Colonizing Processes, the Reach of the State and Ontological Violence: Historicizing Aboriginal Australian Experience

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Abstract: The success of Aboriginal people in reconstituting kin and locality-oriented socialities which could engage with Australian nation-building is underestimated in the naturalizing of "the local community" by anthropologists and politicians alike. But these socialities have not been able to withstand their radical re-shaping under "self-management" programs. These have produced a violent struggle between kin and civic sociality, and between personal autonomy and social responsibility. The consequent loss of cultural and economic autonomy, the stress placed on the realization of persons, and the rendering of authority as ineffectual have produced a pervasive social sickness throughout Aboriginal Australia.

Keywords: Colonization, Aboriginal Australians, self-management, ontology, social suffering, personhood

Résumé : Les populations aborigènes ont connu du succès dans leur entreprise pour reconstituer des unités sociales basées sur la parenté et la proximité et susceptibles de contribuer à la reconstruction de la nation australienne. Toutefois, les anthropologues comme les politiciens ont tendance à sous-estimer cette réussite quand ils décrivent « la communauté locale » comme un phénomène naturel. Mais ces unités sociales ont mal supporté leur reconfiguration radicale dans le cadre des programmes « d'autonomie gouvernementale ». Ces programmes ont engendré de violentes luttes entre les liens de parenté et la participation civique, de même qu'entre autonomie personnelle et responsabilité sociale. La perte d'autonomie culturelle et économique qui s'ensuit, l'insistance sur la réalisation des personnes et la description de l'autorité comme inefficace ont engendré un malaise social envahissant dans toute l'Australie aborigène.

Mots-clés : colonisation, Aborigènes australiens, gouvernement autonome, ontologie, souffrance sociale, identité individuelle

Contemporary Social Suffering: A Reflection of Colonialism?

In one Aboriginal society after another, the length and breadth of Australia, there is an escalation of violence, especially directed at women and children. As well, substance abuse, widespread corruption asserted through bullying tactics, bribery and threats are part of a violence that has been increasing over the past three decades, since the late 1970s (see for example, Sullivan 1986; Sutton 2009; von Sturmer 1982). I would not want to suggest that there were no social problems before this. On the contrary, when I began my own fieldwork in central rural New South Wales (NSW) in 1981, there were violent people and vulnerable people but they were not the norm. There was poverty but there was also hope. There were work histories to be proud of, strong and inspirational men and women to look up to, hilarious stories to tell in the evenings, sports prowess to celebrate and small kids to enjoy. While there might have been periods of boredom and restlessness, there was also something to look forward to, the next pay day, the weekend disco and the promise of social movements such as "land rights." There was a sense that things could and would get better. No one spoke of their communities as if they were out of control, spiralling downwards into increasing poverty, drug and alcohol abuse or of people thieving from their own.

Within a decade I could see people turning in on themselves, sucking the lifeblood out of social relations with spitefulness and resentment. Another decade later there were knife fights, rapes, suicides and unexplained murders. What was happening? People in these communities were blaming each other. I was wondering how it was that people who continually celebrated their earlier lives of "caring and sharing" and their evident commitment to kin networks could so rapidly start tearing each other apart. Soon other anthropologists were reporting similar

situations from other parts of Australia, with those working in "remote" areas tending to interpret this as an inability to deal with coming out of the bush or desert. But Wiradjuri people had not responded to their arguably more violent experiences of "the frontier days," between 1815 and about 1850, in this way, and they had later worked alongside whitefellas in rural NSW for well over a century. So why did they seem to be in turmoil too?

Aboriginal peoples throughout Australia, from one to two centuries beyond those frontier days, often refer to their contemporary social suffering as due to their colonization. This claim would have to be dismissed if colonization is understood as past event. But Aboriginal statements are not simply focused on an unjust past which has led to present discrimination. Rather, they alert us to the ways in which colonization itself continues in various guises, something anthropology has paid insufficient attention to. If colonization is to be understood as process, how should it be understood? The ongoing impact of an initial colonization in Australia is largely understood through the persistence of injustice (cf. Watson 2007) or the lack of provision of the same rights of access available to non-indigenous citizens. But these are issues of long-standing and do not of themselves account for the late 20th century and contemporary degree of social suffering.

Yet I will argue that the Aboriginal interpretation is correct.[1] An analysis of the reasons for this escalation in social suffering requires that we understand colonization as a *cultural* process (see for example, Kelm 1998), not solely one of social control and political-legal transformation. Colonization as processual experience does not unfold in predictable ways: it is experienced differently in different times and places; it provides opportunities for some and suffering for others. Neither is it a universal story: it has had many different faces, rationales and unfoldings. It is a long, slow, often clumsy and ill-thought (if thought at all) set of intertwining and contradictory processes which engage the people involved—colonizer and colonized—over time in a variety of ways.

An important component in these historical processes is the complex composition of the invading population, something the term colonizer does not adequately capture but which can significantly impact on relations with colonized peoples who, in relative terms, are more likely to share a social and cultural world. It then becomes more apparent that colonial relations quickly become variegated, as hegemony is asserted, frustrated and reasserted and as new subjectivities emerge, are contested and transform. This is an analysis that must be grounded in the specifics of time, place and human encounters. It is already a contradiction to speak of "the colonizer" as singular, as if the power differentials between militia and convict, between wealthy and impoverished immigrant, gold digger and missionary, did not make for different views and encounters with an indigenous other who was likewise not singular, and made even less so by the differential impacts of encroachment. However, as *persons*, there was a distinct difference between the ways in which each understood themselves vis-à-vis their own, and vis-à-vis the "other" they encountered.

Colonial subjectivity itself is a changing experience but the ontological dimensions of the variable and long-term processes of colonization have not been a focus for anthropology (but see for example, Samson 2004). What happens to "persons" when change is imposed, one after another? Personhood is not something "one can take on and off like a glove" (Douglas and Ney 1998). We know people everywhere are capable of enduring changed circumstances and yet rebuilding meaningful lives. But is there a limit—a kind of change which so violates our personhood that it renders us unable to make a creative human response? When is change so traumatic that it disables our human capacity to adjust, disintegrates ethical sensibilities or moves us beyond moral relationships?

There is no universalizing or generalizing story of colonization that can be told for the Australian continent and there are few local studies. It is widely recognized that Aboriginal peoples have had diverse colonial histories resulting, by the 1970s, in the awkward and misleading division of them into peoples of either "settled" (living in urban or rural areas, predominantly in southern Australia) or "remote" Australia (Rowley 1970). The former, which includes the Wiradjuri people of central NSW, were long assumed to have "lost their culture" and thus the distinctiveness of being "traditional" or "authentic."

I want to look at the changes Wiradjuri people experienced over time, looking at how different stages of the colonial project impacted on Wiradjuri subjectivities. Colonization is the experience of having one's world taken over by a hegemonic force—but this is not a totalizing experience and to understand its impacts, it is necessary to examine the intent and outcomes of the colonial project, how and why it changed over time, what parts of Wiradjuri worlds were taken over, when, how and why. This requires appreciation of the colonial project in specific historical times and places and thus the differential impacts on those rendered its subjects.

Above all, colonization is a relationship between people who begin as "other" to each other but who soon become socially and economically intertwined into a single social field. It is in the ways in which the myriad relations which arise as one people establish control over the

lives of another that colonization is *experienced.* It is in these relationships, rather than in laws and policies enacted in metropoles, that colonial subjects are made and hegemony imposed. And, it is in these relationships that we can likewise see how uneven hegemonic control is—ineffective in one place and time, oppressive elsewhere. The reach of the newly imposed state is shaped according to differential values placed on resources and local circumstances; curbed by the "tyranny of distance" (Blainey 1982); expanded as the technologies of state develop over time.

Historicizing and Locating Colonization

Wiradjuri experience is not typical of colonial encounters across the Australian continent. A variety of ecologies, economic changes wrought by the colonial process in response to these ecologies, the history of changing attitudes between indigenous person and settler, and the changes in the value of land and persons mean that a generalized history of sweeping colonial processes in Australia will be (as they often have been) fraught with the difficulties of over-generalization, abstraction and assumption. Universalizing histories can serve political ends but they do not aid understanding of the intricacies of human interactions in dynamic and often contradictory ethnographic moments.

My fieldwork began in 1981 with several Wiradjuri family networks, many of whom I continue to work with. I have explored the experiences of these families over six generations of living along the Lachlan, Macquarie and upper Bogan Rivers in the central north of the Wiradjuri-speaking region. In Aboriginal cosmology, language adheres to country (Hamilton 1982; Merlan 1981), although social networks may extend well beyond it. These families have experienced "change" in different ways at different times. It is not a predictable process: its variations can be understood in terms of the intentions of the hegemonic forces asserting control over Wiradjuri country and Wiradjuri people over time. These intentions changed according to specific political and economic agendas. The capacity of the state to operationalize its intentions also changed in its effectiveness over time. The pressure on those Wiradjuri persons who became colonial subjects was not constant and has not dissipated over time. On the contrary, this history enables me to argue that it is the "self-management" policies initiated in the 1970s which have extended the reach of the state in such a way that Wiradjuri people, as elsewhere in Australia, are currently experiencing the worst form of social and cultural destruction that colonialism brings to bear: the colonization of their personhood.

The number of local divisions making up the Wiradjuri speaking peoples makes the Wiradjuri area one of the largest language-countries on the continent. It, in turn, is part of the immense Riverine area of southeastern Australia, linking the peoples who lived within Australia's only drainage system, the Murray-Darling River basin, as well as the rivers flowing west of the range in south Queensland. Wiradjuri people, as with others of this Riverine cultural bloc, did not have patriclans as found elsewhere in Australia. Rather, they had developed an extensive matri-totemic system, linking people across and beyond the language-region and bringing value to frequent and extensive travel. Living in small familially based local groupings, whose membership generally had a core in an adult couple but could otherwise be labile as people moved temporarily or permanently from one grouping to another for various social reasons, they were also clustered into local divisions defined in ecological terms. While marriage, trade, ceremony and ecological necessity formed networks across this vast territory, and with neighbours, there was a preference for local endogamy which enhanced the strength of these local divisions.

The families I refer to were associated with particular *taurai,* local territories within a language area, in which the people of that taurai had a right to hunt, fish and gather. Living in small familially based local groupings of between 15 and up to 50 people, those associated with the taurai had a core in an adult couple (headman and his wife, both gaining this status through the high prestige in which they were held) but could otherwise be labile as people moved temporarily or permanently from one grouping to another for various social and ceremonial reasons.[2] Taurai were clustered into local divisions defined in ecological terms, such as along a stretch of river. Hence the Lachlan River (*Kalarr*) or Macquarie River (*Wambool*) were local Wiradjuri-speaking divisions within which were many taurai.

The violence and disease of the frontier days was devastating in terms of the percentage of Wiradjuri people affected. They had experienced one wave of smallpox before the British had found a way over the densely forested mountains. Another wave was to follow a couple of decades later (Butlin 1983). Other introduced illnesses also took their toll. The enormity of this can only be imagined in terms of the trauma of frequent deaths: people for whom funerals were a significant ritual were fleeing places of sickness, leaving their dead as they lay (Beveridge 1883; MacKaness 1941). The historical focus on the relative chaos of the first decade of colonial incursions has lent itself to a perception of loss, disruption and dispersal, and hence the politically desirable notion that Wiradjuri

people and their neighbours "lost their culture" and could not, socially and culturally, survive the changes in their lifestyle (Macdonald 1998). But what really did happen to Wiradjuri families?

Australian Aboriginal persons have long been constituted through a system of kin relatedness which has been intricately embedded, with a high degree of specificity, in spatial, ecological and cosmological environments. Popularly glossed as the Dreaming, this ontological–cosmological framework focuses on the interrelatedness of all life. Social relations, defined in terms of kin-relatedness, were, above all, characterized by a high degree of personal autonomy, demand sharing (Peterson 1993) and "allocative power," authority earned over a lifetime of looking after others through enabling access to valued resources (Macdonald 2000).

This gave rise to a world so intricately integrated that early anthropologists assumed that it could not withstand change. The influence of this early anthropology was persuasive: the worlds of colonized Aboriginal peoples were seen as fragile. Like Radcliffe-Brown's shells or Benedict's cups, they were rigidly shaped and change could only shatter them beyond recognition.[3] These were cold societies (Levi Strauss 1963, 1966), inevitably doomed in their encounter with the over-heated juggernaut of modernity. Within a few decades there would already have seemed sufficient evidence of "de-traditionalized" or "detribalized" Aboriginal peoples living on the fringes of emerging country towns to substantiate this argument. But such assumptions were not based on an ethnographically-informed understanding of how and why people changed—or how "change" should be understood.

They are views which have also been politically attractive. The intractability of the social sickness to which I referred above was explained to the *Washington Post* in 2000 by the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Phillip Ruddock, as being because the government was

> starting from a very low base. We're dealing with an indigenous population that had little contact with the rest of the world. We're dealing with people who are essentially hunter-gatherers. They didn't have chariots. I don't think they invented the wheel. [Reynolds 2000]

As recently as April 2009, an anthropologist explained on ABC Radio National that the Aboriginal peoples of "remote" Australia were finding it hard to cope because they had only just come in from the desert or the bush, implying that this causes a disintegration so profound that they start violently abusing each other (Woods 2009). In refuting these interpretations of Aboriginal incapacity to deal with change, I present a more powerful explanation for what is currently happening—that which is affecting Aboriginal people with diverse histories of change under colonialism and who are currently living within diverse economic contexts.

The quotidian is the locus of the becoming of colonial subjects. It is subtle and varies from one part of the continent to another, depending on why the colonists wanted land, whether they wanted labour, the extent of conflict in the early years of frontier expansion, the extent to which racialized difference forms part of the colonial imaginary, and so on. There is no doubt, however, that within one generation of the presence of Europeans in the fertile inland of NSW in the 1830s, Aboriginal life had been irrevocably changed. But what changes did take place? Why and how? And what did these mean for the constitution of Aboriginal "persons"? What did it mean to be Aboriginal in circumstances that had not only undergone a rapid and violent period of change as the frontier pushed west, but that were to become characterized by wave after wave of change for the next 150 years?

Colonizing Land: Greed, Labour and Indifference

Although Captain Arthur Phillip had come from England with instructions to endear himself to the natives and enter into treaties with them, in the two decades it took to find a means of crossing the impenetrable Blue Mountains to the west of Sydney, attitudes had hardened. Phillip found Aboriginal peoples on the coast unwilling to engage in any way meaningful to the British (who kidnapped some to try and work around this). A century and a half later, anthropologist Bill Stanner (1977) came to interpret British frustrations over just the first five years as having produced what thereafter became a "history of indifference." In most respects, Stanner is right. But his comment elides the various relations required in the colonial effort to transform this harsh continent into an image of a fertile Britain. Aboriginal people have, in some places and times, been essential to the successful development of capitalism. It is also the case, however, as Stanner implicitly recognizes, that when they were seen as being in the way their fate was not a matter of major concern. Recent decades have changed that comfortable indifference and Australians are having to address the consequences of a history of neglect, hardship and discrimination. How they are doing that and why is written into family histories on the Lachlan which I briefly outline here. This is not a typical story because these dynamics are played out in myriad ways, even within Wiradjuri country. But what I hope to demonstrate ethnographically is the way in which colonial intentions changed over

time and how the colonial project thus shifts in relation to those who have been colonized and who are forever the reminder of colonialism's inherent contradictions.

The Colony of NSW was not established for its apparent wealth of minerals, spices or foodstuffs. Rather, land was required for penitentiaries. The newly independent United States of America was no longer a viable option for ridding industrialized Britain of human waste. Convicts served as the indentured labour required to build the facilities for their own imprisonment and the infrastructure of the new colony. Efforts to encourage Aboriginal people into working relations (always menial) were thus half-hearted.

Once the Blue Mountains were crossed and the vast river plains of the Macquarie and Lachlan had been sighted, these were coveted for their pastoral potential. A town, Bathurst, was established in 1815, which made it more feasible for the adventurous to seek their fortunes over the mountains. Initial Wiradjuri reactions demonstrated curiosity and were rarely violent unless in response to violence. They became violent when the newcomers took over sources of food and water or moved into areas of particular cultural significance. Violent reaction also followed insulting abuse of Wiradjuri people. Beyond the towns, a man and his family, or two or more brothers, might decide to take their chances and clear the country for sheep. Sheep as well as shepherds were targetted. It is noteworthy that this violence was not indiscriminate but specifically directed toward newcomers who behaved in objectionable ways (Coe 1986; Salisbury and Gressor 1971). These raids produced terror on both sides, and were met with organized but indiscriminate reprisals by military police, including a second declaration of martial law in 1824 (the first had been in 1817 on the east side of the mountains), less than ten years after the first encounters. As in the case of coastal reprisals, martial law was a means of "ridding us of troublesome blacks." The pronouncement was accompanied by the announcement in the *Sydney Gazette* (14 October 1824) that this was a "war of extermination" (Salisbury and Gressor 1971). British militia quickly established the force of their muskets and Wiradjuri people found themselves having to deal with this new presence and learn what opportunities as well as constraints it posed. By the late 1820s, coordinated attacks in the east of Wiradjuri country had been subdued and white men felt safe enough to venture further, but fighting would start up again whenever they aggressively entered new taurai (Gammage 1983).

By the end of the 1840s, many Wiradjuri had lost control of their taurai, especially where small towns were established and agriculture commenced, yet this is not the whole story. Wiradjuri who had survived smallpox, influenza and armed conflict might have been bruised and battered but not all their lands had come under British control: the process of colonizing specific areas of land was gradual. Patterns of daily practice on taurai and interaction with those of neighbouring taurai continued in the midst of change and death. Perhaps by the 1850s they could even think that the worst was over. They were not to know that they were in the eye of a storm whose magnitude would have been unfathomable.

By the 1830s, the eastern Wiradjuri realized the British were there to stay but they were also maintaining and restoring their own cultural equilibrium after a decade and a half of unrest. Some would have no truck with white men and sporadic violence continued. Others had come to value the new goods, clothes and tools available to them, and were happy to exchange these for a few hours work around town. Some, perhaps those left with few economic options, were quickly dragged into dependence on alcohol, tobacco and food that could be acquired with relatively little effort in the towns. Trading a small task, such as chopping wood or fetching water, for cash or kind was common.

But these towns were still small dots in a landscape of taurai. And it was an extraordinary set of relationships that was to develop on these taurai in one place after another throughout the inland. Paradoxically, these relations enabled the successful emergence of the sheep industry at the same time that they ensured the continued self-identity of Wiradjuri people vis-à-vis each other and their taurai. As the military established an overall context of British control by force, the relative peace which followed enabled Scottish, English and Irish to venture in search of tracts of land to turn into sheep runs—some of them vast. Men set out from Sydney to take their chances; to establish a working life, if not their fortunes "in the bush." They set off with a brother or a friend, occasionally alone, to find land they could farm. By the late 1820s, they could cross the Blue Mountains on convict built roads, and could make the fledgling town of Bathurst on the west side a base from which to explore. After that, they were on their own.

As the British entrepreneur started his exploration for land, headmen saw an entrepreneurial opportunity for themselves. As they encountered these British travelling into their taurai, they worked out when rapport could be established. Aspiring pastoralists were often filled with horror and fear at an Aboriginal presence and shot to kill. However, a significant number—I estimate at least 50%—sought to establish amicable and respectful relations. In turn, Wiradjuri headmen offered to assist in the selection

of land, the building of bark huts and later houses, the procurement of food and water and, perhaps most importantly, protected them from raids from other Aboriginal people. In other words, the pioneers of the Australian sheep industry started out with powerful, knowledgeable and invaluable Aboriginal patrons. These patrons advised the newcomers how to avoid floods and how to survey roads to connect with other properties and with the convict-made roads back to Sydney. As a symbol of mutual respect, the Aboriginal man often took the name of his new brother. English-style names were useful. The British had difficulties pronouncing Aboriginal names and the Aboriginal naming system did not encourage the use of kin or ritual names by others. New names allowed for a new style of relationship—although some were probably unaware of the derogatory or demeaning intention of some of the nicknames that were bestowed (for example, King Tea Pot, Tadpole, Donkey, Solomon the Blâck) (Christophers 1964; Mitchell 1839).

The Wiradjuri headman who became known as William Sloane took his name from John Sloan, a Scotsman who turned William's taurai on the Lachlan into a sheep station named *North Logan* (Busby 1941). The Scottish and Wiradjuri Sloan families did not intermarry but lived and worked on the property over three generations. John Grant took up *Merriganowry*, almost opposite *North Logan*, on which Wiradjuri people continued to camp. His son, John Jr. had three children by Catherine (née Elmes) Ryan from the Lachlan Wiradjuri, starting a Wiradjuri family of Grants (Grant Nd). William, one of these children, ran Bumbaldry Station, to the southwest of Cowra. Decades before, Billy Glass had taken his name from William Glass on the southern creek of the Lachlan known as The Bland but he was ordered off, moving up to Bumbaldry (Musgrave 1926). The names Sloan and Glass are still associated with Wiradjuri families along the Lachlan from Cowra to Condobolin. James White named his properties on the Bland *Burrowmunditroy* and *Burrangong*, the names he was taught by headman, Cobborn Jackie (Musgrave 1926). These are only some of the Lachlan families who trace their ancestry in the country in which they still reside and with which they identify in terms of Aboriginal identity politics.

On these properties and others, relationships grew between Wiradjuri patron and British pastoralist that, in many cases, were to endure through the next two to three generations. They were relationships recognized and respected by other Wiradjuri people. These white families were guests in particular taurai, whether or not they understood this—but there is evidence that many did. They acknowledged the support they received and the status of their headman (and sometimes headwoman) by giving them a brass gorget (sometimes incorrectly labelling them as "kings"). The tradition of giving military gorgets to Aboriginal men and women who performed valuable services had started in the 1820s in Sydney and continued into the 20th century, although the practice was banned among the military from 1830 on (National Museum of Australia, n.d.). William Sloan and Cobborn Jackie received them for their help in setting up stations and providing protection from other blacks. John Grant gave them to senior men on Merriganowry who rescued white people in the 1840s floods. These adventurous pastoralists recognized that Wiradjuri knowledge of the land and its climate was invaluable, especially in time of flood. These black families warned their guests as soon as they heard the familiar sounds in the far distance. People elsewhere were swept away. They taught their guests to build above the flood plains, helped them construct bark huts, showed them how to hunt and what foods were edible.

As Wiradjuri men and women became expert horse breakers and riders, acquired fence-building skills and learnt to shear sheep, they maintained their independent camps, their own economy, their marriage alliances and their patterns of social, economic and ritual travel. Many of their people had died of disease and conflict: social and ritual life had to be modified. Slowly their economy changed. One of the attractions of being a patron to a particular pastoralist was the ability to make demands on one's guests in terms of long-standing Wiradjuri conventions. The fickle seasonal cycles which could produce cycles of starvation and plenty, were evened out by the availability of new foods grown and imported by these guests (see for example, Ferry 1979).

The anguish which must have followed the Wiradjuri death toll from disease and massacres could be healed—human beings are remarkably resilient. Restricted access to land was only one imperative to change. The other was the desirability of new foods and new technologies for storing and transporting water—perhaps the most important and influential of the changes Europeans introduced. These came in the form of new animals, plants and technologies which had not previously existed on the continent. Not merely attractive, these provided a new lease on life. However romantic the notion of hunting and gathering has become under Sahlins' (1972) influence, on most of this continent life was a cycle of famine as well as feast. What was now avoidable was death occasioned by drought. Hard work produced the seed to be ground into flour which could now be obtained in a sack for a day or two's work—relatively light work at that. Wiradjuri demands

for food met with various responses from these farmers but the latter quickly learned that if they resisted they put themselves at great peril. Wiradjuri demands were expected to be met. Slowly these Wiradjuri people became more engaged with the activities of pastoralism and their economic options closed off with more intense land use. Their land was changing and they were changing with it, as were the white families they lived alongside.

Wiradjuri family members supplemented white labour in the paddocks and in the house. White men willing and skilled to work in the "outback" were often hard to find. However, it was during the gold rushes, from the 1850s to 1890s in northeastern Wiradjuri country, that Aboriginal workers became invaluable. White workers literally dropped their tools in the fields and disappeared in search of wealth. James Sloan's wife on North Logan wrote home to England to say that she did not know how they would have gone on without Aboriginal help (Sloan family records, courtesy of Catherine Bennett, Cowra, 2006).

It is unlikely that the Wiradjuri men who acted as hosts and patrons could see how their actions would eventually lead them into greater economic dependency. In the early years, the symbiosis worked for both Wiradjuri and farmer, and a degree of reciprocal respect grew up which, although probably misinterpreted on both sides, worked for them. Wiradjuri camps looked poor and dirty to the British gaze, but this did not infer enforced poverty. When desired, Aboriginal people erected their own bark huts along the lines of the British, but a majority engaged with selected aspects of the new possibilities and constraints imposed by their colonization in their own familiar terms: those on their taurai or pastoral stations could choose when they wanted to work and how they wanted to live.

The symbiosis that was possible as Wiradjuri taurai become converted into pastoral properties was not the experience of Wiradjuri whose lands were either not desired or were transformed by agriculture or townships. Some become an unwelcome sight around the new towns as they sought work to augment a precarious existence and some resorted to alcohol. Collectively, these more visible people fed the growing usefulness of the 19th-century perception that Aboriginal persons were backward, not fully human, not worthy of consideration. Life on these urban margins was very different than for those who had found a means of reproducing and re-imagining their cultural practices and meanings within the context of pastoralism.

Wiradjuri people did not of their own volition suddenly become subservient, colonial subjects, regardless of the ways in which they were being defined by Europeans. They remained a proud people, whose rights in relation to their taurai were literally sacrosanct—determined by creator spirits and inviolable. On the other hand, that Aboriginal people were inferior was an uncritical assumption made by most Europeans of the time. The subservience or subjection this implies was not always born out in the bush: where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men and women worked hard alongside one other, forming respectful relations across class and ethnic divides, they recognized human worth and friendship, even if not social worth. There are many written tributes and commemorations on headstones which testify to the depth of friendships and loyalties which grew up away from the towns and cities. This relationship of patronage would be completely inverted by the beginning of the 20th century, to become one of (white) master or boss to (Aboriginal) worker. Nevertheless, relations remained strong and loyal throughout generations on a great many stations, only to be severed by events beyond local control.

In the midst of the traumatic changes wrought in their relations to their own country, the surviving Wiradjuri people had found pockets within which they could maintain meaningful lives. These meanings were now crafted from innovations as well as pre-colonial beliefs and practices, and were subject to constraints on practice and movements imposed by a new and hegemonic power. Yet, on the taurai, redefined as stations, they had a degree of social and spatial autonomy. It was a sufficient space through which to maintain essential characteristics of their cultural lives. Importantly, it encouraged a dual economic system which, while increasingly moving from hunting and gathering to purchasing goods, was also flexible enough to allow for the economies of relatedness and travel through which they continued to express and reproduce the kin ties which governed intra-Wiradjuri sociality.

Several Wiradjuri people had, by the end of the century, developed their own farms on land provided by the state government.[4] Many senior people had chosen to become self-employed contractors, working with their kin-based teams as shearers, fencers or fettlers, in land clearing or doing odd jobs in the off seasons. Employment was high even though they competed with white teams. The status certain jobs and incomes attracted were a cause for pride and respect among black and white alike. Wiradjuri people may have looked like dependent wage labourers at the end of the century but their engagement with the relations of capitalism were partial and externalized. Among themselves, they transformed the expectations of work, wages and roles in capitalism into terms which encouraged their own senses of being and acting in the world. They had lost economic control of their land but it

continued to play an important part in spatial identity formation. They had learned how to transform the concept of cash and the inequalities it might have introduced by treating it much as they did any other resource entering their domain. They transformed their colonial condition and status in terms through which they could continue to understand themselves as *Wiradjuri* persons.

Colonizing Bodies: Wealth, Rights and Exclusions

At the end of the 19th century and into the early years of the 20th century, the NSW Colonial Government put an end to many of these relationships, perhaps not intentionally but certainly in a spirit of indifference to their impacts on Aboriginal peoples. Two key events were to impact Wiradjuri lives: Federation, which produced a more structured racializing of Aboriginal peoples with subsequent controls over their movements; and, in NSW, a push toward more intensive settlement of rural lands, known as Closer Settlement programs, which significantly curbed many Wiradjuri options.

This produced a shift in the colonial project. The appropriation of land and the relative lack of value placed on Aboriginal labour meant that Aboriginal people had been ignored by the state, treated with indifference, or with attempts to eradicate them through military force or poisoning in areas where they became a nuisance. But by the end of the 19th century, capitalism had been established and Australia was a wealthy set of colonies about to become a nation-state. What kind of nation, what form of governance and what characteristics represented the desirable citizen were the preoccupations of the late 19th century, leading to independence from Britain in 1901. The 1901 Australian Constitution included all residents as equal citizens—Aboriginal peoples and the various "others" who had come to make new lives: Chinese, Indians, Afghanis and others. However, these inclusions were only to keep the Colony of South Australia on side. Following Federation, a series of laws prevented the remaining "coloured others," including Aboriginal peoples, from full participation, and restricted further migration. Most of the indentured labourers brought in from the Pacific Islands to work on sugar cane had been deported before the necessity to accord them citizenship arose. These strategies were designed to ensure that Australia would be a "white nation."

Federation marked the beginning of independence from Britain. This was not a process of decolonization as this is conventionally understood. There was no departure of the colonizer, no hand-over of power or rights to the colonized. Federation was simply a shift in power between the settler-colonist and the metropole from which they had previously been governed. However, it did lead to significant changes for Aboriginal people, including Wiradjuri. In defining the new citizen of the nation, Federation Fathers had decided not to include Aboriginal peoples: the new Commonwealth Government was not given powers to legislate on their behalf. Left to the whims of each state, policies differed from one place to another in terms of who was defined as "Aboriginal," as well as the kinds of restrictions which would be placed on those so defined: they lost many of the rights and freedoms they had enjoyed in the 19th century.

The tables had now been completely turned: dependence on Aboriginal knowledge and labour was no more, and the racialization of Aboriginal peoples became more extreme. "Aboriginal" in NSW meant hypodescent. This "one drop rule"—which was not, as Hollinger (2003 and see Munasinghe 2006:17-18) argued, unique to the United States—meant that any person in NSW "tarred with the brush" could be designated as Aboriginal and was thus subject to the *Aborigines Protection Act* (NSW) 1909. One in four, eight or even 16 ancestors was enough to have one defined as Aboriginal, a definition which meant exclusion, denigration and denial of civil rights. A "touch of the tar brush" was enough to exclude one from mainstream "white" Australian society whether rural or urban. The Act controlled where people could live, what rations they might be allocated, what work they could do and who they might marry. It also allowed for the Aborigines Protection Board to remove children from their families on various grounds, including "neglect"—defined as not living in a conventional house. In practice, the Board removed thousands of children who were light skinned, in the belief that their "white blood" would make them more amenable to training as domestic servants or farmhands (see for example, Link Up and Wilson 1997).

The second event was the NSW Government's response to intensifying demands for land as the Australian population increased. The only way to meet this demand was to force the vast pastoral stations to subdivide. The *Closer Settlement Acts* were not popular with pastoralists but they were also losing their control over the "outback," and this was reinforced with the advent of Federation. As their lands were subdivided, some sold out all together while others retained a portion of their property. Few could support their Aboriginal camps: these became expendable, forcing a new wave of dispersals.

Although the descendants of James Sloan kept a portion of *North Logan*, the Wiradjuri Sloan family had to take leave of old William Sloan's taurai. Granny Sloan and her counterpart, James Sloan's wife Marion, who had met

each other as young brides, were now two old women. They had lived out their different lives together, sharing the same space as well as the joys and trials of raising large families of children and grandchildren. On leaving *North Logan*, Wiradjuri Granny Sloane presented to white Granny Sloane a superb gift of artefacts carved by her people in their early years on *North Logan*: spears, boomerangs, digging sticks, clubs and shields. Among these was the brass gorget that James had given William, both men by then deceased. James' descendants still treasure this collection (Catherine Bennett 2006, personal communication). To part with items which must have meant a great deal to Wiradjuri Granny Sloan begs the question as to how she understood her actions. Was she concerned for the life that lay ahead? Did she see this gift as marking the end of the life she and William had known, of which there would have been little left? Whatever her reasons, it was an act of trust in and respect of in those white people with whom her husband had formed such a close relationship many decades before.

Similar evacuations were going on in many places. In response, the NSW Government gazetted more land "especially for the use of Aborigines." One such area was the 32 acres known first as *Nanima* but soon to be renamed *Erambie*, on the bank of the Lachlan River opposite the town of Cowra. The families who moved to *Erambie* were the direct descendants of the local Lachlan taurai, all encompassed within pastoral stations. For the families who were now known as Sloan, Glass, Murray, Coe and Collett, *Erambie* was the reserved land closest to their taurai or station homes, and thus still within their own local division of the Lachlan Valley. From that move, they would become, for the first time, villagers, a sedentary people. This new spatial constitution would become known as a "local Aboriginal community," a term that has become so naturalized that many Australians could be forgiven for thinking that Wiradjuri have always lived in communities. In fact, this is a history of barely a century. This was a major upheaval after decades of re-adjustment—another process of cultural and economic adjustment that should also be regarded as an extraordinary achievement in the annals of human history, and which gives the lie to the idea that Aboriginal people did not have the capacity for change.

For the next 70 years their movements would be controlled by government legislation, much of it under the Aborigines Protection Board's (APB) and later Aborigines Welfare Board's (AWB) often oppressive managerial regimes (see Read 1980, 1984, 1988). The lands gazetted "especially for Aboriginal use" were now classed as either reserves or stations. Reserves were simply camping areas, some with the addition of a school and a resident teacher. The stations were managed reserves. A manager or his wife might also act as a teacher or a teacher might be appointed. Although the schools were run by the Department of Education, it was not expected that they meet the standards of education or resource allocation as required of non-Aboriginal schools. What this move represented in the colonial history of Wiradjuri people was the shift from colonization of their country to colonization of their bodies: a new and much more demanding form of colonial control was about to come into being. This would change the sets of local relationships which had structured their social and economic lives in the 19th century. From 1909 the state secured a particular kind of power over Wiradjuri people by defining them as a different and legislatively racialized form of citizen.

Ironically, the value that Aboriginal labour had acquired was what ensured a continued, if increasingly limited, form of spatial and social autonomy. It was valued because it was competitive and reliable, not because it was cheap. Many stations had paid equal wages in the 19th century and the introduction of unionism, in particular the influential Shearers' Union, ensured this. By the end of the 1920s, equal wages were mandated for all Australians, including Aboriginal Australians, throughout NSW. The reserves served to support a rural workforce out of season—approximately four months of the year they had a base, with rations, to return to. The rest of the year, kin-based teams could travel around the stations and farms, many returning each year to properties they knew well, to shear, fence, clear, pick fruit and to enjoy each other's company as they met up with others (Beckett 1958, 1965).

Erambie had been set aside for local Wiradjuri families in 1892. It did not become a supervised Aboriginal station until 1924. *Erambie* residents then had to account for their every movement: spending, eating habits, the cleanliness of their houses and even their social relationships. Nevertheless, days on "the mission" (as all such reserves were called) are remembered by Wiradjuri people as times of community solidarity, discipline and happiness as well as times of pain, deprivation and adversity (see oral histories in Read 1984). The apparent contradiction reflects the two worlds in which people lived: on the one hand, their close kin-based relationships and, on the other, their segregated and marginal status in Australian society. Discrimination was rife, having increased with the white politics of Federation and increases in legislative controls, but was mediated by the relative autonomy that even the supervised reserves provided.

During the mission era, most people could find employment. Both men and women were employed on *Erambie*, working for the manager; men found seasonal work such as fruit picking, shearing, jobs on the council and droving; whilst women worked in the towns and stations, usually as domestic workers. This was a time of productive adjustment: Wiradjuri people grew their own vegetables, and supplemented government-erected huts by building their own homes from whatever materials were at hand. It was a common boast that the *Erambie* mission was self- supporting (Chaffe 1981; Foster and Mellick 1981; Read 1984). Memories focus on the productive skills people passed on from one generation to another as they had in the 19th century. People had jobs in which they could take pride (Read 1980, 1984).

Conditions were arguably worse then they had been in their camps on the stations. Residents at *Erambie* in the early 1940s had no running water, sinks, baths, stoves or washing lines. Tin covers substituted for windows and jam tins for saucepans. Rations per household included oatmeal, jam or syrup, two cakes of soap each week, two loaves of bread every two days and some powdered milk. Only the oatmeal and milk could be supplemented during the week. There was no electric light and the purchase of kerosene for lamps or meat, depended upon whether people had employment for cash wages. Work on the mission was often paid in rations rather than cash. Scabies and malnutrition were common and infant mortality was high. Housing conditions did produce a degree of shame still evident among a few older women today, but only in so far as relations with Europeans were concerned. Among themselves they retained, assisted by their spatial separation from Europeans, much pride in qualities of life they often believed to be superior. These included their concern for kin, their commitment to ensuring equity of distribution among their own, honesty and their respect for those who had earned it (Macdonald 1986).

Wiradjuri remember the managers as "a mixed bunch." Some are recalled with respect but most were regarded as unduly harsh and paternalistic. If they spoke out against the system they risked expulsion, losing their rations, or worse, losing their children. The managers had the power under the Act to expel people from the mission or to refuse them entry. This meant that young people who had been sent away for apprenticeships as domestics or farmhands, or men working elsewhere whose families were on the mission, could be, and often were, refused permission to return home or were charged with trespassing (Foster and Mellick 1981:12). The effects on familial relations are still felt and people spent many years attempting to trace kin.

Control by managers has not prevented Wiradjuri people from depicting themselves as having had an independence of spirit and purpose throughout the mission era (Read 1984). Read described *Erambie* people as having "had the reputation of aggression and defiance towards the Aborigines Protection Board" (1982:10). Those whom I have known myself who grew up under the managers at *Erambie* did not present themselves, as one historian believed (Read 1980:106), as "institutionalized Aborigines" who "accepted the rules (and a good part of the beliefs, folklore and prejudice) of European supervisors and workmates." Rather, the "old people," as the elders are called, inspired and taught the generation who were to spearhead Aboriginal political action for civil rights and land rights from the 1950s on. A recurring theme in the accounts of the next generation is that these old people refused to submit to pressure themselves. They are appreciatively remembered for the stand they took against harsh managers or general injustice. An *Erambie* woman expressed this at a land rights meeting in 1983 when she said, "our fathers and forefathers battled for our rights and we mustn't give in." Despite authoritarianism and paternalism, Wiradjuri people perceived themselves as having maintained some autonomy. *Erambie* was characterized by strong and politically aware leadership and people were unanimous in asserting that they exercised controls over the intra-Wiradjuri domain: "The officials and the white people were under the impression that the managers ran the mission. The managers didn't at all. It was the tribal elders" (Foster and Mellick 1981:6; see also Agnes Coe in Read 1984:67).

"Local communities" were not natural or preferred modes of Aboriginal sociality—all the more reason to acknowledge how they were able to make them work for themselves. They retained a smaller but important measure of personal, social and economic autonomy while living under the control of the APB and AWB, even with spatial and legal confinement, limited opportunities and repressive treatment. The desire to get out from under managerial control was constant and grew in intensity, prompting various social movements and calls for civil rights. Factors external to the mission facilitated the development of political consciousness and strategy. The mobility and relative independence of men (and some women) who were expected to get work off the mission reproduced the long-standing communication networks amongst Aboriginal people in different parts of the state. Several *Erambie* men were involved in campaigns to bring about public awareness of the ill-treatment Aboriginal people suffered under the APB. The Aborigines' Progressive Association, founded in 1937, prompted the NSW

government of the day to change its policy of segregation to one of assimilation (Miller 1985:150-151; Read 1983:206). *Erambie* people were amongst those who travelled to Sydney in 1938 during the 150th sesqui-centenary celebrations to declare a "National Day of Mourning" for Aboriginal people at a rally demanding recognition, justice and a restoration of their rights (Miller 1985:151-156).

Seemingly progressive at the time, these protests moved the NSW government to set up a reconstituted Aborigines Welfare Board with an explicit policy of assimilation. In fact, this led to greater management of people's lives rather than less. But the mission years were not the success in welfare or assimilation terms which policy makers had hoped for. The wheels set in motion to civilize and assimilate the Wiradjuri did not revolve according to plan. Reserve life did not provide attractive models or scope for development along mainstream Australian lines. Significantly, however, they did provide a relatively secluded environment in which Aborigines could continue the process of reconstructing their social environment in terms of their own views of the world.

There is a dual irony about the mission era. First, the deliberate attempts to destroy traditional Wiradjuri lifeways actually engendered new forms which, although, not "traditional" were distinctly Aboriginal. Second, the missions reveal a paradox in Wiradjuri memories: they both deplored the semi-imprisonment, oppression and restrictions they experienced, yet, at the same time, found much they valued. The reserves were spaces they could identify with, withdraw to, and the concentration of people and activity in these small areas fostered rather than destroyed corporate identity. These spaces, small though they were and under a form of surveillance, nevertheless provided a sufficient degree of social autonomy that people could reproduce their valued and taken-for-granted ways of being in the world. People who worked across white and Aboriginal domains did so with a degree of bicultural aptitude—but when they were "home" they were part of an Aboriginal-defined ontological and social world.

To the extent that practices identify the state at the level of the quotidian, then the 20th century ushered in controls over Wiradjuri activity—what people could do in terms of work, where they could live, what they could eat and how they could organize their domestic space. This represented a new wave of colonization, the colonization of bodies as workers, as burdens on the state, as eyesores, and as proliferators of unwanted "half-caste" children. The state reached into domestic and public spaces inhabited by Wiradjuri people so as to control (and limit) education, forms of employment and wages in non-unionized contexts (especially domestic service). The state had now become liberalism's benign despot, half-heartedly inculcating meaningless concepts of the good citizen to those denied any realization of the rights of citizens.

This management of Wiradjuri activity, oppressive as it could be at times, was not total: there was work that took people away, often for months at a time, and intra-Wiradjuri socialities continued to be expressed in terms of long-valued understandings of themselves as kin-oriented social selves. The state's attempt to rid itself of "the Aboriginal problem" failed in so far as the wider Australian society made no effort to assimilate Wiradjuri people and Wiradjuri people showed little interest in *becoming* like white people. I should qualify this: there were many demands for equal rights, for better living conditions and for an end to the managerial regime, however, these cannot be read as desiring to become a different kind of *person*.

As Diamond (1974) remarked of indigenous peoples of North America, there had been little about the quality of white people's lives that produced envy, desire or respect. He went so far as to assert that a majority of people have found the alternatives to the modern, capitalist nation as economically, socially and spiritually more *viable* and only change them when forced to. When I started my own fieldwork in the early 1980s, Wiradjuri people often expressed a mixture of sorrow and disbelief bordering on contempt for the ways in which white people lived with and treated each other, including their kin. So it cannot simply be said that segregation and racism limited Wiradjuri choices and thus, by default, prevented them from "becoming modern." Choices were also exercized in the reproduction of ontological foundations they continued to value—not in any pristine or unchanged form, but nevertheless expressing more in common with the social values and practices of their past than with white ways introduced to them a century and a half earlier. However, the period I refer to as the "mission era," from the early 20th century to the 1970s, is one in which the bodily control of Wiradjuri people was designed to turn them into less visible, assimilated citizens: to extinguish any remaining Aboriginality of culture or colour (see for example, Bell 1964; Reay 1949).

Albeit with only snippets presented here, my ethnography demonstrates a consistent pattern of Wiradjuri efforts to engage with the circumstances of their colonization. As consistent has been the pattern of indifference, rebuttal and demolishing by the state. A number of mixed descent people with less distinctly Aboriginal facial features have chosen "to pass" as something other than Aboriginal (such as Maori or Polynesian). A small number have been willing to leave their own social meanings and values behind to become a "coconut"—black on the out-

side but white on the inside, a type of Australian-style "Uncle Tom" but they do not always succeed. The majority have preferred the difficulties of "mission life" and relative poverty to becoming "white."

Assimilationist policies failed not because the Aboriginal people did not desire an improvement in material living standards and economic opportunities but because Anglo-Australians equated this, as many still do, with acceptance of and conformity to middle class Anglo-Australian lifestyles as well. Wiradjuri people either refused or were unable to accept the terms upon which improvements were offered—those being that they relinquish their own ways of being. There was a space of autonomy on the reserves within which adjustments could be made and the distinctly Aboriginal ontology, albeit transforming, continued to shape the understandings people had of themselves, each other and their shared lives. What Peterson (1993) refers to as the Aboriginal domestic economy of "demand sharing," through which persons and relatedness have always been realized and expressed, was retained to a remarkable degree by these Wiradjuri people on the Lachlan (Macdonald 1986, 2000). This was the environment in which I commenced my fieldwork in 1981. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was witness to the end of this second wave of the colonizing process: the wheels were already in motion for an even more intense colonizing pressure.

Colonizing Persons: Self-Management and the Battle for the Mind

Wiradjuri experiences as colonial subjects over time were of a progressive loss of spatial and social autonomy as demands for their lands increased and new values produced through demand for their labour decreased. Through relationships with Australians "on the land" they had encountered significant and often painful change but this also included new practices which provided transformative spatial and social niches, and which appealed to their own value systems. Although their own farmed lands were taken from them, they continued with self-employed contract teams who worked groups of properties. Their desire to expand their work horizons in terms of both independent businesses (farms) and forms of industry (trades and university training) within and beyond the rural economy (and thus still within their own country) were denied by the force of the "mission" regime within which they were controlled. The consistent demand for civil rights strengthened in the 1930s and was given impetus by the land rights movement through the 1960s and 1970s. These movements were designed to enable them to exercise choices *within* the nation.

The next stage of their colonial experience, however, referred to in policy terms as self-management,[5] would be even more devastating because it involved the loss of intra-Wiradjuri economic and political autonomy. Rural recession, coupled with the increasing mechanization of what remained of the industry and the nation's move from dependence on agriculture and stock to mining hit Wiradjuri pastoral workers hard. Unemployment rose rapidly and with it declined respect for old people: they no longer had resources, skills or knowledge of value to pass down to their descendents. This prompted the state to involve itself in an unprecedented program of micro-management of people's lives. This was more devastating than the loss of land and social choices, or the confinement of spatial relations. It signalled the ultimate violence that colonization entails: the battle of the state for the hearts and minds of people who stubbornly persisted, for whatever reasons, to understand themselves outside of the cultural practices and beliefs of modernity, nationalism and capitalism by which they could more effectively be governed and turned into productive consumers.

What was significantly different in comparison with the mission era and its managerial system is that this program involved the management of relations *between Wiradjuri people themselves*. This is something that no earlier system of governance had attempted to the same extent. Their own political culture, which had largely been shielded from state interventions in previous decades, had espoused equity of distribution, denied the legitimacy of representation in any generalized sense, and recognized authority only when achieved not ascribed. They were not accustomed to the hierarchical and exclusionary relations of representative democracy.

The state's ability to intervene in the relationships between persons stemmed directly from the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the mainstream economy and their growing dependence on social security incomes or "welfare." This resulted in two significant changes: first, there was a move from employment and self-employment in the private rural sector to jobs created by governments, federal and state, in government-funded Aboriginal organizations; second, there was the impact of these organizations themselves.

Aboriginal-run organizations were often started by Aboriginal activists concerned to change conditions for their people. Much needed funding was provided by government to run services that Aboriginal people, with long histories of discrimination in mainstream Australia and now increasingly without incomes, needed. Many had boards and staff who were kin, who worked well together in a commitment to serve "their people" more widely.

These included the Aboriginal Legal Service and Aboriginal Children's Service, both started by Wiradjuri people, the Aboriginal Medical Service, the Aboriginal Housing Companies and various other Aboriginal Co-operatives. Although most started as "grassroots" organizations, often with little funding, they increasingly became part of the official policy of self-management as they became recipients of government funding. In the 1970s, as Federal support became available for the first time, these organizations mushroomed by the thousands.

Self-management was contradictory from the start: Aboriginal organizations were funded ostensibly to bring greater cultural, social and economic autonomy to Aboriginal peoples. In fact, they found themselves permitted to manage their increasing dependence on behalf of the state, according to state-defined forms of organization and within a state progressively shedding its commitment under neoliberalism to being a "welfare-state." Indifference to Aboriginal cultural values produced a set of policies, organizational structures, expectations and forms of accountability which made self-management a transformative space but one that would be extremely destructive of Aboriginal selves.

These destructive effects were evident early: one devastating account published by von Sturmer in 1982 might have alerted people (see also Sullivan 1986; von Sturmer 1984). In the Wiradjuri case, as elsewhere, Aboriginal people blamed each other for the impact of unseen structures making entirely new demands of people's relations with each other. One minute people were kin, sisters, the next minute one sister had become the chairperson of an organization determined to evict the other sister for not paying rent. Mum headed up the Aboriginal Co-operative: "she can allocate money to anyone but the selfish old cunt won't give me a cent." Whether there were rules about who could be given handouts and on what occasions is irrelevant—kin are supposed to privilege kin. If you are not kin, what are you? And the elections! Reducing respect to the "numbers game," the people who could get most kin to the meetings—regardless of history, rights, ability, respect—got the positions. One mob is voted in, the other gets the numbers up next meeting to pass a vote of no confidence and vote them out, then they rustle up the numbers for another election. Little wonder that a non-comprehending NSW Government limited elections in Local Land Councils first to once a year then once every two years. All this meant was that the other mob did not get involved at all. Nor did the bureaucrats understand why their well-intentioned efforts seemed to fail, why Aboriginal people did not seem "to get it," why people who were supposed to "share" and be so "community-oriented" seemed to become uncaring and selfish to the extreme (see Macdonald 2004).

Self-management was very different from the rights and autonomy that the calls for self-determination aspired to during the land rights movement. These assumed Aboriginal people would run their own programs in their own way according to their own political values (see Macdonald 2004 for a Wiradjuri example; also Carter et al. 1987). The social values and demands of *being Aboriginal* were now found to be in direct opposition to those expected of people in receipt of government largesse. "Government funding" meant strict adherence to bureaucratic values. Although tackled with some energy and relative success to start with, self-management programs quickly turned sour as people found themselves having to become different persons in order to realize the prospects these seemed to offer. From one part of Australia to another, regardless of differences in colonial histories, it became evident that "local Aboriginal communities" were encountering increasing problems with modes of decision making, forms of representation, the disjuncture between kin-based relationships and the bureaucratic roles that were now imposed on them (Myers 1988; Palmer 1990). The options were few: not to comply meant no resources. Receipt of resources, however, almost always meant conflict at the local level. Aboriginal people were unprepared, in any sense of the term, to become the subjects of a liberal democracy which required that they exchange their kin relations for bureaucratic ones (Austin-Broos 1996, 2003, 2009).

Three and a half decades of programs designed to ameliorate impoverished living conditions and the state of Aboriginal peoples' health have met with little success. But such measures are not, in fact, designed *for Aboriginal peoples*. Rather, they are an ongoing if underestimated part of the colonial project itself, which has always intended to control both Aboriginal land *and* Aboriginal peoples. In the appropriation of land, they have been successful. With regard to the reshaping of Aboriginal selves, however, one might argue that they have been spectacularly unsuccessful.

Self-management continued as government policy, regardless of political party. Policy is now moving rapidly towards greater intervention and mainstreaming of services under the rhetoric of "practical reconciliation." The political representation of self-management as a "failure" of Aboriginal will or competency legitimates even more state intervention with ever escalating conflict now erupting into increased violence and abuse of selves and others. This, in turn, serves to convey that Aboriginal people are confirming their inability to manage themselves.

Ontologically, culturally constituted understandings of persons and selves, and the socialities that reproduce these, are of course amenable to change, to adaptation, but this cannot be achieved, even when desired, when wrenched into new shapes by force. This is the force self-management was able to apply through its new and unprecedented control of Aboriginal people at a micro-level, economically as well as socially. This in turn was enabled by their increasing marginalization within the restructuring Australian economy. No form of governmentality can be understood as singular or all-powerful but in the rolling out of self-management programs, the Australian state found its most skilful means of destroying *Aboriginal persons*. The irony of this is that, in the first phase of colonization, within the constraints brought about by the loss of land, Wiradjuri people nevertheless had a sufficient space of social and economic autonomy from which to negotiate what it meant to become a part of modernity. As the state developed its frustrated and contradictory attempts to shape them into citizens of the nation-state, they became progressively alienated rather than incorporated.

As land is returned under land rights and native title legislation, and bodies are freed from managerial control, the battle for the *ontological transformation* that all those who become part of modernity must go through intensifies. For this is the pre-condition and price of freedoms and rights in a hegemony defined by a capitalist liberal democracy. Why has it taken over 150 years for this to happen? Because that small space of economic and spatial autonomy allowed for the cultural reproduction of changing but recognizable *Aboriginal selves*. In the 19th century, with resources and spaces of their own to give them a place from which to negotiate their engagement, Wiradjuri people proved not only their capacity but also their inventiveness in adapting to new circumstances. Certainly, they were doing so within imposed constraints, and these constraints increased over time but they also changed with them. What they could not adapt to was the manipulation of their selves. No one can; this is the ultimate violence.

The violence of colonialism is ongoing because the colonial project is unfinished (Watson 2007). The only way to deflect Aboriginal claims for self-determination as a greater degree of autonomy from the state, greater control over their own lands and resources, and the right to live according to their own values—which is, of course, a limited form of decolonization—is to control Aboriginal difference. The colonial project remains incomplete in settler nations who have not decolonized, exterminated or assimilated the peoples they displaced. The history of state efforts with regard to Aboriginal peoples is part of the way in which the state has been able to extend its reach over its citizens. Aboriginal peoples are different only to the extent that they seem recalcitrant, unable or unwilling to accept the state's own civilizing processes. The state has had to devise a series of strategies aimed at securing a particular kind of power which will better allow them to achieve a particular form of subject–citizen.

Ontological Violence

If there is sufficient autonomy with which to maintain the dialectic between valued cultural practice and the economy which supports its expression, that practice can be reproduced. This was not true of many Aboriginal practices, yet many of these proved superficial when it came to the deeper level at which people experience themselves as persons. So integral to being, one's sense of personhood changes only slowly, imperceptibly, as external conditions change. Human beings can go through great trauma, migrations and even religious conversions without undergoing profound ontological change. This has been true of Wiradjuri people. However, adaptation has been enabled only because they had a degree of autonomy, of spatial and social distance from those who sought to change them, such that they could make their own transformations in their own way.

The expression and reproduction of particular cultural selves rests on an economy which has been made conducive to cultural meanings and practices. In a situation of social and economic change, these valued cultural selves can only be maintained if the social and economic transformations can be renegotiated in some way. For this transformation, social and spatial autonomy is essential. For 150 years, Wiradjuri people had, through oppressive and sometimes violent circumstances, retained the autonomy required to understand their world in their own ontological-ethical terms. That it was no longer understood in terms of the cosmology of the Sky Beings was not relevant. What was significant was that they could continue *being in relation to each other* in ways that made sense to their *social selves*.

The very gradual shifts in economy of the 19th century did not make major changes in the Wiradjuri domestic economy of demand sharing, which focuses on modes of circulation in the constitution of relatedness rather than production (Macdonald 2000). Even as wage earners of the 20th century, the structures of rural work maintained imperatives to share income, skills and knowledge.

However, self-management not only does not provide but actually denies these imperatives to relatedness. In encouraging individualism, and placing people in roles

vis-à-vis each other rather than kin relationships, it promotes an opposition to the kin-social world. There are no valued knowledges or other resources to be handed down by the old people and their ability to exercise authority is undermined by the appointment of boards and executive officers of organizations. Accountability to the kin-based social world declines and demands are not reciprocated.

In the establishment of local Aboriginal organizations, government policy makers assumed a cultural capacity and willingness to hierarchical and representative decision making. But Wiradjuri people did not share this culture—it negated egalitarianism and the responsibility to the kin-based social world demanded of persons. The practices seized on in the past to encourage socialities—rural work teams, communal activities, engagement with Christianity, card playing, sport and even drinking—were inadequate to sustain kin sociality in the face of the individualizing and atomistic, competitive dynamics introduced through new channels of resourcing which imposed culturally unfamiliar social relations. The notion of the community, whether conceptualized in Christian terms, or in terms of a disadvantaged group working together for civil rights, or as people who shared a Wiradjuri heritage, was a strong incentive to work together and support each other.

The same argument can be made for the Wiradjuri cultural heritage, evidenced in demand sharing practices, in personal autonomy, in notions of leadership—in other words, in practices of personhood, what Wiradjuri people on the Lachlan usually refer to as "*Koori* way" (Koori is the common way in which Aboriginal people of central NSW refer to themselves), an intuitive sense that they do things differently even when they look the same. These practices of personhood have ensured that what is distinctive about Wiradjuri as indigenous people is not what they have brought forward from their past as static "traditions," but is to be discovered in *how* they have changed (Sahlins 2000).

It is not surprising that violence and corruption increased through decades of programs which aimed to ameliorate impoverished living conditions and the state of Aboriginal health. Nor is it surprising that their health declined with the increase in "lifestyle" diseases. But the ameliorative measures are not, in fact, designed for Aboriginal peoples. Rather, they are an ongoing, if underestimated, part of the colonial project itself, which has always intended to control both Aboriginal land and Aboriginal peoples. The continued existence of "indigenous peoples" within the settler state serves to refute the effectiveness and, more importantly, the legitimacy of the liberal project which legitimized their colonization in the first place (Macdonald 2008).

Any colonial project has different facets, not all of which are experienced in any particular colony and not in any particular order. The most obvious is the desire for land and its resources. In Australia this was paramount and initially included land for settlement and then its transformation for economic production. Second is a desire for labour to be used locally or elsewhere. Both the exporting and importing of slaves and the coercion into labour of indigenous populations come to mind in this regard. In Australia, with convict labour and a rural industry that was not particularly labour-intensive, it was not necessary to coerce Aboriginal people into work until the opening up of the cattle industry in the far North. Wiradjuri people competed competently alongside white workers in the pastoral industry. Contrary to popular opinion, they often received equal wages, so they needed to be good.

It was not local employers but decision makers in the cities, preoccupied with the making of the nation, who found Aboriginal people incompetent, unworthy of attention, in the way and needing to be contained. The belief that Aboriginal people would eventually disappear, as in "die out" or "assimilate," was wishful thinking. So, too, was the idea that, by structuring people's relationships vis-à-vis each other regardless of their social values, one could turn them into a less-than-white middle class white citizenry.

The idea of indigeneity has come to legitimize the presence of these others but they remain, in Australia as elsewhere, marginalized, somewhere on the periphery of both citizenship and personhood. Their living conditions are an embarrassment to the state, as is their status as an unhealthy, burdensome and unproductive category of welfare recipients. Their demands to have land returned and to have greater autonomy is irksome in the face of a neoliberal economy in which developers and shareholders demand greater access to resources on "Aboriginal land." But the real battle a colonially-constituted state would like to win is the battle for the mind. If Aboriginal people would only give up their understandings of themselves as kin in country, would move into the cities, would learn to accumulate property instead of giving it away, and would work a seven-hour day, then they could become useful to the state.

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Notes

1 This article introduces a key argument of my forthcoming publication, *Promises and Lies, Australian Aboriginal Experiences of Modernity*, where it is expanded and illustrated ethnographically in greater depth.

2 The idea of a headman here does not refer to a hierarchical or hereditary position. It is based on respect earned over one's lifetime, experiential knowledge, and the ability to use one's skills and knowledge to provide resources for others (which I refer to as allocative power, Macdonald 2000). Although there was a preference for patrifiliation, this would depend on the abilities of one's son, could be competitive, and was tempered by the matritotemic cults which worked against the formation of patrilocality (see also Gold 2006; Macdonald and Gold N.d.).

3 British structural-functionalist, Radcliffe-Brown (1952), argued that the social structures of primitive societies were comparable on the basis of structure, as are sea shells, but shells are also rigid and impermeable. Similarly, American culturalist, Ruth Benedict (2005) argued that cultures were poured into cups, each different from the others, but able to be completely shattered. Despite differences in these respective approaches across the Atlantic, early anthropology saw non-modern societies as fragile and unable to change. A good comparison of Radcliffe-Brown and Benedict in this respect can be found in Carrithers 1992. Later, Levi-Strauss (1963, 1966) was similarly to distinguish between hot (changing, European) and cold (resistant, unable to change) societies.

4 Land was being gazetted "especially for Aboriginal use" and was available to families or sets of families as small residential reserves. As people were removed from taurai they found themselves forced into supervised Christian missions or onto these reserves, several of which were initially held by individual families. As white pressure for land intensified, nearly 75% of these reserves were illegally revoked by government acts which were subsequently retrospectively legalized in 1983 (Macdonald 2004).

5 The policy stance was called *self-determination* under the Federal Whitlam Labor Government of 1972, but this was formally changed to *self-management* in 1975 under the Fraser Liberal-National Coalition and it remained so for the rest of that century.

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