly provoked by the squatters pushing further and further into every corner of their tribal lands, they finally speared a couple of the most offensive intruders. The vengeance of the bloodthirsty squatters, aided by the native police, led by the notoriously vicious F.C. Urquhart, who ended up Queensland Police Commissioner, was absolutely awesome.

Using their superior firepower, they wiped out several hundred Kalkadoons. What is most amazing about these brutal incidents is the unctuous and brutally frank way Sir Hudson Fysh describes them and other events in this war of extermination against the Kalkadoons and praises the bloodthirsty Kennedy and Urquhart.

The illustrations and the cover of the book are also extraordinary expressions of the ideology of conquest that pervaded British Australia. These illustrations portray the "rugged and manly" white settlers, with their carbines, pursuing and shooting the "naked savages". Fysh routinely repeats, as if they were true, the fairy stories about Aboriginal cannibalism. He says:

There is no doubt that the blacks right through northern Queensland were cannibals. Urquhart says that his boys always told him the blacks did not like the taste of whites much — they were too salt — but they relished Chinamen, hundreds of whom were killed when taking provisions across the Peninsula to the Palmer River goldfield in the early days following its discovery by Mulligan. This fact was put down to the salt-beef diet of the early whites, while the Chinamen lived mainly on rice.

The following extracts from Fysh's book celebrate several of the massacres.

At last, Eglington, the white officer in charge, arrived on the scene and soon the situation was under control. A brush with the murderers ensued and many of the natives were killed, the rest making their escape to the rough country. Kennedy returned about this time and asked Eglington if he thought he had got all the murderers. "Yes," said Eglington.

"Did you get a piebald black?" asked Kennedy.

"No," was the answer.

"Well, come along. That fellow is one of a mob that I have had my eye on for a long time — a cheeky trouble-making chap. We shan't be safe now till they are out of the district."

A long trip into the hills followed, the native police hot on the trail and Kennedy as keen as the rest. A yell of defiance was heard, the pursuers were discovered by the retreating party and hurled threats from their supposed safety in the rugged hilly country. However, they did not reckon on the deadly carbines of the whites and the native troopers, who speedily shot the warlike bucks down.

The piebald lay dead. He was a most peculiar freak, normal in physique, build, and intelligence, but his dusky skin was patched here and there with healthy, pinkish-white areas.

#### A later massacre

Kennedy was filled with a fierce rage and urged the speedy following up of the murderers. This was the last straw. The killing of his cattle was bad enough, but the loss of his partner ... showed that nothing but a terrible lesson would suffice. ...

The blacks were finally located in a gorge and, though showing some hostility at first by hurling spears in an attempt to stay the approach of the party, they broke and fled at the first sign of rifle fire. There were natives behind boulders, behind trees, and up trees, and every now and then they made attempts to sneak away to better cover when the opportunity occurred. One small party got away over the spur of a hill, being assisted in their flight by the cracking of the carbines, which stirred up the dust around their feet. Kennedy borrowed Urquhart's horse, Hamlet, and went off in pursuit. ... Kennedy was like hell let loose that day ...

Some natives who had remained in hiding bobbed up here and there as they made a dash for better cover. One fellow jumped up from behind a boulder and raced for the nearest creek, and Kennedy, who was on foot at the time, sprang after him. Reaching the steep bank the native jumped into the water, meaning to make for the opposite bank. As Kennedy reached the edge he took careful aim with his carbine, but the weapon failed to go off. Hurling the carbine in after the native, Kennedy jumped into the water, and commenced to grapple with his enemy.

Urquhart fired just in time to prevent serious consequences, for Kennedy could not swim. Two of Urquhart's boys went into the water and brought Kennedy ashore. It took the boys two hours' diving to recover the carbine.

The self-righteous Urquhart even wrote an execrable poem celebrating the second massacre! Hudson Fysh's interest in Kennedy stemmed largely from the fact that Kennedy was one of his first investors in Qantas, and there is a picture in the book of Kennedy as an old man in 1931 getting out of one of the early Qantas planes. Never has Karl Marx's aphorism that modern capitalism comes upon the scene "bloody in tooth and claw" been more clearly demonstrated than in the reverent way Hudson Fysh writes about the bloodthirsty Kennedy.

In a very real sense, part of the initial capital to develop the pioneer Australian airline, Qantas, was surplus value derived from this conquest and massacre, that is, from the blood of the murdered Kalkadoons. In my view, as an act of long overdue historical recognition and repentance, Qantas should be renamed Kalkadoon.

No doubt Paul Sheehan has been reduced to appoplexy by recent news that Professor Colin Tatz, director of the Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies at Macquarie University, has prepared a general brief against previous Australian governments for genocide on four major grounds. One of these is that the colonial authorities stood by or authorised settlers or police to slaughter 4000 Aborigines in Tasmania from 1806 to 1835, and some 10,000 in Queensland between 1824 and 1908.

#### P.P. McGuiness, as an "expert" on Aboriginal affairs

The editor of Quadrant and Sydney Morning Herald columnist, the irascible, arrogant, pompous and chronically self-congratulatory P.P. McGuiness, has in recent times appointed himself as a bit of a pundit on Aboriginal affairs. One of his preoccupations is ridiculing all notions of past genocide, which is a pretty tall order, considering all the evidence for past massacres — of which the incidents recounted above are only a few — many of which have been documented by Henry Reynolds.

McGuinness associates this rejection of past genocide against Aborigines with throwaway remarks questioning the genocide involved in the recent massacres of Kosovar Albanians and East Timorese. He seems to have a particular soft spot for the "civil rights" of "alleged" practitioners of genocide such as the white British conquerors of Australia, the Serbian dictator Milosevic and the Indonesian military. To each their own!

McGuinness's other unpleasant obsession is his ridicule of the notion that thousands of Aboriginal children were stolen from their parents. He claims that (1) it wasn't a matter of government policy, despite Robert Manne's documentation of national meetings of public servants in Aboriginal affairs, where such lines of policy were implicitly endorsed, and (2) he ignores or ridicules the personal testimony of the many hundreds of Aboriginals who assert that they were forcibly removed from their parents.

This second obsession is very offensive indeed to those who were forcibly removed and to many thousands of other Australians. McGuiness's approach reached a kind of high point in the notorious ABC program in which he gratuitously insulted Lois O'Donoghue, one of the stolen children herself, in his most arrogant way, by pouring contempt on the idea that any children were stolen. His extraordinary performance on that occasion took many people's breath away.

#### Michael Duffy, another "expert" on Aboriginal affairs

The Murdoch tabloid directed at the less formally educated sections of society, the Daily Telegraph, retains three rabidly right-wing populist columnists whose function is to cater to the perceived prejudices of the paper's audience, to whit, Piers Ackerman and the Janissary journalists Miranda Devine and Michael Duffy.

On the Telegraph opinion page of January 5, 2000, Duffy has a carefully worded piece headed, Keep the H word out of our history. He goes out of his way to stress the Jewish origins of a number of prominent public critics of Australian racism against Aborigines, while of course disclaiming any anti-Semitism, in singling out these Jews.

Apparently Jews are more sensitive on these things because they got here more recently and their familiarity with the Holocaust directed at the Jews of Europe has made them overly preoccupied with such matters and led them to exaggerate the magnitude of the atrocities perpetrated on Australia's Aboriginal population. Get the message! Rootless cosmopolitans don't understand Australian history as well as older "real Australians" such as Duffy, who properly understand in their bones that our treatment of the Aboriginals wasn't all that bad.

Duffy is worried that the Labor side of politics may be gaining some momentum among liberal-minded Australians by its defence of Aboriginal rights, and he bemoans the fact that the vigorous defence of Aboriginal rights, and a vigorous focus on past wrongs done to the Aboriginal population, is dividing Australia. He says:

The last thing Aborigines — or those genuinely interested in their wellbeing — need is for their future to be affected by the introduction of concepts and words which inflame and confuse our view of those horrors which did happen here.

And, later:

In the meantime, the best thing the rest of us can do is resist attempts to polarise Aboriginal matters. This includes attempts to change the meanings of words in common use.

Elsewhere he makes the extraordinary statement:

Most people would now agree that One Nation was in fact not a racist phenomenon.

So we had all better get the message. Pauline Hanson is not racist, and anyway, many of the people making a fuss about Aboriginal oppression are a just a bunch of Jews. British Australia did some bad things to the Aboriginal population, but we shouldn't exaggerate it. After all, the main danger in Aboriginal affairs is not really the oppression of the Aboriginal people, but the damaging possibility that inflaming anger about injustices to Aborigines will interfere with the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

In the Telegraph a bizarre competition is developing between Duffy and Piers Ackerman, with the two tabloid columnists trying to outdo each other in the vicious extravagance of their comments on Aboriginal affairs. Well, Duffy now has to be way in front in this contest, with his contribution on March 25 to the debate on mandatory sentencing. The following extract is something of a new low in nasty tabloid treatment of these matters:

It is particularly nauseating that this new racism has been practised in the name of virtue. Many of these sanctimonious whites, this small army of lawyers, anthropologists, public servants and journalists, have lost touch with the spiritual roots of their own culture and have tried to redeem themselves by feeding off Aboriginal issues, which they pervert to suit their own decadent spiritual requirements. Their new religion is anti-racism, and everything is interpreted as a racial issue, no matter how wrong and destructive of Aboriginal interests this might be. It is time these white moral maggots were shaken off the body of black Australia, from which they have sucked so much life.

White maggots, indeed! White maggots of Australia unite! Within a couple of days of Duffy's extraordinary outburst in his column, an opinion poll was published in the newspapers of March 28, showing that more Australians opposed mandatory sentencing than supported it, and many more again opposed mandatory sentencing of adolescents. I'm considering having a badge made for public sale, with the slogan, "I am a white maggot".

It almost goes without saying that it would be fascinating to get Duffy down on a couch and try to draw out of his mind by psychoanalysis what ghosts and demons are running around in his head about "rootless cosmopolitans" and "white maggots" "interfering in Aboriginal affairs".

#### The saga of Jack and Lallie Akbar

A brutal and instructive episode in both Aboriginal affairs and Australia's race policy relating to Asians, sharply refutes McGuiness's proposition that no state policy was involved in the stolen children saga. A moving and informative book by Pamela Rajkowski called Linden Girl, a story of outlawed lives (UWA Press, 1995) recounts the extraordinary saga of an "Afghan" (actually an Indian Muslim from the Punjab), Jack Akbar, who married a young Aboriginal woman, Lallie, in Western Australia in the 1920s.

This scholarly and thorough book documents how the notorious Western Australian "Protector" of Aborigines, Auber Octavius Neville, had Jack Akbar and Lallie, who ultimately produced a family of three children, imprisoned several times for the "crime" of marrying each other. It is an extraordinary story of human courage and endurance. The devoted couple escaped a number of times, on one occasion making an extraordinary journey across the Nullabor Plain with Lallie pregnant, and which they only survived because he was an experienced camel driver and she, coming of a tribe of desert Aborigines, was used to living off the land.

Eventually they beat the rap, so to speak, for their marriage "crime", and lived happily for many years after the Department of Aboriginal Affairs eventually gave up trying to separate them out of exhaustion.

The significance of this book in relation to the stolen children is that the author found repeated and constant references in "Protector" Neville's private papers to the policy of removing mixed-race children from their Aboriginal parents in an attempt to "breed the colour out". One of Neville's objections to the marriage between Akbar and Lallie was that in his racist universe they were both coloured, and therefore a union between them would only perpetuate the continuation of undesirable coloured races.

Auber Octavius Neville was by far the most forceful person in the adoption of the stolen children strategy in Aboriginal affairs. In the minutes of the meeting of Protectors of Aboriginals from the different states and territories that in 1937 adopted the policy as official strategy, he emerges as the most forceful, domineering and articulate advocate and practitioner of this terrible government practice.

#### Aboriginal resistance

The history of Aboriginal resistance to the war of conquest, has been carefully covered over in the past, but Forgotten rebels: Black Australians who fought back, by David Lowe (Permanent Press, Melbourne, 1994). Black War by Clive Turnbull (1948), and Aboriginal Tasmanians by Lyndall Ryan (Allen and Unwin, 1996), and in particular the wonderful and ongoing work of Henry Reynolds, describing the many episodes of Aboriginal resistance, have gone some distance towards correcting the historical record.

#### Australia's collective repressed memory. Sexual relations between conquerers and conquered produced multitudes of mixed-blood Australians from the first moment of settlement, and many of them have been absorbed by "white" Australia

Despite the very real attempt at extermination, Aboriginal Australia displayed an extraordinary resilience in some ways. From the first days of settlement, sexual relationships between whites and Aboriginals produced many mixed-blood offspring, who survived because of their immunity, inherited from the white parent, to imported diseases. Many of these were absorbed, because of the shortage of women, into white colonial society, giving rise to a very widespread but often hidden Aboriginal ancestry among working-class and rural populations. Recently, even the well-known television personality Ray Martin has discovered a remote Aboriginal ancestor.

This question of the amount of "racial" mixture in older Australian populations has been constantly repressed in the collective memory. There can be very little doubt about the widespread Aboriginal contribution to "white" Australian population, particularly in the older settled areas and in rural and pastoral areas.

Particularly during the explosion of pastoralism beyond the 19 counties around Sydney, from the 1820s onwards, all observers noted constant sexual relationships between ex-convict shepherds and Aboriginal populations. Even the rapidly developing distinctive Australian version of the English language was strongly influenced by the interplay between Aboriginal idiom and Irish Celtic speech on the pastoral interface between Aboriginal and European Australia.

Conflicts over women were flashpoints for many of the physical conflicts between whites and Aboriginals. "Half-caste" girls, in particular, were in great demand for domestic labour and sexual services in the bush. The Aboriginal contribution to the gene pool of "white" society is substantial in much of rural Australia.

In pastoral Australia the curious institution developed very widely of the "drover's boy", in which Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal women travelled with drovers, dressed as men. This has been immortalised in Ted Egan's popular song. As in the American South, this question of some black ancestry is the haunting refrain that exists in the recesses of many family histories. The explosion in numbers of people asserting Aboriginal identity in successive censuses is the surfacing of this widespread repressed family memory.

Many other mixed-blood people became part of a surviving, and later reviving, Aboriginal society in many parts of Australia. In Victoria, southern South Australia, Tasmania and NSW there are very few full-blood Aboriginals left, but there is now a large and vigorous Aboriginal society of mainly mixed ancestry.

In the 19th century, a sometimes well-intentioned, but often vicious, white paternalism emerged in relation to Aboriginal affairs and the anthropological study of Aborigines. The work of Protectors cum anthropologists, such as Daisy Bates and T.G. Strehlow, has been used to justify some paternalistic practices and to defend essentially conservative policies in relation to Aboriginal affairs. Recently an anthropologist working in Aboriginal affairs, Ken Maddock, has attempted to use his anthropological prestige to buttress the reactionary Quadrant project in relation to Aboriginal affairs.

Even a well-known, prize-winning, although rather opaque novelist, David Foster, has made spectacularly reactionary public statements on Aboriginal issues, once again, quickly seized on by Paul Sheehan in his book. A theme that was begun in the 19th century by the fantasist Daisy Bates, was that of "the passing of the Aborigines", which she associated with a wild exaggeration of perceived barbaric rituals and practices in traditional Aboriginal society.

The eccentric and tortured Daisy Bates became a byword for these two themes, and her largely invented stories of ritual infanticide came to be a core element in the conventional European view of traditional Aboriginal society, which she kept repeating forcibly was dying anyway. Dick Hall, in his wonderful and effective book Black Armband Days (Random House, 1998), thoroughly and comprehensively "deconstructs" the previously all-pervasive Daisy Bates legend.

Some of the bones of allegedly ritually eaten Aboriginal babies that Daisy Bates sent to the South Australian Museum, were later found to be the bones of feral cats, and a lot of the other bones can't be traced.

The impact of the Strehlow-Bates school of Aboriginal "anthropology" has been enormous. The ease with which someone like Pauline Hanson or the authors of the book Pauline Hanson, The Truth (Pauline Hanson Support Movement, 1997), just reel off wild assertions implying that tribal Aboriginal eating of babies was an almost normal dietary practice, underlines the unpleasant ideological impact of this thoroughly white paternalist, shoddily researched, or even falsified Daisy Bates style "anthropology". Whenever some racist wishes to abolish ATSIC, like Pauline Hanson, or cut off funds for Aboriginal health and welfare, its become almost routine for them to throw in dubious anthropology about Aboriginal "baby eating" and other barbarities alleged to be part of traditional Aboriginal culture.

The main figure in this paternalistic extinctionist attitude to Aboriginal culture and affairs was the extraordinarily talented, prodigiously energetic, but possibly slightly mad, anthropologist T.G. Strehlow. There is no question that Carl Strehlow and his son, T.G. Strehlow, put together a thorough record of the Arrernte culture through their anthropological efforts over many years. Nevertheless, both Strehlows' thoroughly racist preconceptions led them to exaggerate perceived brutal aspects of Arrernte culture. T.G. Strehlow's racist Eurocentrism made him the originator of a general theme that has become almost a mantra of racists who wish to appear learned. His view was that Arrernte society, although brutal and in parts even Satanic was, nevertheless, in its own way, authentic. (T.G's father, Carl was head of the Finke River Mission, at Hermannsburg, in the Northern Territory from 1894-1922, and T.G. was raised and individually taught by his father to the age of 14.) He had absolute contempt, however, for mixed-blood people, who he regarded as degenerate, not authentic Aboriginals, and demeaning to the white "race" also.

This Strehlow view of Aboriginal traditional society as cruel, brutal, authentic but doomed, and half-caste society as loathsome and degenerate, has become the accepted ideology on Aboriginal affairs of many racists and bigots in Australian society. The many variations on this theme permeated most attempts to address the problem of Aboriginal society until very recent times. The state project of stealing mixed-blood children from their parents (the stolen generations) stems from the Strehlow view that half-caste society was vile. The Hermansburg Lutheran Mission, where Strehlow's dramas were played out, was one of the saddest and most contradictory of Christian missions. It certainly acted as a kind of refuge for Aboriginal people trying to survive the widespread physical attacks on them, but the price they paid was a constant assault on their cultural traditions by the narrow and bigotted Lutheran missionaries, who regarded Aboriginal traditional religion as Satanic.

The important book by the infuriating postmodernist, Paul Carter, The Lie of the Land (Faber, 1996), is very illuminating on this. Ploughing through Carter's maddeningly obtuse text is, in this instance, well worth the effort. The chapter "A Reverent Miming" is an extraordinary mine of information about what happened at the Hermansburg Mission.

Carter describes, in a pathetic and moving way, the constant pressure on the Aboriginal elders and religious leaders by the Christian religious maniac, Pastor Albrecht, to surrender to him the traditional Aboriginal religious artifacts, the tjurungas. He also describes the official Lutheran ceremony of "desacralisation" of the Manangananga Cave in which these objects had been preserved for many hundreds of years. Both Strehlows accumulated a collection of thousands of these looted Aboriginal sacred objects, and many of the Aboriginal people in central Australia are still fighting a vigorous battle with the Strehlow estate to get them back for the Aboriginal people before they are dispersed via Christies or Sothebys to rich collectors around the world.

The account of these events in Carter's book is supplemented by the account in One Blood (Albatross Books, 1990) by the Anglican, John Harris, who provides a perceptive overview of the experience of Christian missions in Australia.

#### Australia played a bloodthirsty role in the South Pacific. Nevertheless, 150,000 people from the South Pacific now live in Australia

From the time of white settlement, Sydney became the main port for the British looting and conquest of the South Pacific. British ships out of Sydney supplied guns to Maori chiefs in New Zealand and to many tribal chiefs throughout the Pacific, using their trade in guns to increase British political influence, and to thereby facilitate their looting of the area.

This activity was almost universally bloodthirsty. The notorious activities of Samuel Marsden, the Anglican minister, flogging magistrate and missionary gun-runner, and the later "blackbirding" of many thousands of Melanesians as semi-slave labourers to Queensland, are only the best-known examples of a whole system of conquest and exploitation.

A typical event was the incident in 1837 when, without warning, the men of Sapwauahfik Atoll (then called Ngatik) in Micronesia were killed by the crew of a trade ship, out of Sydney, who wished to steal a cache of valuable tortoiseshell possessed by the islanders. This is recounted in the fascinating book, The Ngatik Massacre (Smithsonian Institute, 1993) by Lin Poyer

The story of this community is, in its own way, just as fascinating a story as that of the Pitcairn Islanders. After the massacre, several of the European murderers settled on the island and were joined by a collection of other Pacific beachcombers, who cohabited with the female survivors of the massacre, giving rise to a vigorous new community with its own complex culture, which now numbers some hundreds, descended, in a way, from the murderers and the surviving widows of the murdered men. Needless to say, a collective memory of the massacre is an important part of the cultural history of the island.

Quite a lot of South Pacific history is like this, containing terrible memories of past atrocities mixed with the extraordinary resilience of the surviving indigenous people, recreating a life and culture for themselves from whatever is left to and available to them.

In the light of this bloodthirsty Australian participation in Pacific history, an interesting feature of the racial history of Australia is the presence, today, of vigorous communities of indigenous people from all over the Pacific. For a start, people from the Torres Strait Islands, who are mainly Melanesian with some Polynesian influences, have scattered all over northern Australia, from Darwin to Brisbane, and there are even communities in Sydney and Melbourne.

There are maybe 30,000 of these people. The descendents of the Melanesians (Kanaks) who managed to avoid deportation from Queensland between 1900 and 1910 have developed into a vigorous, self-confident community, nearly 20,000, mainly in Queensland centred on Mackay.

More recently, large communities of people from Polynesia have settled in Australia: Samoans, Tongans, Cook Islanders and others, and some Melanesians from Fiji and Papua New Guinea. There are now perhaps 40,000 people of this background from the Pacific in Australia. There are also about 60,000 Maoris from New Zealand and quite a scattering of descendants of Africans and West Indians, sent to Australia as convicts in the 19th century, or who came, like the black Americans at Eureka, during the gold rushes. (In an article in the Journal of Australian Studies No 16, Ian Duffield calculates that 1% of the convicts sent to Australia were African or West Indian blacks. This makes a total of almost 2,000 black convicts. In Watkin Tench's account of the early colony, there are nearly 20 mentions of different black convicts. In "Australian Race Relations 1788-1993" published in 1994, Andrew Markus records: "Sir Frank Villeneuve Smith, at various times attorney-general, premier and chief justice of Tasmania, and the first president of the Tasmanian Club, was of part-African descent".)

The complexity of the history of the infusion of people of colour into the Australian community is underlined by the nasty hullabaloo directed at the head of a well-known and successful Western Australian Aboriginal writer, Colin Johnston, and the noted academic, Bobbi Sykes, whose detractors claimed that they didn't have the right to classify themselves as Aboriginal because their coloured ancestor was actually from somewhere else, despite the fact that they had identified from childhood with the black community. If you take together all these people, plus the more than 350,000 people who now identify themselves as Aboriginal according to the census, you have a community in Australia of indigenous people of colour from Australia or the South Pacific, of more than 600,000 people.

The phenomenon that has taken demographers by surprise, and driven conservative racists to fury, is the explosive numerical expansion of the self-identified Aboroginal population at the past few censuses. At each census the number of Aboriginals has gone up far more rapidly than either natural increase or even intermarriage can account for. What has actually happened is that many Australians who have a family memory, often concealed for survival reasons, particularly in the rabidly racist 19th century, having rediscovered and come to terms with their Aboriginal ancestry, feel sufficiently at ease to acknowledge it to the census takers.

The racists, of course, ascribe this to the (very limited) financial advantages, available to people of Aboriginal ancestry, but the more obvious explanation is the same kind of thing that drives other people who engage in the now widespread, very human preoccupation with family history, to proudly proclaim the convict ancestry, which was once such a terrible stigma. Recently, Paddy McGuiness has put a new slant on these things, asserting that because a majority of Aboriginal people appear currently to marry non-Aboriginal people, the existence of Aboriginal identity is questionable and the rapid complete "assimilation" of Aboriginals is likely. This McGuiness slant is not very useful in making an accurate projection for the future.

The overwhelming majority of children of unions between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people tend to identify mainly with the Aboriginal part of their heritage, and even if they don't, are often forced to do so by the residual racism in Australian society. In real life there is no prospect at all of Aboriginal identity dying out because of intermarriage.

#### The stolen children

The stolen children is the issue that most sharply embodies the brutal history and the unacknowledged guilt of white racism in Australia. To assist in the process of the widely acclaimed "passing of the Aboriginals", the racist authorities in British Australia in the 19th century began a process of stealing Aboriginal children from their parents to turn them into a docile labour force for the emerging Australian capitalist society.

Over the past 150 years, nearly 50,000 Aboriginal or mixed race children were stolen from their parents in one way or another. The process of the descendants of this child stealing rediscovering their Aboriginality is a part of the explosion in Aboriginal numbers in the census. In addition to this, in the early years of settlement, and in fact all through the 19th century, other mixed-blood people disappeared into the underclass of white society, often into the Irish Catholic section of it, where they were more accepted and could partly avoid the rabid racism of the British ruling class in colonial Australia.

The extraordinary popularity among white Australians of Sally Morgan's wonderful bestseller, My Place (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987) about her experiences tracing her Aboriginality, clearly indicates that many people are beginning to come to terms with the sorry history of white Australia in these matters. Another very moving book on this topic is The Lost Children (Doubleday, 1989) edited by Coral Edwards and Peter Read, which is the life stories of 13 stolen children told by themselves.

The definitive overview of the whole question of the deliberate disruption of Aboriginal life involved in the stolen children policy, is the magisterial and comprehensive new book, Broken Circles. Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000 by Anna Haebich (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000).

Another feature of colonial Australia was the intermarriage with Aboriginals of some migrant groups that had few women among them. Quite a few Chinese married Aboriginals. In central Australia very many of the "Afghan" camel drivers (they were mostly actually from the north-west frontier of what is now Pakistan, but crude British shorthand classified them as Afghans) married Aboriginals, and there is a community in central Australia, which mainly forms part of the Aboriginal community, with Pakistani names, who are descendants of these unions.

The explosion of Aboriginal numbers in the recent censuses is obviously a coming together of the delayed results of all these past practices and events. The antagonistic response to it from some of the more backward and racist white Australians is obviously a product of a very bad conscience about Aboriginal relations in the past. For me, these matters have acquired a strong personal aspect in the last few years, because, as I describe elsewhere, an inquiry by one of my relatives into our family history has produced a hauntingly circumstantial, but difficult to document, inference of some probable remote Aboriginality, from an Aboriginal ancestor who may have deliberately disappeared into the more accepting Irish Catholic working class of the 19th century.

#### Indigenous Australia and white Australia

It is obvious that my starting point in these matters is the imperative need for Australians to take a determined stand in defence of the interests of indigenous Australia against the current explosion of racism and attacks on the material interests of Aboriginal Australians. It seems to me absolutely clear that it is a reactionary diversion for essentially conservative people such as Pauline Hanson and Paul Sheehan to make indigenous Australians, Asian migrants and others scapegoats for the problems of modern Australia. Such attempts must be opposed, fought and defeated.

Hundreds of thousands of white Australians are prepared to defend the rights and interests of indigenous Australia, as is shown by the enormous response to the events such as Sorry Day, Queensland pastoralists who have spoken up for Aboriginal reconciliation, the thousands of people who have spoken out against mandatory sentencing, and even the statements of conservative figures such as Malcolm Fraser.

Nevertheless, having said this, there are real, if episodic, conflicts of interest between some ordinary white Australians and some indigenous Australians, and that is one of the factors that gives momentum to the racist diversions of the people such as Pauline Hanson. These conflicts of interest are real and can't be glossed over.

For a start, many Aboriginals live either in poorer working class areas of major cities or in provincial cities or country towns of high unemployment, low income and limited facilities and prospects for everyone. Because of past oppression, and current social problems, the unemployment rate among Aboriginal youth, with the concommitant social dislocation, is much higher than that of any other social group.

Problems such as alcoholism and drugs are proportionately higher among Aboriginal youth. The health problems of Aboriginal communities are worse than those of whites, and the life expectancy of Aboriginals is lower than that of whites. In addition to this, and for all the above reasons, the proportion of Aboriginals in the prison system is far higher than the proportion in the community. (This has been the case for the last 30 or 40 years. Before that, for the whole of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century, the Irish Catholics numerically dominated the prison system, out of all proportion to their numbers in society at large, much to the mock horror of upper-class British Australia, which got very worked up about the criminal propensities of Catholics. The reason for this over-representation of Catholics in the prisons was exactly the same as the current over-representation of Aboriginals. At that stage Irish Catholics were the poorest of the population, at the bottom of the social heap. In Paul Sheehan's book, he also makes great chauvinist mileage from the proposition that Vietnamese, Arabs, Turks and Maoris (Sheehan's codeword for Maoris is "New Zealanders"), recent immigrants from poor countries or poor circumstances, are somewhat over-represented in the prison system. So what's new?)

The widespread presence of an often physically obvious indigenous Australasian community, in the poorest sections of Australian society, gives rise to very sharp and quite human conflicts of interest. In some country towns a heavy concentration of mainly unemployed youth, a fair percentage of them black or brown, is a prominent feature of life. In some towns it is difficult to run a small business because of the desperate behaviour of unemployed youth. Such problems don't lend themselves to easy or short-term solutions, and it is not useful or intelligent to treat the sometimes racist responses of poorer white Australians to these circumstances as racism of the same sort that Pauline Hanson expresses. Such conflicts of interest are to some extent conflicts among the people, and should be treated as such and approached as realistically and humanely as possible, trying to take account of the real interests of all concerned.

Such conflicts aren't so acute in major urban centres such as Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne, but they exist there, too. In some areas of Sydney, for instance, quite a lot of house burglaries are committed by unemployed indigenous youth, and a fair percentage of the current wave of minor hold-ups in newsagencies and convenience stores, with knives or syringes, are committed by brown or black youth, often driven by narcotics habits, as are their fellow white armed robbers. While the human tendency to urban myth often exagerates the proportion of burglaries and hold-ups performed by Aboriginals or Pacific Islanders, nevertheless, in my patch, the inner west of Sydney, these conflicts of interest between ordinary Australians are quite real. I have been a retailer, with a large, late-opening, seven-day-a-week shop in King Street, Newtown, for the past 12 years.

We have been burgled three times, and we have been robbed or held up half a dozen times in those 10 years. One of the burglars was caught, and he was white. Four of the hold-up men or robbers were brown or black. Luckily no one was ever injured, and we never lost too much, because, as a matter of routine, we don't keep much money in the till. Many other small businesses in the inner west have had similar experiences, as have many householders. There is no doubt that these experiences inflame a certain amount of racism directed at indigenous people, who are perceived by many to be the main perpetrators. It's a mistake to put this response of ordinary Australians to real problems in the same category as the Pauline Hanson response.

In my experience, this kind of problem comes in waves, to do with the constantly changing demographics of the inner-city. In my 10 years on King Street, I have seen several generations of very young Aboriginal kids "working the strip", so to speak, and finding outlets for their frustrations in thieving and vandalism. Like any other shopkeeper, when a new bunch of young kids, white or black, starts appearing full of the obvious unemployed adolescent testosterone, I go on a bit of a war footing until they pass on to other things. I've outlasted quite a few groups like this. On one occasion, seeing the telltale signs, with a couple of young kids causing a disturbance, while another one tried to get behind the till, I confronted the group, and told them to leave because I knew what they were up to. One of them said to me, "Oh, are you a racist?" To which my response was, "This is my bit of turf. I don't give a fuck whether you're a Koori or an Eskimo, I know what you are up to, so piss off." On that occasion they all burst out laughing, and did leave and never came back.

On another occasion, a few years ago, I was sitting outside the shop on the bus seat for 10 minutes, on a muggy Saturday afternoon in spring, drinking a Coke before I went back inside to get on with my work, watching the world go by, when I saw the following fascinating tableau. A very well-built, gleaming, tough-looking young black bloke about 17, stripped to the waist, wandered along the other side of the street, rather out of it, high on something, talking to himself in a loud voice, carrying a short iron bar, which he was banging on the walls and doors as he passed, much to the consternation of the people, for instance, inside the cafe opposite.

When he reached the houses opposite, after the cafe, which are inhabited by students from Moore Theological College, he disappeared down the path of one of them, with what appeared to me malicious intent. As the Moore College students are my neighbours, I quickly adopted a kind of Neighbourhood Watch approach, crossed the road, and gingerly followed him down the path, where he had already commenced trying to make entry through a door with his iron bar. I yelled out to him: "Stop that mate!" until he stopped. Then I hastily retreated, as he groggily came back down the path and wandered further off down the street.

He then stopped, turned around and started throwing stones at me, one of which hit me hard, from quite a distance. He was a pretty good stone-thrower, that bloke. He then wandered off down King Street, towards his own patch, still grumbling to himself, still waving his iron bar. I felt a certain satisfaction that I'd protected the neighbours from robbery without too much fuss or any real danger to myself, and I hoped he wouldn't inflict too much harm on anybody else, or himself.

Other small robberies have been more threatening and less amusing, and I and other staff members have been several times threatened with knives or clubs. On these occasions I've had no compunction in calling the coppers. I only call the police if there's any physical threat to my staff or myself. If the poor bugger who has tried to hold us up, driven by his addiction, ends up inside, whether he's black or white, that can't be avoided.

This unfortunate choice is despite the fact that I know that the prison system doesn't solve anything, except that it gets the immediate threat off the street, if and when the bloke is caught and convicted. I try to handle these matters realistically, without contributing further to the race prejudice in our society. I know a number of other small business people in this area, for instance, the newsagent in Chippendale, the next suburb, who shares my non-racist views, but has nevertheless been held up on a number of occasions, and takes a similar matter-of-fact approach to these problems.

However, my experience in these matters has given me a bit of insight into all sides of these problems. The racist form of the response of victims to some of these urban problems is by no means the same thing as the belligerent, deliberate racist scape-goating of Pauline Hanson, and one of the real tasks in relation to Aboriginal-white relations is to address these kind of current problems in a very concrete way, without either pandering to racism, or lightly shrugging off the real concerns of the working class and middle class victims of urban crime.

One of the most dangerous but poignant incidents close to me happened several years ago. A planning meeting for the Campaign against the Third Runway was being held in the house of my daughter, who also lives in Newtown. At the end of the meeting, walking up to King Street, a bloke from the International Socialists who had been at the meeting, a bloke I know quite well, a serious-minded, quiet individual, also the trade union delegate for his fellow workers on a university campus, was assaulted from behind and robbed. He woke up a few days later in hospital, in intensive care, and he was three months off work. Eyewitnesses to the incident identified his assailant as brown or black, and the motive appears to have been robbery. (The assailant was actually picked up by the coppers a few hours later.) The bloke assaulted is back at work and once again engaged in his intense trade union, political and anti-racist activity, and more power to his elbow. He is, however, probably a bit careful about dark streets at night.

All of this leads me to my major conclusion. The problems of Aboriginal society in Australia are, historically speaking, products of the imperialist British conquest of this continent. The rights and interests of Aboriginal and other coloured Australians have to be vigorously defended by all other Australians, as well as Aboriginals. All attacks on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the Wik and Mabo decisions, and on funding for Aboriginal welfare, and the repellant phenomenon of mandatory sentencing, which bears down so heavily on Aboriginal youth, should be vigorously opposed and defeated. Considerable funds and resources should be devoted to getting at the sources of the problems in Aboriginal society, as they should at the problems in Australian society as a whole, particularly youth unemployment. All racism should be defeated and condemned. However, real conflicts among ordinary people that derive from these historic oppressions, should be treated with realism, sensitivity and care, taking into account the real interests of all Australians, pink, yellow or black, working class and middle class.