

### **Chapter Three. Relations Between Europeans and Aboriginal Australians in Pastoral New England, New South Wales, 1832-1930.**

#### **Section One. The Doomed Race Theory and New England.**

##### **a). Introduction.**

The following historical survey has a dual aim. First, it attempts to piece together, from very fragmentary evidence, a reasonably accurate picture of relations between Europeans and Aboriginal people on New England from 1832. It will then argue that, between the time of first contact on New England and the height of the Stolen Generations era before World War Two, local Aboriginal people enjoyed sufficient independence to maintain and extend their expression of indigenous identity. This will hopefully establish a solid foundation upon which will be constructed the following chapters' analyses of local Aboriginal musical development through the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

It is not denied here that the European invasion of New England visited a host of evils upon local Aboriginal society. But to overemphasise the negative aspects of white occupation, as some histories have done, is to risk discounting the ability of nineteenth-century Aboriginal people to resist or adapt creatively to novel challenges, and to influence continuing relations through appropriate customary strategies. The desire to explore an alternative view has been prompted by a perceived disjunction between the conventional historical depiction of nineteenth-century relations, for which mainly European sources of evidence survive, and that historical orientation which has been presented recently by senior and knowledgeable Aboriginal people themselves. This disparity is noted by McBryde (1996: 6) and Goodall (1996: 199), who apprehend a tension between the portrayal of Aboriginal by Aboriginal people as

creative and resilient on the one hand, and their characterisation by some white commentators as almost powerless victims on the other.

The present section examines local historical evidence informed by the Doomed Race Theory. This will illuminate the typical workings of the scheme, and test its assertions regarding frontier violence, and the putative decline and disappearance of local Aboriginal cultures. Section two provides alternative information concerning New England contact relations, while local nineteenth-century population dynamics will comprise the focus of section three. Section four looks at patterns of European land acquisition, section five will discuss participation by Aboriginal people in the white pastoral economy, and section six will conclude the chapter.

#### b). The Doomed Race Theory in Practice.

Chapter one introduced the idea that much of the published nineteenth-century opinion relating to Aboriginal society was informed by an ideology that Russell McGregor styles the Doomed Race Theory. What follows below is a selection of expressions that illustrate the theory's unmistakable influence on New England observers. By interrogating their rationale, and testing their insinuations against parallel sources of evidence, it is expected that the contribution these expressions have made to the presentation and maintenance of a distorted picture of local Aboriginal society is clearly recognised. The further step of examining how this ideology might have operated in assisting the expropriation of Aboriginal landowners will not be taken, although it is considered that a positive link does exist.

One dimension to the Doomed Race Theory, presented briefly in the first chapter, concerns the common notion that frontier violence was, in all localities, of

calamitous proportions. Expressions of this aspect were invariably framed by nineteenth-century commentators as 'dark hints', which gave no real indication of the extent of conflict. Henry Reynolds acknowledges its suggestive power, but arguing from a different position, considers that this testimony euphemistically indicates large-scale aggressions:

In the late nineteenth century many writers quite consciously avoided references to the nature and extent of frontier conflict. They said things like 'it is well to draw a veil over the dark side of the picture' or 'there one would willingly draw a veil over the sad picture' (Reynolds 1999: 114).

The same elusive style characterises A.B. Norton's and Finney Eldershaw's references to New England contact violence. Norton writes that:

when I first went to New England the dark chapter had been closed in that district and the blacks who remained went to and from station to station without let or hindrance...this is a subject I have no desire to enlarge upon...(1902: 81).

The rhetoric of Norton's expression, particularly in the appeal to the concept of 'remnant' and in its resigned *laissez-faire* mood, betrays relationship with similar archetypal utterances noted by McGregor. More compellingly, Norton's depiction of a 'fading people' is contested by alternative contemporary evidence, presented below, for a still-robust indigenous culture. Eldershaw's example, dealing with the mounting of an armed expedition to recover a stolen mob of sheep, is a variation on the general run. While every bit as euphemistic as Norton's, it partakes of the 'harum scarum' Rider Haggard-style adventure story (Eldershaw 1854: 62-75).

There may have been good reason for the detail of frontier aggressions to be veiled in suggestive language, particularly after the experience of Myall Creek (see below). But there may also have been advantage in using such imprecise expressions to support the view, in the absence of demographic data, that the indigenous population was rapidly dying out. The pregnant vagueness of the accounts left the way open for contemporaries and later historians to interpret them as source evidence for massacres, that delivered a demographic blow from which indigenous populations could scarcely recover (Blomfield 1988). Logically, these suggestions can be just as easily interpreted as exaggerations as they can understatements. The way they will be read ultimately depends on the personal commitment of historians.

When Henry Reynolds asks rhetorically whether or not he has made too much of violence in his analyses of black and white relations (Reynolds 1999: 124), any answer should include an acknowledgement that force was only one strategy in a whole suite of oppressions designed to marginalise Aboriginal populations. His statement that frontier aggression was

the instrument for the acquisition of a whole continent (Reynolds 1999: 125),

is therefore considered to attach too much importance to violence alone, certainly for the New England experience. Other more protracted strategies, including the concerted promulgation of the Doomed Race Theory and the *praxis* of the Aboriginal Protection and Welfare Boards, were equally implicated in the stealing of Aboriginal lands. Unless it is quite obvious that armed aggression was the main contact process operating on a particular frontier, then the temptation to interpret vague evidence on the side of more rather than less violence might risk doing local Aboriginal people further injustice. If brutality were seen to constitute the enduring characteristic of

contact relations, then because of the obvious superiority of white weaponry — including horses — the opportunities for recognising diverse, creative and successful Aboriginal resistances are much diminished. Reynolds admits to both his assumption of force and its historiographical consequence in saying

The British decided they would take the land without a treaty, without negotiation, and without any attempt to purchase it. Whenever and wherever the indigenous landowners resisted the European incursion or attempted to impose their law on the newcomers, the only answer was force. It is hard to see how it could have been otherwise. The result was predetermined (Reynolds 1999: 120, 121).

By counting violence as one strategy amongst many, the way can be cleared to seek evidence of a political dynamic operating between black and white — one that was more complex than combative, with Aboriginal creative action assuming a greater relative importance.

The classic Doomed Race declaration that Aboriginal society would quickly die out, is well-represented amongst New England ethnological observations. Eldershaw, after drawing a most miserable sketch of customary Aboriginal practices in the district, concluded that:

it is a matter of undeniable observation, that...our native tribes do now, and must of necessity continue to, decrease, irrespective of the white man's influence (Eldershaw 1854: 84-87).

Even where contemporary observers seem careful to restrict themselves to providing information of a less opinionated nature, the Doomed Race Theory can be seen inexplicably surfacing in their summations. Commissioner George Macdonald reported in 1845 that the decrease in the New England Aboriginal population had

been negligible over the first five years of official white occupation, that relations between Aboriginal people and Europeans were continuing on a friendly footing, and that their own internecine wars seemed to have had little demographic effect. Despite these observations, he concludes with the grand *non sequitur* that:

what has been said by Dr. Tocqueville, of the American Indians, applies with equal force to the natives of New Holland: – 'that judging of the future by the past, we cannot err in anticipating a progressive diminution of their numbers' (Macdonald 1845, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 106).

Local newspaper journalists excelled in this type of judgement, particularly when reporting on annual blanket distributions. On these occasions, which provided an opportunity to compare the size of the present with previous patronage, the writers either prosaically 'wrote off' the surviving Aboriginal remnants, or waxed lyrical about the passing of a noble warrior race. Either way, the rhetoric used easily brands the product as generic:

Indeed the darkie race is fast dying out, and in a few years we shall have the same tale to tell, that only 'one old man' remains. However, the poor unfortunates seemed quite pleased to receive 'blanket' and attempted in their way to give three cheers for the Queen (*Armidale Express*, 29-5-1869).

Again, the rhetoric used here accords with archetypes presented by McGregor in chapter one. The mood of the report is patronising, and emphasises strongly the economic dependency of local indigenous people. While the writer is referring here to a group numbering fifty, the impression given is that this number was not only much-reduced from previous years, but that it represents an unsustainable population figure.

The use of the occasion and its 'traffic' to support a prediction of extinction seems most inappropriate when it is considered that twenty years later, eighty-one Aboriginal people applied for blankets at Armidale Court House (Armidale Bench Book 1890-1904: 70).

The alternative rhetorical style is seen in a report for 1881, where the *Glen Innes Examiner* marked its local blanket distribution in this way:

Only four poor emaciated Aborigines put in an appearance as supplicants for the annual blanket...The distribution took place on Thursday last, and it was a sorry sight to see all that remains of a once noble race drag their weary forms to the precinct of the court house...And, merciful heavens, is this the only few who can be gathered together out of that warrior band whose thousand tongues a few years ago made the surrounding plains echo with their war songs?

(*Glen Innes Examiner*, 31-5-1881, p. 4).

The language used by the reporter here leaves no doubt that the fated decline of Aboriginal people was considered virtually complete. The extravagance of the rhetoric is revealed by a contradictory local census statistic published only two years later — and itself likely to be a significant underestimate — which shows not only a much higher population figure for the Glen Innes Police district, but also mentions specifically that there,

they are all supplied with government blankets if they choose to call for them. In some instances, they have neglected to call for them (Votes & Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales 1883, vol. 3: 908, 909).

The newspaper article provides an illustration of another Doomed Race stratagem — the exaggeration of the original strength of the indigenous population in order to sharpen the picture of decay. Many editorial descriptions refer to the ‘remnants of a once-powerful people’ now merely scattered over the Tablelands. The available evidence suggests that, contrary to the unfounded opinions of a host of observers like these, the New England region may have been only sparsely populated before the advent of whites. In 1845, Macdonald described the ‘tribes’ as ‘widely scattered’ even then, although it is likely that their population numbers were holding to the level of 1839 (see below), and still possessed the integrity, physical and cultural, to host large inter-regional ceremonies into the 1850s (White 1934: 226).

The same rhetorical device also links population decline with loss of culture — in this case, specifically musical culture. If the *Examiner* journalist wanted ‘war songs’, he or she could have heard them seven years later in the same town, performed by the same group on the very same type of occasion. The following is a picture, strikingly different both in mood and detail to the previous report, of a local corroboree performed in exchange for blankets. Although hideously derisive, the article describes a vibrant cultural event whose trade dimension (see chapter two), successfully parries any suggestion of economic dependency:

The top end of East Street was quite lively on Friday night, the occasion being a corroboree held by the blacks of the Oban tribe. A wonderful performance is a corroboree as every Australian knows, and the quaint antics of the performers were greeted with shouts and screams of laughter by a fair-sized crowd of white spectators, all muffled up against a sharp frost which had set in. The fun was at its height, when a venerable-looking aboriginal who was heading the



discord by striking two pieces of wood together, fairly convulsed the audience with laughter by informing one of the howling performers that her song was pitched at least half an octave too high (*Glen Innes Examiner*, 29-5-1888: 2).

Another example that can be analysed in some detail concerns a newspaper report of new houses erected on the Oban reserve 'for the comfort of the remnant of a once numerous and powerful tribe' (*Glen Innes Examiner* 11-7-1893). The message of even these few words is clear. Out of a feeling of benign humanity, the government has provided housing to 'smooth the dying pillow' of a pathetic and dwindling group. Of course the scene changes quite dramatically when further historical detail is brought to bear. There is a strong likelihood that the Oban reserve itself was obtained through the group's direct political action (see Goodall 1996: 171-178), and it is known for certain that the housing was obtained in this way (McGuigan n.d.: 39; *Glen Innes Examiner* 11-7-1893; *Glen Innes Examiner* 8-8-1893: 3). The 'remnant' that the journalist refers to numbered about thirty people, but there were at least another fourteen of their relatives living at nearby Kookabookra (New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1894-1895, vol. 2: 499-508), and still others were camped on adjoining stations such as Aberfoil, Lyndhurst and Camperdown (F.J. White 1895). Given these circumstances, it may be reasonable to assume a population figure of about sixty. In 1857, the Oban group was described as 'a *large* tribe of blacks, numbering about 70 or 80' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 11-5-1857. Emphasis added). Even if the Oban population figure had previously been higher, the *Glen Innes Examiner* reporter would have had no knowledge of it. Sixty people hardly constitutes a 'remnant' of a group of seventy or eighty.

John Macpherson was a medical officer practising in Glen Innes at the turn of the twentieth century. His writings, mainly ethnological articles published by the Linnean Society of New South Wales, seem to be well-imbued with the Doomed Race ideology. In one of these he paints a romantic picture of the sad decay of the Oban Aboriginal people, reminiscent of Barron Field's 1825 eulogy:

At Oban-Kookabookra was a little band of about eighteen...Dicky Nelson, the patriarch of them all — an old man a quarter of a century ago — was a familiar figure prospecting for precious metal in the bed of the creek, and thus passing his declining days — alone (MacPherson 1904: 96).

Alternative historical sources suggest that Macpherson's population statistic is an underestimate, perhaps by a factor of three (Bill Cohen 1988; New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1894-1895, vol. 2: 499-508). But even allowing the possibility of such a sharp population decrease in the ten years since 1893, there is no reason to consider that it would have been prompted any differently to the exodus of white miners from the locality at that time, nor need it have been permanent. For economic reasons, the general mining population of the Oban field dropped from one hundred in 1897 (Belshaw & Kerr 1950: 9) to twenty-three by 1903 (Newbury 1991: 17). The Oban Aboriginal people had been involved in small-scale mining operations since at least 1857 (*Sydney Morning Herald* 11-5-1857; Doug Irving 1995; Anonymous 1962: 4), and some of its members may well have followed the more productive fields in just the same way.

In another place, Macpherson fuels his observation with medical authority to give maximum propulsion to the Doomed Race Theory:

Such, then, was the practice of medicine and surgery among these primitive people. Drunkenness, with its attendant evils, exposure to wet and the cold of night, tubercle, hydatids, venereal disease, the diminished bodily vigour resulting from occupying and sleeping in damp, dark and ill-ventilated hovels, incident upon their civilisation, have all combined to destroy the tribes, and soon the few remnants will be gathered to their fathers and we shall know them no more (Macpherson 1902: 92).

It can be seen from the correspondence of these stated causes of extinction with the opinions of Westgarth (quoted in McGregor 1998: 14) and Eldershaw (Eldershaw 1854: 84-87), that they were somewhat institutionalised, informed by the same set of theoretical ideas regarding human evolution that McGregor canvasses in his study. Macpherson's own rhetoric of destruction forges a direct link with the dominant ideology, which is again thrown into relief by conflicting historical evidence. As seen above, it was only a few years since relatively high-standard housing had been erected on the Oban reserve. These lined, iron dwellings were more modern and comfortable than the tents and bark huts of many of the group's white neighbours (McDonald 1994b: 68), one of whom commented on the clean and industrious habits of the Aboriginal people who lived in the district (Anonymous 1962: 4; Jim Lowe 1983: TRC 2720/39/1, 36, 37).

A large part of the reason that the Doomed Race Theory could have such an enduring existence on New England, was the invisibility of local Aboriginal society to most Europeans. The poverty of white knowledge is due here in varying measures to a number of factors: the adherence of the European intellect to fanciful and obstructive ideas about human cultures (including their own); the lack of desire on the part of

most whites to find out about Aboriginal people, less still to form friendships with them; the very isolated nature of the country many Aboriginal people lived in after 1861; their only sporadic appearances in centres of European population; the nature of indigenous cultures that depended less than many on outward material expression, perhaps more than most on secrecy for their maintenance; and most importantly, to various obfuscating strategies of resistance (Eddie Briggs 1995).

It is manifest that by the 1870s, white people inhabiting the main population centres of New England knew virtually nothing about local Aboriginal people (*Armidale Express* 13-5-1871). Even graziers inhabiting the central portion of the Tableland were unaware of the existence of communities situated within a very few miles of their runs. John Ditton of Black Mountain, north of Armidale, commented on a complete indigenous absence from his area (*Armidale Express* 16-12-1871, 'Relics of a Departing Race'), and C.E. Blomfield of Booroolong extended this perception to embrace the whole region. Blomfield, who was born into a central New England pastoral family in the early 1860s and who farmed for most of his long life in the district, said in his memoirs that:

the New England Tableland aborigines, for some reason or other, did not survive long after the arrival of the white man. Except at Myall Creek I never heard of any wholesale murder or poisoning of the Aborigines in New England. *I do not remember that I ever saw any New England Tableland Aborigines* (Blomfield 1945: 4. Emphasis added).

Another contemporary example of this ignorance concerns the analysis of a dramatic surge in the numbers of kangaroos over the whole of New England during the 1870s. The reason for the increase was that, as New England selectors opened up more and

more grazing land during that decade, they created environmental conditions that greatly favoured kangaroo populations (McDonald 1994a). The *Armidale Express* saw instead in this phenomenon, proof of the demographic fate of local Aboriginal people. Drawing conclusions from a simplistic conception of the relationship between predator and prey 'species', the journalist there considered that:

The absence of the blacks is manifested by the rapid increase of kangaroos on the runs (Armidale Express 7-5-1875).

As will be demonstrated below, Aboriginal people had continued occupying New England pastoral runs from the beginning of white settlement up until the second half of the twentieth century. At the time the newspaper article was written, it is known for certain that they lived in communities on Hillgrove, Wollomombi, Aberfoil, Rockvale and Oban stations, and are likely to have been resident on a number of others on the north-eastern, western and south-eastern parts of the Tableland.

The foregoing examination has highlighted expressions of New England Aboriginal history that show the obvious influence of the Doomed Race Theory. By subjecting them to verification against alternative historical sources, it was demonstrated that published opinion was often unsupported by observed fact, and that educated Europeans had almost no knowledge of the people about whom they wrote with such confidence. Real changes to Aboriginal society, rather than the much-touted indicators of cultural decline, remained unrecorded. When researchers like Macpherson set off in search of anthropological information, they interviewed only the oldest community members about cultures that existed before whites came to the area. This was a span of seventy years in Macpherson's case, a long stretch of time for the local history of indigenous cultural development to be completely ignored. The conclusion that Aboriginal culture was dying was therefore never tested in the field,

because the typical research methodology incorporated that very conclusion as an integral premiss.

McGregor's analysis allows historians to quickly recognise evidence infected by the Doomed Race Theory. Because the theory's rhetoric, agenda and lineage are all well-documented, its expressions can be excised from what might otherwise be reliable historical evidence without too much difficulty. The historian in this case should therefore not be confronted with any special dilemma in choosing which European evidence to trust and which to reject. In many cases the empirical data indeed seem acceptable, while objection is taken only to conclusions drawn from them. For example, no attempt would be made here to deny that only four Aboriginal people presented themselves at the Glen Innes Court House to receive blankets on that particular day in 1881. But that this constituted proof of terminal population decline can be successfully contested. Where the line between opinion and empirical observation becomes blurred, the exercise of historical judgement may be more taxing. In these cases, some validity might be claimed by both sides to an argument, while at the same time the Doomed Race Theory's influence should be clearly recognised. There is little doubt that alcohol, housing and health, for example, were all issues of social inequality obtaining in nineteenth-century New England society, just as they are today. But whether they were contributing materially to the extirpation of local indigenous groups is quite another matter. If it can be seen that the delivery of empirical evidence is too radically implicated with a Doomed Race Theory conclusion, then a careful historian must regard the reliability of the observation as diminished.

The Doomed Race platform was built on a number of planks. These emphasised: the cataclysmic violence of frontier relations; rapid and inevitable

indigenous population decline; the dependent nature of the relationship between Aboriginal society and a beneficent colonial government, and the inability of Aboriginal people to develop their own cultures in response to European innovations. The last idea is related to those that would hold Aboriginality and Europeanness as fundamentally inimical, and also to the view that Aboriginal people could not be civilised. Detailed local historical information weakening the integrity of each of these planks will be set out below, beginning with a short history of New England contact relations.

## **Section Two. Contact Relations.**

As a corrective to the Doomed Race Theory's exaggeration of violence on the New England frontier, this section will comment briefly upon selected aspects of the history of early contact relations as presented by conventional white sources such as pastoralists' diaries, official reports, pioneers' reminiscences and so on. While these will be supplemented where possible with twentieth-century Aboriginal commentaries, historians cannot avail themselves here of Aboriginal testimony expressing a recent memory of contact situations, such as exist for central Australia (Vaarzon-Morel 1998).

It was stated in chapter one that the literature of early relations between black and white is weighted on the side of the all-pervasive, annihilating influences of European invasion. Analyses of indigenous resistances and their possible contribution to the subversion of white aggression are few, and are mainly the work of Aboriginal historians (see Miller 1985). Instead, the idea of the incompatibility of European and Aboriginal social, economic and intellectual systems, and the concomitant inevitability and ubiquity of major conflict, has held a general sway in academic

examinations (Dingle 1988: 57). Again, some 'broad brush' historical analyses such as that of Tony Swain discussed in the next chapter, run the risk of glossing over significant local differences in the course of achieving a manageable regional overview. A corollary to this is the practice of interpreting sketchy historical evidence in a way that might exaggerate the level and extent of frontier conflict, presumably in order to fit local experiences into a wider pattern (Blomfield 1988: 83, 84). While the fact of serious and widespread conflict must of course be acknowledged, it is argued here that any perception of its inevitability and comprehensively devastating character should not be accepted uncritically.

Despite the tendency towards over-generalisation, historians are beginning to acknowledge the possibility of local variation to the frontier experience. Henry Reynolds concedes that

it appeared that conflict was practically universal around the fringes of settlement, although there were important regional differences which resulted from the period of first contact, the varying policies of government, the prior knowledge of Europeans possessed by Aborigines, particular geographic and climatic conditions, the density of European settlement and the nature of the settlers' economic activity (Reynolds 1999: 109).

While this represents a considerable historiographical advance, it is arguably oriented a little too steadfastly towards the European experience of contact. Lack of access to contemporary Aboriginal testimony is certainly a major factor here, and in order to redress this situation, an appeal is made in the following chapter to the evidence of New England Aboriginal songs that deal with the subject of frontier relations. It is



considered that the general nature of the New England experience can be sufficiently glimpsed from white sources however, and this is what is attempted below.

Apart from John Oxley's fleeting visit to the southern edge of the Tableland in 1818, larger groups of Europeans did not visit New England, as far as is known, until Hamilton Collins Sempill established the Wolka sheep run in that same corner in 1832 (Gardner 1854: 69). This chronology is qualified by Oxley's opinion that the New England Aboriginal people he met had prior knowledge of Europeans (Oxley 1820, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977, p. 61).

That conflict occurred immediately upon first 'economic' contact in New England might possibly be inferred from Sempill's own testimony before the New South Wales Committee on the Crown Lands Bill in 1839, although this squatter did maintain pastoral enterprises in other parts of the colony, and it may have been to these that he was referring:

After a certain time, a person is as safe in the vicinity of the Aborigines as anywhere else; but on coming for the first time in contact with them, they are invariably hostile; that hostile feeling, however, wears off as soon as they become acquainted with White persons settling among them, and the power they possess (New South Wales Legislative Council 1839a: 223).

Very little other evidence for the course of local black/white relations survives for the period up to George Macdonald's appointment as Commissioner of Crown Lands for New England in 1839, although the *Sydney Herald* occasionally mentioned conflict with Tableland Aboriginal people, beginning with the following report on January 28, 1836:

We hear that numerous outrages have been commenced by the aborigines in the newly-discovered country north-east of Liverpool Plains (quoted in Campbell 1922, p. 245).

Commissioner Macdonald's first *Report on the State of the Aborigines* suggests that this may not have been the general rule on New England (Macdonald 1842), and it would be fair to say that, at the very least, such hostility was neither inevitable, nor did it follow a prescribed pattern. Other reliable evidence indicates that first relations could be friendly (Bundarra Young 1922: 395; Campbell 1971: 1-11; Everett 1840: 2; Fennell & Gray 1974: ; Gardner 1846: n.p.; Jamieson 1987: 10, 11; Cohen & Somerville 1990: 45), and numerous New England squattages including Ollera, Clerkness, Oban, Rockvale, Aberfoil, Mihi, Kentucky, Ohio, Rimbanda, Looanga, Inglebah, Surveyor's Creek and Waterloo were known for at least accommodating customary Aboriginal usage of land (plate 3). Further, certain resident squatters such as the Everetts (Macdonald 1842; Everett Family Papers) and Captain S. Darby (Fennell & Gray 1974: 84), expressed more than a passing interest in indigenous cultural matters, apparently displaying some understanding of local Aboriginal thought and languages.<sup>2</sup>

The point should be made however, that even where it was enabled by European accommodation, customary usage must have been severely curtailed by the

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be mentioned here that Dr. John Ferry of the University of New England considers that the Everett family may have been capable of aggression where their economic interests were directly threatened. He cites as evidence a letter written by George Everett (Everett 1840), describing what could have turned out to be a punitive expedition mounted in response to the supposed driving-off of a mob of sheep. The sheep were found before Aboriginal people were engaged by the whites, so the expedition was disbanded (Ferry 1995: pers. comm.).

introduction of livestock into ancestral lands. George Macdonald wrote that, within six years of first contact,

their ordinary means of subsistence must have diminished to a considerable extent — the introduction of 500,000 sheep into the original hunting grounds of the district has nearly driven the kangaroo, on which the natives formerly subsisted, beyond its boundaries (Macdonald 1845, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 105, 106).

Cattle also wrought major environmental changes, particularly to watercourses, which represented an important source of food for local Aboriginal people:

The grazing of cattle on the runs has greatly contributed to the draining of the swamps, the cattle track in a line, and these tracks have early formed a trough for the cattle to pass, & latterly a strong current set in through these tracks, cutting deep ruts, and clearing the water during wet & drooping seasons from the swamps (Gardner 1855, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 150).

The response of local people was to both utilise the new food types on the one hand, and to try and rid their lands of the animal pests on the other. The consequent driving-off of flocks of sheep provoked armed retaliation in some instances, and Eldershaw records his own involvement in a chase that culminated in the deaths of some local Aboriginal men (Eldershaw 1854: 62-75). Whether or not the spearing of cattle led to similar reprisal is unclear, as Gardner states quite categorically that, at least from the early 1840s:

Everywhere in this district the blacks are well aware that the whites are not allowed to use fire-arms in defence of their cattle and they make light of the matter (Gardner 1846: 22).

Further clashes between European and Aboriginal landholders may or may not have been caused by direct competition for the control of water resources, a theme running through the history of European land-accumulation in drier portions of the continent (Vaarzon-Morel 1998: 37). Even up to 1850, it was the opinion of the Government Surveyor that access to its abundant waters was not a great cause for competition amongst those looking for land on New England (Galloway 1851). Contradictory evidence is provided by John Ferry however, who demonstrates that water was the first resource secured by graziers in consolidating their runs by freehold title (Ferry 1990). Whatever the case, it appears that livestock depredations had largely ceased by the time George Macdonald prepared his report for 1845 (Macdonald 1845, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 106).

Hostility undoubtedly reproduced itself on New England as elsewhere, and for this and other reasons, some squatters were presumably unwilling to allow Aboriginal groups to reside on the land they had appropriated. The methods these squatters would have used to deter indigenous usage were no doubt varied, but further violence was certainly one option. Although the evidence relating to the largely undocumented period before 1839 is very scant, the name of the stockman 'Terrible Billy' Stephenson has been associated with a number of pastoral stations at that time, including Saumarez (Gray 1982: 89), Gostwyck, Salisbury, Terrible Vale (Bundarra Young 1922: 401; Gardiner 1998: 17) and Niangala (Moore 1991: 1, 3). This man may have held a brief to initiate aggressions that are now spoken of in only the haziest terms (such as on Saumarez, Gostwyck and Macdonald River stations), an insight prompted chiefly by the following statement of the Wallabadah pioneer William Telfer:

went through a dense scrub for about four miles Passing mount  
Terrible Enroute which was called after a stockman named Terrible

Billy in the old Times who was a terror to the aboriginals in the New England districts he after Comited suicide on Glydes Corner in 1851 (Milliss 1980: 91).

Non-official European action towards Aboriginal people in the first decade of contact seems to have followed no uniform policy, and instead depended to a great extent on the attitudes of individuals. Nor did it follow class lines as has been postulated by I.C. Campbell, who attributes much of the hostility to the generally brutalized character of convict labour (Campbell 1971: 11). The opinion of Susan Bundarra Young that:

the convicts were not the hardened ruffians and criminals that they have been represented to be (Bundarra Young 1922: 294),

has been echoed by Donald Jamieson and others (Jamieson 1987: 10), and some records portray a close relationship between assigned labouring men and local Aboriginal people (*Muswellbrook Bench Book 1838; Armidale Bench Book 1844-1859*). Moreover, evidence given to the 1839 New South Wales Legislative Council Select Committee On Police and Gaols laid the blame for bad relations in the adjacent north-west region as much on the character of station superintendents as on their stockmen (New South Wales Legislative Council 1839b: 225). In the aftermath of the Myall Creek massacre, some of the sharpest disapprobation — issuing from both contemporary newspaper editorials (*Sydney Monitor and Commercial Advertiser* 1838, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 118), and the published accounts of informed observers such as Judge R. Therry (Therry n.d., quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 120-122), — was reserved for several of the local squatters themselves.

Much must also have depended on the varying attitudes of the Aboriginal groups concerned, and even upon individuals within groups (Jamieson 1987: 16).

While it seems to be the case that an anti-white Aboriginal 'confederation' was formed on the north-west slopes between 1836 and 1838 (Bundarra Young 1922: 399; Gardner 1846: n.p.; New South Wales Legislative Council 1839b: 23), there is no evidence that Tableland Aboriginal people acted with a similar unity of purpose. In fact, Macdonald's 1842 report suggested a singular absence of cohesion obtaining amongst them:

from the widely scattered state of the Tribes – their distrust and fear of each other; — their constant feuds...there is but a very remote probability of effecting any radical change in their moral or social

Condition as a people...(Macdonald 1842. Original emphasis).

Moreover, it is possible that the white occupation actually sharpened hostilities between local groups, an idea supported both by early newspaper reports and by oral historical evidence. Although the specific events took place well after initial contact, various issues of the *Armidale Express* for May and June 1860 discuss troubles on the eastern border of New England, caused by Aboriginal people from the Macleay River being driven there by the New South Wales Mounted Police in the wake of coastal settler expansion (*Armidale Express*, 20-5-1860: 3; 2-6-1860: 2; 9-6-1860: 2; 23-6-1860: 2). Current oral historical evidence links these troubles to stories of pitched battles between the Macleay River people and Tableland tribes (Mr. M. Kim 1996: pers. comm; Mr. B. Lockwood 1996: pers. comm; Cohen & Somerville 1990: 61, 62; see also Scholes 1971: 54, 57). Similar processes could well have produced intra-Tableland hostilities in the years immediately after 1832. Some context is provided for this assertion by evidence from South Australia, where it appears that after the initial development of the town of Adelaide, Aboriginal people from outside the area began to migrate to the settlement. This resulted in some conflict with the original

indigenous owners, suggested by a narrative of the local Aboriginal King John, first published in 1844:

Before white man came, Murray black fellow never come here. Now white man come, Murray black fellow come too. Encounter Bay and Adelaide black fellow no like him. Me want him to go away. Let them sit down at the Murray, not here. This is not his country (quoted in Clarke 1996: 85).

For sometimes obscure reasons, relations between black and white on New England also varied over time during this early period. Europeans living on Surveyor's Creek station, for example, for some years maintained good relations with local Aboriginal people. Documented familiarity includes the mutual celebration of Christmas in 1842, and the frequent employment of Aboriginal men and women on the property. But in 1844, the station overseer wrote the following in his journal:

Thursday September 26th. 1844...I keep my gun & pistol loaded in the house. The Blacks attacked a neighbouring station, Rusden's, & nearly killed a shepherd, left him for dead & stole some of the sheep. the damn scoundrels, they ought to be shot. I had some of them here to-day working about the house & I heard to-night that one of the Blacks I had was one of those who attacked Rusden's, they are treacherous dogs (Surveyor's Creek 1839-1845: n.p.).

Again, white attitudes on New England are likely to have changed markedly after the perpetrators (or their agents) of the Myall Creek massacre were sentenced and hanged in 1838. It may be appropriate to state at this point that the Myall Creek massacre is not considered here to be an example of New England contact relations. Although Myall Creek itself ran just outside the western border of the New England pastoral

district, the massacre was almost certainly an expression of the continuing state of extreme hostility that existed in the north-west region between whites and *Bigambal*, *Kwiambal* and *Gamilraay* people (see evidence given before E.D. Day, recorded in the Muswellbrook Bench Book, August 1838). The strong judicial action taken after Myall Creek showed that sections at least of the colonial government intended to enforce the protection of Aboriginal people, a principle laid out explicitly in the initial general instructions to the Commissioner of Crown Lands for New England (New South Wales Legislative Council 1839b: 578-582). A general and very serious caveat against large-scale racial aggression had thus been broadcast before fully one-third of the 45 or so stations in New England had been taken up by the end of 1839 (Campbell 1922: 235-237; Allman 1940: n.p.).

An illustration of this effect of Myall Creek, *inter alia*, may be seen in the writings of Finney Eldershaw of Marooan Station. Although the sheep runs around Ben Lomond were first taken up in about 1837 (Gardner 1854: 69), Eldershaw wrote that no bloodshed occurred there until 1841 (Eldershaw 1854: 62-75). In that year, the murder of shepherds on Marooan resulted in retaliatory action where Aboriginal people were no doubt killed, but probably not on the scale assumed by the historian Geoffrey Blomfield, who in this instance, seems to have taken a less than critical attitude towards his source (Blomfield 1988: 86-91). In discussing the Marooan action and local relations generally, Eldershaw clearly indicated that he and like-minded squatters felt themselves considerably constrained by British law in their ability to adequately defend their investments against Aboriginal depredation:

the actual position in which the Squatter of the so-called unsettled districts stands towards the aboriginal tribes...is one of undoubted hostility; in plain terms, it is a position of open warfare; and without



presuming to enter into the question of right, by which the British Government...assumes the privilege of taking possession of and inhabiting the wasting territories of such savage tribes; it is surely to be inferred, that the mere assumption of this authority conveys to the subjects of that Government an indisputable right to protection...I deem it manifestly unjust that actual murder must be permitted to be perpetrated before sufficient measures are allowed to be adopted for the removal of the danger. The evident intention to ravage and destroy is the natural signal for protective action. But it seems not. We must wait till we are attacked, remain quiescent until the murderer stalks at our door, and his victims quiver at our feet, and then a warrant may be obtained from the nearest neighbouring justice of the peace; and armed with which precious document, we are permitted to call upon the offender to surrender himself to justice...The manifest absurdity of a warrant at all in such cases needs no comment...(Eldershaw 1854: 102-105).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, William Gardner described New England cattle-owners as powerless to defend their stock by force of arms, and the *Sydney Herald* reported that, during 1842, warriors on the nearby Namoi river repeatedly taunted white stockmen, telling them that 'they are afraid to shoot them as the Commissioner will hang them' (quoted in Swain 1993: 140).

The type of frontier incident at Marooan was repeated, as far as is known, perhaps six times more on New England — on Bolivia, Dundee and Salisbury runs (Irby 1908, quoted in Gilbert and Elphick 1974: 125; Frankland 1845: 150; *Sydney Herald*, 27-1-1842; 25-10-1844) — before hostilities appear to have largely ceased in

about 1845 (Campbell 1971: 6; Norton 1903: 81; Macdonald 1845). For various historiographical reasons, I believe these 'skirmishes' were carried out on a smaller scale, and were of lesser consequence, than any putative pre-1839 aggressions. Both Norton and Frankland for example, in chronicling their travels over the northern part of New England soon after its occurrence, wrote that contemporary white accounts of the alleged massacre at Bolivia were likely to be highly exaggerated (Frankland 1845: n.p.). Some support for this general view is provided by the opinion of Godfrey Mundy, who as New South Wales Adjutant-General, visited New England in 1847 and reported that:

Considering its great distance from the peopled (*sic*) settlements, the blacks have not lately been very troublesome in this district (Mundy 1852, vol. 2: 37).

Mundy goes on to say that he had heard of only two serious incidents occurring in the locality over the preceding years. Each eventuated in the death of one Aboriginal warrior, and one of these took place during unarmed single combat (Mundy 1852: 38, 41).

This survey has attempted to demonstrate both the multiplex nature of the New England frontier situation and the possible uniqueness of this region's historical experience. It was seen that white aggression was neither organised nor consistent, and that peaceful relations obtained from quite an early date. Chapter four will present musical evidence for the Aboriginal reaction to contact, and it will be seen there that indigenous responses were also diverse, and resistance strategies often effective. Something will now be said of the Aboriginal populations of the region, and available statistics will be analysed to test the Doomed Race Theory's presumption of a declining Aboriginal people.

### **Section Three. New England Aboriginal Populations of the Nineteenth Century.**

Official and unofficial reports at first adverted to an undifferentiated population of 'blacks' on New England. These early descriptions indicate that the writers had little idea of the identity of any of these people, how many inhabited each district, or just where they were living. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the first detailed descriptions of the Aboriginal populations and cultures of New England were published by Mathews and Macpherson, nearly seventy years after whites initially invaded the Tableland. What is known today about early nineteenth-century indigenous societies of New England is still largely a product of the researches of these two men.

The current conventional wisdom regarding New England tribal identities is represented by Terry Crowley's 1976 language map (plate 4), which depicts the distribution of four major language groups over the Tableland — *Marbal*, *Ngarbal*, *Baanbay*, *Yugambal* and *Nganjaywana* (hereinafter referred to as *Anaiwan*). Although details of the indigenous cultural practices of these groups are scarce, heterogeneity was recorded as a feature by the region's early ethnologists. This was certainly the case with language, which has been examined in some detail in chapter two. Further evidence suggests that there were major differences pertaining to kinship and totemic systems, primarily between *Anaiwan* and the other groups (Mathews 1900b: 168-170), but also between the New England peoples and those living on either side of the Tableland (Radcliffe-Brown 1929a: 233-235).

Local indigenous population numbers may have been relatively small at the time of the white invasion. Commissioner Macdonald estimated five or six hundred for the region (Macdonald 1842, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 104), which if

correct, would represent the lowest population density for any Aboriginal group on the continent (Bowdler 1982: 106). Based on Macdonald's figure, some archaeologists have canvassed possible reasons for this situation, postulating that New England may have long been resource-poor, perhaps a seldom-visited centre of religious significance for surrounding groups (Bowdler 1981: 106, 107). This proposition may have some merit, but the general lack of evidence and the contradictory nature of that little which does exist, militates against any confident assertion. Other researchers like Luke Godwin have decided that Macdonald's calculation was an underestimate. Taking into account the possibility of a pre-contact smallpox plague, for which there is no local evidence, Godwin has re-assessed Macdonald's figure at between seven and eight hundred, and the pre-1788 population of New England at about twelve hundred (Byrne 1989: 8).

After his 1852 tour of the northern districts of New South Wales, the Reverend W.B. Clarke estimated the New England indigenous population to stand at an absolute maximum of about eight hundred (Clarke 1852: n.p.). Even making allowances for different methods of calculation, Macdonald's opinion that there had been no discernible decrease in local numbers between 1839 and 1845, is therefore likely to be correct. Considering that direct physical assaults upon Aboriginal groups had ceased by the time Clarke pursued his research, it comes as a surprise to consider that thirty years later, the first New South Wales Police District Census (1883) proposed a much-reduced population figure of only about two hundred and twenty for New England (New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1883, vol. 3: 908, 909). One should be careful in interpreting the Census as evidence for a dramatic decline however, as there are obvious problems with the presentation of its data, not the least of which is the lack of any figures at all for the Walcha and Inverell districts (New South Wales

Legislative Assembly 1883, vol. 3: 908, 909). The general methodology of the census is likely to have been heavily flawed therefore, and its computations quite inaccurate.

While no alternative sources survive which can be used to check the 1883 figures directly, employing comparisons in the analysis of later Census statistics supports the assumption of unreliability. For example, the Police Census for 1890 counts a total of 46 Aboriginal people living in the Armidale and Uralla districts (New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1890-1891, vol. 8: 411), while 81 presumably local Aboriginal people applied for blankets at Armidale Court House in the same year (Armidale Bench Book 1890-1904: 70). In another instance, the Armidale Clerk of Petty Sessions noted, on the pages of the blanket return for that year, several wry and revealing comments regarding the perceived inaccuracy of the 1902 Police Census figures. After listing the recipients of 28 blankets, including five members of the Jarratt family, he writes sarcastically:

1902 by Police return, 1 Full Blood & 15 Half Castes in district. Total  
— 16. I find Rose Jarratt the only Half Caste included in the Police  
Report for 1902 & the only one entitled to a blanket (Armidale Bench  
Book 1890-1904: 95).

This list of twenty-eight blanket recipients therefore does not include fourteen 'half-castes' counted by the police, nor does it record blanket requests by the numerous members of the Dunn and Ross families who had applied for blankets three years earlier (and who still live locally in strength of numbers). In addition, the two blanket returns previous to 1902 contain the names of a dozen further recipients who did not apply in the latter year. On the other hand, the official Police Census statistic can only include a maximum of two of those who applied for blankets in 1902. Adding the two primary figures produces a total of over forty. The Police statistic for 1902 might then

be revised upwards by two or three times to arrive at a more accurate estimate. If this percentage discrepancy is applied back to the 1883 Census, the figure there should perhaps have totalled six or seven hundred or more, especially taking into account the lack of figures for Walcha and Inverell. This hovers in the range of Macdonald's and Clarke's figures, indicating anything but steep population decline.

If the census-takers were committed to collecting accurate population data, they were stymied by the travelling habits of local Aboriginal people, and possibly also by direct Aboriginal resistance to the process. To take one example of the significant effect this could have on statistics, the Police Census for 1893 counts only two Aboriginal people resident at Walcha, while the next year's figure includes 99! Numbers for all the other localities remain reasonably stable between the two censuses, so that the latter figure does not seem to be accounted for by migration to anywhere else on New England, there being instead a regional surplus of eighty-five recorded for 1894 over the previous year (New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1894-1895, vol. 2: 499-508).

Whichever way these Police statistics are interpreted, the raw figures indicate a two- or threefold population increase on New England between 1883 and 1895. Either the local Aboriginal population was growing exceedingly quickly, or the 1883 figure is a gross underestimate. Succeeding censuses for the last decade of that century record small but consistent yearly population increases for Aboriginal New South Wales. While it is obvious that all these figures should be viewed cautiously, it can be said with some confidence that local Aboriginal population statistics for the nineteenth century do not support the Doomed Race Theory's depiction of a 'dying race'.

#### **Section Four. Land Matters.**

The topography of the New England Tablelands exercised a considerable influence over the processes by which Europeans 'took up' and developed country there, and consequently over their relationships with Aboriginal landowners. The following general description of the terrain is both tolerably accurate and interesting, in that it represents a view of the landscape very soon after the white invasion:

New England, including "Beardy Plains," is a high table-land, about 150 miles in length, from 30 to 50 broad, and about 60 miles from the coast; it is a continuation of the dividing range between the eastern and western waters, and is about 4000 feet above the level of the sea...This table-land falls much more gradually to the N.W. and W. than it does towards the E., and the country between the lowland of the interior and the dividing range is more suited for stock than the descent towards the sea...The country immediately to the east of the table-land is of a different character: the rivers, after running a few miles over a comparatively level country, suddenly fall into ravines frequently 2000 feet deep...(Hamilton 1843: 245, 246).

More localised descriptions of the central portion of the plateau show that, at contact, it was indeed flat to gently undulating and only thinly covered in timber, its dense grasslands occasionally interspersed with treeless plains. Except during periods of sustained drought, water sources were consistently recorded as abundant and reliable. As Hamilton points out, the country to the east of the Tableland is much steeper, rockier, and densely timbered. A contemporary newspaper report described the terrain around Oban as 'mountainous, rugged and forbidding', and classed its access tracks in 1852 as 'bad, worse, worst' (Belshaw & Kerr 1950: 16). Because of the roughness of

its geography and its general unsuitability for sheep-husbandry, this eastern country was never developed to the same extent as were the sheep runs in central and western New England (Walker 1965; Ferry 1990). For a variety of reasons, agriculture never really persisted as an important industry on the Northern Tablelands, which remains today a primarily pastoral district.

G.W. Allman has outlined a schedule for the first squatters' occupation of New England pastoral runs:

Prior to 1836 squatters had drifted beyond the limits of location...The irregularities which followed this temporary illegal occupation caused the Government in 1836 to pass an act for the granting of licenses (*sic*) to depasture stock...Under this act, the first of such licenses was issued and which date from 1st January 1837...in 1839 a further act was passed which...provided for the levying of a tax and assessment on depastured stock...the revenue from this source being used to defray the expenses of the Border Police (Allman 1940: n.p.).

To exercise further control over the squatting rush, several new pastoral districts outside the nineteen 'home counties' were proclaimed in 1839, each to be presided over by a Crown Lands Commissioner. These men received detailed formal instructions, chiefly concerned with ensuring the protection of the Aboriginal inhabitants of their districts. The tenor of these instructions makes it clear that they were drafted to redress a previously lawless phase in black/white relations, and they strongly emphasised the equal status of Aboriginal subjects under British law. Nothing was expressly stated concerning the rights of Aboriginal people to continue occupying their homelands unhindered by pastoral enterprise, however (New South Wales Legislative Council 1839b: 578-582).



For the first ten years of official European settlement on New England, runs continued to be held under licence from the Crown. Licences could be revoked at will, and squatters felt keenly this lack of secure tenure, especially in the light of the necessity to effect basic but expensive improvements such as the erection of dwellings, outstation huts and fencing. In deference to a strengthening pastoral lobby, an Order-In-Council for 1847 introduced a system of fourteen-year pastoral leases. Some further security was ensured by the granting to lessees of a limited pre-emptive right of purchase of 640-acre blocks upon their runs (Ferry 1990: 110).

Of course, the more extensive the rights accorded to European settlers, the greater was the potential for the diminution of indigenous freedoms. Responding to alarms raised by Aboriginal Protectors in other parts of the colony, the Colonial Office at first contemplated creating Aboriginal reserves out of pastoral leases, but concluded

that they were not appropriate in Australia, given the nature of the country and the need for Aborigines to hunt and gather over large areas of land (Reynolds 1999: 210).

Early moves towards the creation of small Aboriginal reserves on New England were therefore abandoned, the British Colonial Secretary, Earl Grey, opting instead to trust that under the new system, Aboriginal people could continue using their own lands now covered by leasehold. To this end, he reminded the New South Wales administration that

leases granted for this purpose give the grantees only an exclusive right of pasturage for their cattle, and of cultivating such land as they may require within the large limits thus assigned to them, but that leases are not intended to deprive the natives of their former right to hunt over

these Districts, or to wander over them in search of subsistence, in the manner to which they have been heretofore accustomed, from the spontaneous produce of the soil except over land actually cultivated or fenced in for that purpose (quoted in Reynolds 1999: 210).

In the absence of clauses guaranteeing Aboriginal people free access to whatever runs lay over their ancestral lands (Reynolds 1999: 211), it seems that it was therefore incumbent upon lessees themselves to ensure that this occurred. It is not known to what extent pastoralists recognised the prior rights of Aboriginal people, nor whether these were enforced by the Commissioners. Considering the argument introduced below that it was only after graziers acquired the ability to secure land by freehold title that Aboriginal people were excluded from properties in central New England, it is possible that lessees did allow the original owners to continue living on their runs. Such customary usage is unlikely to have been physically prevented by the mechanics of pastoral development itself, as for about ten years after the introduction of leases, the landscape of New England remained virtually unchanged. It seems that runholders were still unwilling to invest heavily in improvements until the creation of a proper system of freehold tenure guaranteed their security (Blomfield 1945: 10; Gardner 1855).

Pastoral development accelerated in response to the passing of the Robertson Land Acts of 1861, which resulted in greater opportunities for freehold consolidation of runs, and in a consequent rapid intensification of European land-holding in many areas of New South Wales. Although Goodall considers that

the central and northern inland slopes...were not affected at all in this decade by such intensifying land use (Goodall 1996: 183),

this is not entirely true. Owing to the systematic usurpation of the action of the Acts by resisting squatters however, properties to the east of Armidale were only slightly affected (Ferry 1990: 119). There is no doubt that the face of runs in the central portion of New England began to change from this time, and the evidence of station diaries shows that new technologies such as wire-fencing and ringbarking were adopted almost straight away (John Ferry 1996: pers. comm.).

With the introduction of the 1861 legislation, it is likely that a process was put into train whereby Aboriginal people were pushed from the heart of the Tableland out onto its eastern flank. It is certainly the case that, while groups of local Aboriginal people occasionally figure in newspaper reports from the time the *Armidale Express* was established in 1856, there is virtually no record of their presence near the town after 1863. And as was seen above, they were considered to have almost disappeared from the face of the earth by 1871.

The 1870s witnessed an era of massive pastoral development on New England. Growth was indicated by improvements in roads, the introduction of new technologies, and the development of markets and investment practices. N.G. Butlin records that:

In the first phase, rising from 1871 to an extreme peak in 1877,...the level of pastoral investment increased extremely rapidly in what was, perhaps, the most profitable period of pastoral enterprise ever encountered in Australia (Butlin 1969: 322).

Reynolds documents the extensive role played by Aboriginal people in the development of Australia's pastoral frontiers generally (Reynolds 1990). Goodall and others outline the benefit to graziers, all other things being equal, of allowing an Aboriginal encampment on their stations, so as to utilise

accessible and increasingly skilled labour which gathered some of its own food, built its own housing and was committed to permanent residence in areas many white labourers regarded as too remote (Goodall 1996:182).

It is possible that Aboriginal people in eastern New England can also be seen to have benefited from pastoral expansion and the concomitant increase in employment opportunities. The Police Census of 1883 shows that Aboriginal people right around New England were at that time living on sheep or cattle stations, working as drovers, farmers, stockmen and domestics (New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1883, vol. 3: 908, 909). Historian Sue Johnston has calculated that

Aboriginal self-sufficiency was in fact high in the period around 1880, with 81 percent of the Aboriginal population self-sufficient from a mixture of wage or ration labour and more traditional subsistence foraging (Goodall 1996: 178).

Working on stations could be seen as an admittedly compromised opportunity for Aboriginal people to continue living communally on ancestral lands, maintaining their ceremonial life while operating within a European economic context.

During the period 1860-1895, Aboriginal communities were also demanding the reservation of land for their own community purposes, in direct response to the closer settlement movements described above. Heather Goodall outlines what she styles a 'land rights movement', whereby Aboriginal people successfully persuaded colonial governments to return to local communities portions of traditional lands as reserves. Goodall found that this was done in three ways: by directly lobbying government departments; by employing the assistance of a white intermediary to do this, or by simply taking control of land by squatting (Goodall 1996: 171-178).

Successes were achieved using each of these methods, and it will be seen below that such reserves were created on New England at Oban, Walcha and several other locations during this time.

Local Aboriginal people lived and worked on these reserves until their usage was revoked and they were sold off to white farmers and pastoralists from the years around World War One. By 1935, at least half of the Aboriginal reserve land in New South Wales had been so alienated. Aboriginal people were then crammed onto remaining reserves, mostly outside their home regions, with movement in and out strictly controlled by Aboriginal Protection Board managers (Read 1996: 204). It was only after this time that the social independence and relationship with land that local Aboriginal people had fought for one hundred years to retain, was very seriously threatened.

### **Section Five. Aboriginal Participation in the White Economy.**

As discussed in the previous section, European occupation obviously brought a whole new range of choices for New England Aboriginal people. Their actions after the mid-1830s were no longer based solely on customary paradigms, but were now also motivated by the constraints and enablements of the white presence. Decision-making in response to frequent physical, cultural and economic challenges, must have involved the formulation of strategies for integrating indigenous and white lifestyles, without the sacrifice of an essential indigeneity (Maisie Kelly 1995). For those people who chose to retain an indigenous perspective, 'Aboriginal' identity, as distinct from, but in addition to more circumscribed customary allegiances, marked a process which quickly moved local Aboriginal people along the path of cultural innovation. Extending Bob Reece's assertion that a major stimulus to the development of an

Aboriginal identity was 'a fairly uniform historical experience at the hands of Europeans' (Reece 1996: 29), Heather Goodall describes the nineteenth-century land rights movement as revealing an identity that encompassed the whole of the south-eastern seaboard:

Regardless of diverging state policies and differing levels of missionary activity, Aborigines from the 1860s to the 1890s, around this whole southeastern agricultural belt, can be seen to have generated parallel strategies, focussed on land, to lay their bases for the future (Goodall 1996: 197).

While the majority of New England Aboriginal people must have embraced this new identity, some individuals preferred to participate more completely in white society. One officially-recorded instance concerns Pali, an *Anaiwan* woman, who in 1847 chose to remain in a settled relationship with a white station hand, rather than return to her people to live (Armidale Bench Book 1844-1859, 18 March 1847). Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many New England families were formed from stable black/white relationships. These families generally lived as European, and saw no need to own to an Aboriginal community identity.<sup>3</sup>

The rugged country to the east of the Tableland was an important factor in the maintenance of identity for local Aboriginal people. If the grazier on one of the eastern stations happened to possess a sympathetic attitude — and it was seen above that quite a few did — then Aboriginal people could pursue a more-or-less customary lifestyle while camped there. The more that neighbouring landholders were also sympathetic, the more effectively could Aboriginal people preserve that mobility

---

<sup>3</sup> The author is personally acquainted with a number of such families. He is not at liberty to cite their names in support of points raised in his argument.

upon which their economy depended. In addition, there was much adjoining 'vacant' Crown land in the area, which local people could more freely utilise for hunting and ceremonial purposes (George Cohen 1980).

Some evidence exists to support the idea introduced earlier that, after the period of first conflict, some agreement obtained between pastoralists and Aboriginal people concerning customary access to leaseholds. Gardner expressly maintained that Aboriginal people kept their customs while living on stations in New England (Gardner 1846: n.p.), and Norton stated that:

When I first went to New England...the blacks who remained went to  
and from station to station without let or hindrance (Norton 1903: 81).

A graphic instance of such customary usage involved the periodic burning-off of country as a necessary strategy in the indigenous maintenance of economic resources.

M.H. Marsh wrote in 1851 that:

The great summer heat is sometimes increased by the burning  
grass, which is generally lighted by the aborigines carrying  
fire about with them...They have a great effect on the  
character of the country, as they burn many of the young trees,  
and thus prevent the forest from being too thick. All the  
country, except when heavily stocked with sheep, is sure to be  
burnt at least every two or three years (Marsh 1851, quoted in  
Gardiner 1998: 4).

It is revealing that Marsh includes the rider about sheep. This could indicate that either some special agreement obtained not to burn these areas, that Aboriginal people no longer lived in them, or that the sheep country would just not burn. Most

importantly, it shows that for the moment at least, the two economic systems could coexist.

As argued above, New England Aboriginal 'tribal' groupings may have remained more-or-less discrete, even into the 1860s. This seems to have been the opinion of George Macdonald (1845), whose proposition is supported by a newspaper report of an armed Aboriginal contingent, perhaps fifty strong, passing northwards through Armidale, towards Oban, for ceremonial purposes (*Armidale Express* 1-4-1863). Sometime after this, camps coalesced into larger collectives on suitable properties, particularly at Wollomombi and Hillgrove east of Armidale, at Oban east of Guyra, further south around Walcha, at Wilson's Downfall in the region's north, and in various western locations.

There may well have been indigenous political reasons for this process of coalition, similar to those that saw the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan Aboriginal peoples 'uniting in peace' under the leadership of a significant figure, named by local Europeans Cobborn Jacky (Craze 1977: 18, 19). Whatever the case, the new grouping at Oban consisted of chiefly *Baanbai* and some *Anaiwan* people (Macpherson 1902; Mathews 1902), while that stationed around Walcha comprised chiefly *Anaiwan* people (Mathews n.d.). Individuals of mixed-parentage were included in these groups, and there is every reason to believe that they participated fully in cultural activities (McGregor 1998: 203; Laves 1929; Maisie Kelly 1995). These settlements were proclaimed as reserves at the end of the nineteenth century, and dwellings were erected at the expense of the Aboriginal Protection Board (McGuigan n.d.: 5, 39; *Glen Innes Examiner* 11-7-1893; Cohen & Somerville 1990: 45). McGuigan writes that reserves were generally made of areas that had already been permanently occupied,



and were in many cases the traditionally-owned lands of at least some of the people living there (McGuigan n.d.: 3).

While any white occupation of Aboriginal lands must of course have exercised a considerable constraint on Aboriginal society, at the same time it offered opportunities for some development of the indigenous economy, mainly through paid employment. The earliest recorded instance of New England Aboriginal people labouring for whites occurred at Surveyor's Creek station, where the overseer states in a journal entry for May 19th. 1842:

I have been busy all week again at the potatoes, had lots of blacks assisting in digging with their yam sticks and the gins picking up  
(Surveyor's Creek 1842: 186).

From that same year, successive Crown Lands Commissioners' reports detail increasing Aboriginal participation in the pastoral economy, people working for the new landholders as stockmen, shepherds, grooms and domestic servants (Macdonald 1842, 1845; Massie 1851; Fellowes 1852, all quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 104-109). Remuneration for this work at first comprised clothing and food rations, but reasonable money wages were being offered by at least 1851. These were paid at from half to three-quarters the 'inflated' rate commanded by Europeans (Gardner 1854, quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 154-156), but seem to have been calculated on the basis that Aboriginal employees would 'move with the tribe' when circumstances demanded it — comprising, in effect, a part-time emolument. Commissioner Massie summarised the situation at the end of 1851 as follows:

At the same time I have the satisfaction of observing that no outrage whatever has been committed by the Natives upon any of the White population, in many cases their services have been in considerable

repute as Shepherds, Grooms, and even as House Servants, Services which from the high price of White labor (*sic*) from the recent discovery of gold, have been extremely valuable to the Settlers, in some cases they have been receiving wages at the rate of £20.0.0. per Annum, and in all cases coming under my own personal knowledge. I can speak confidently of the good conduct and orderly habits of the Black Servant, and of the good faith and the kind conduct of the White Master, and no case has come before me in which the Aboriginal has not been fairly and faithfully rewarded, at the same time this is a source of labor in which no confidence can be placed as from the roving disposition of the Aborigines of this Colony...they can never be induced to remain in one place for any time, locomotion seems essential to their very existence (Massie 1851, 'Commissioner's Report on New England Aborigines', quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 107).

These sentiments are echoed by William Gardner (Gardner 1854), and by Massie's successor, H.B. Fellowes, both of whom detail peaceful social relations, and the diversification of Aboriginal economic participation in the region. Both also emphasise that, in the process, Aboriginal people consistently refused to forego their customary right to mobility, pursuing in the process traditional hunting, food-collecting and ceremonial activities.

After 1851, the discovery of gold on New England not only provided further openings for Aboriginal employees on pastoral runs deserted by white station-hands, shepherds and watchmen, but Aboriginal workers soon came to be employed on the gold-fields themselves. Fellowes reported that:

Several have been employed at various times at the Rocky River Gold Fields in the district, by the Miners engaged there, and their families to fetch wood and water, and it is a great pleasure to me to state that everywhere, whether on the Runs, in the Stable Yard, or the gold fields, the best of feeling seems to prevail between the Blacks and their white associates (Fellowes 1854, 'Commissioner's Report on New England Aborigines', quoted in Gilbert & Elphick 1977: 109).

This indigenous connection with mining prevailed for many years, the Aboriginal residents of Oban going on to mine surface gold and tin on their own account until the break-up of the community there sometime in the 1920s (Macpherson 1904: 96; Bill Morris 1980; Doug Irving 1995). Two of the 'kings' of the Oban district, Jack Nelson and King Robert, are specifically mentioned as having been serious, if not fully-professional mineral prospectors (Jim Lowe 1983: TRC 2720/39/1; Macpherson 1904: 96; Anonymous 1962: 4). The following observation by a special correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* describes the beginnings of this involvement in 1857:

The day before my arrival (at Oban), a large tribe of blacks, numbering about 70 or 80, had camped on the creek. They were making themselves very useful to the diggers, the men in cutting wood, stripping bark, or doing some of the lighter work of the mines, and the women in cooking, washing &c...When travelling in the tribe, however, very little beyond light work can be got out of them, as they are off the moment the tribe is on the move (*Sydney Morning Herald* 11-5-1857).

Throughout all these descriptions runs the clear theme that Aboriginal people successfully integrated two economic approaches. That this ability continued well into

the twentieth century is shown further below and in chapter six. Any suggestion of economic incompatibility should be able to confidently dismiss the convincing evidence that the local pastoral enterprise needed very much, not only the labour of Aboriginal people, but also their local knowledge and technical expertise. Symbolically, this might be perceived most clearly in the ethos of the white 'bushman', which identified directly with an indigenous influence (see Tonkin and Landon 1999: 170ff). More prosaically, there are several recorded instances of the significant flow of Aboriginal know-how to the newly-established European society on New England. Not only were grasslands and water-sources identified for pioneering graziers (Gilbert 1990), but knowledge of a more technical nature was also freely shared. The overseer of Surveyors Creek station records his regular practice of burning-off to make green pick for lambing ewes in late September/early October 1839-45. Frankland writes that graziers had been doing this long before 1845 all over New South Wales, and moreover, that they had learned the practice from Aboriginal example.

In New England, as elsewhere in Australia, many of the earliest European dwellings were constructed entirely — even to the chimneys — of sheets of bark. The knowledge that enabled whites to use this material efficiently was undoubtedly provided originally by Aboriginal people. A story of symbolic significance is told in the local Aboriginal community that King Bobby of the *Baanbai* cut the first sheet of bark in the erection of Richardson's Store (established in Armidale *circa* 1842), and carried it 'on his back' to the building site (Reuben Kelly 1995: pers. comm.). Again, I have shown elsewhere that the European strategy of using bush yards in the 'driving' of kangaroos, owes its technical origins to local indigenous practices (McDonald 1994a). All this argues against there being any terminal incompatibility between the

two lifestyles, at least in New England, and shows that some opportunity and desire existed for the old and new inhabitants to influence each other culturally.

The generally independent economic relationship between white and black continued on New England into the 1930s at least, and in some cases significantly later (Maisie Kelly 1994, Bill Cohen 1988, Wright 1985; Cecil Briggs 1995). This relationship was always mediated by the need for Aboriginal people to travel when necessary, and to gain access to bush places. Economic independence was thus retained by Aboriginal people to a greater degree than was possible for many white rural labourers (Marshall & McDonald 1996). Contract bush work was a favoured niche filled by many Aboriginal families. It was certainly the conscious choice of Frank Archibald, who was proud of the fact that, up until the Second World War, he and his family had never lived on a reserve or mission, had always been financially independent, and 'was always free to come and go' (Maisie Kelly 1995).

The same could be said of many New England Aboriginal people, as up until the 1930s, managed reserves or missions seem to have been entirely absent from the region. But such independence did not come without the intermittent need to resist. In some instances, dramatic resistance strategies were initiated in response to sudden European threats to freedom, particularly relating to the removal of children by white authorities (Hazel Vale 1995). More generally, the insistence on travelling itself can be seen in terms of resistance to white pressures (Maisie Kelly 1995; Cecil Briggs 1995), and as shown earlier in this chapter, this practice has persisted from first contact to the present. In non-contract employment situations, such as that of the Cohen family of Dyamberin, overt resistance did not seem to have been necessary, as their employers allowed the family whatever freedom was necessary to conduct cultural business (Cohen 1988; Wright 1985).

This theme of independence also characterises the experience of several Aboriginal families, either from New England or with strong local connections, who farmed land on their own account. The 1883 Police Census mentions that Aboriginal people in the Bundarra district worked as drovers and farmers (New South Wales Legislative Assembly 1883, vol. 3: 908, 909). The Cohen, Naylor, Kelly, Wright and Moran families farmed successfully in various locations, and in all cases were said to have combined this economic activity with the maintenance of many aspects of a customary lifestyle, including the holding of ceremonies (Bill Cohen 1988; De Silva 1994; Maisie Kelly 1996). Annie Kelly (Wright) here provides some details of her uncle Henry's selection in southern New England:

Uncle 'enry 'ad a place, 'e bought a place, a selection, and 'e built a old gunya place with stringy bark and boards that 'e cut. He took granny and grandfather down there when 'e finished at the station and 'e worked down there for Laurie, see, grandfather did. And they used 'is property for killin' kangaroos and possums and things like that (Cohen & Somerville 1990: 72).

Some of these families still own and farm their land, while in other cases, leaseholds have been resumed for alternative purposes (Maisie Kelly 1996). The present owner of one large New England pastoral holding is said to be Aboriginal, and related to a long-established local grazing family (Ray Cooper 1997).

Using their example to emphasise the continued compatibility of the two economic systems, Heather Goodall says that:

The Koori farmers were involved in some of the most recent ceremonial activity in the state, continuing modified initiation ceremonies in this area until at least the mid-1940s. During the earlier

years of the twentieth century, some of the Kooris with the longest experience of secure tenure over and independent cultivation of reserves were also those with a most detailed knowledge of traditional philosophy...It might be argued that the success of their land strategy was one factor which had given these communities the security to create a lifestyle which 'made sense' in their own terms, developed from their own traditions as well as from what they found useful in European material and cultural life (Goodall 1996: 192).

Chris Sullivan has said precisely the same thing in regard to Aboriginal musicians playing European instruments — that often it was the most senior people who adopted the musical innovation most enthusiastically (Sullivan 1988: 65; also see chapter five). These examples suggest that, if cultural knowledge is any indicator of indigeneity, then there was no especial risk to an Aboriginal identity in people embracing aspects of the European lifestyle.

As outlined in the previous section, much local Aboriginal economic and social independence was terminated in the 1930s, when reserve lands in New South Wales were revoked and sold-off to white farmers and other interests such as golf course developers (Goodall 1996: 198; Maisie Kelly 1996). It seems that the Aboriginal Protection and Welfare Boards became quite aggressive at this time, and people who had managed to retain a dignified independence were finally forced to surrender it up. Frank Archibald was told by the Board's officers that his choices henceforth comprised joining his many children on the newly-created Burnt Bridge Mission near Kempsey, or to continuing enjoying his own freedom without them (Grace Gordon 1995). Darryl Tonkin traces a parallel process operating in Gippsland,

where the hostile policies of Victorian welfare agencies terminated what had been an independent Aboriginal lifestyle right up to the early 1960s.

## **Section Six. Conclusion.**

The main purpose of the foregoing sketch has been to argue the varied nature of the New England contact experience from European evidence, and to introduce the view that there was nothing inevitable or systematic about the course black/white relations would take here after 1832. That course ultimately depended on attitude, opportunity and other purely historical factors, rather than on any economic, or social determining forces. In the absence of missions and managed reserves on New England, a positive relationship between Aboriginal people and certain sections of the local white population continued more-or-less uninterrupted from the mid-1840s until the Second World War. In this, the New England experience is seen to have been different to that of the regions both to its west and east, where hostile relations seem to have been a great deal more protracted.

The chapter also elicited themes of cultural continuity, the successful integration of European and Aboriginal economy and lifestyles, social invisibility and political resistance, all of which have relevance to the following discussion concerning musical exchange between Europeans and Aboriginal people. As has been suggested, a dynamic musical relationship was rendered at least possible by the maintenance of relatively peaceful relations, and by the readiness of local Aboriginal people to modify cultural practices and attitudes while maintaining a discrete identity. It will be shown in succeeding chapters that this flexibility further allowed the continued observance of important cultural 'essences', subverting the view that European systems ultimately replaced the indigenous. Chapter four will concentrate



on the New England musical evidence for contact processes, which reveals the immense creativity of local Aboriginal people in meeting the challenge of European invasion. Victimisation was resisted strongly in this region, and the local nineteenth-century experience certainly accords with Goodall's generalisation that

far from being a period of Aboriginal inaction and loss of agency, it was a time when Aborigines were indeed making their own history (Goodall 1996: 197).

## Chapter Four. Indigenous Songs From New England New South Wales.

### Section One. Introduction.

This chapter will examine all that has come to light so far of nineteenth-century New England Aboriginal musical compositions. Its purpose is to narrow the focus of chapter two by discussing, in depth, the texts and contexts of nine local songs in order to plumb their possible meanings, both as musical expressions, and as evidence for cultural relations generally. That the surviving indigenous musical corpus for New England is so slight, is due to the almost total lack of direct interest of those few ethnological researchers who have worked in the district. While only six lingo songs appear to have been collected in the field — all since 1964 — details of a further three have been distilled from descriptions given by nineteenth-century European diarists.<sup>4</sup>

Textual discussion of these songs will be arranged in four parts, according to their subject matter. No chronological significance is attached to their order of examination, nor is it considered that musical stylistic analysis would here reveal a nexus between chronology and the extent of European influence. As will be argued below, the most extensively syncretic of these local indigenous productions was composed very soon after whites invaded the Tablelands. Its creation pre-dated by forty years little-modified songs from the same district like *Wanggala-ji* and *Nga:mi*. While there may be some interest in attempting to trace European (or, for that matter, Chinese) melodic or rhythmic influence on local indigenous compositional

---

<sup>4</sup> Amongst the extensive *Bandjalang* repertoire recorded from the singing of Dick Donnelly of Woodenbong, two songs occur that Mr. Donnelly stated were from the *Gunggari* language area, proposed by Margaret Gummow to be have lain within the New England region (Gummow 1985: n.p.). This surmise appears to be incorrect, as a language by that name was spoken in the Warrego district of central-western Queensland, and no record of *Gunggari* occurs in any New England sources.

techniques, almost no confident conclusions could be made because of the insuperable methodological difficulties involved. These will be explained in depth in chapter five. Because the focus of greatest significance is located in the texts of these songs, and as the problem of Eurocentric representation is hopelessly entangled with the melodic transcription of indigenous material, no such attempt will be made here.

Section two below, deals with material that may have a pre-contact provenance. Section three concerns songs that record indigenous perceptions or reactions to European innovations. Direct Aboriginal responses to white frontier aggression comprise the focus of section four, while the last part examines two songs that reveal early indigenous cosmological reactions to the advent of European beings themselves. The chapter, concluded by section six, can be further seen to fall into two larger unequal divisions, dictated chiefly by the amount of evidence supporting the discussion of the last two songs. Because these deal with a particularly important cosmological development, their exegesis is necessarily much longer than that of all the previously-discussed songs taken together. Reference will be made throughout this examination to the findings of previous chapters. As certain insights unfold here, they will be applied back to the history of local contact relations presented in chapter three, and to the dynamism of Aboriginal musical processes discussed in chapter two.

### **Section Two. Pre-contact Songs.**

The most important source for New England sung material is Frank Archibald, who was a member of the *Baanbai* language group of Oban. A more comprehensive biography of this man and his family will be set out in chapter six. During the latter part of his life, Frank's singing was recorded by several scholars, chiefly Bill Hoddinott of the University of New England (Archibald 1964), and John Gordon, a

grantee of the then Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (Gordon 1968a). Frank's contribution totalled five lingo songs, which regrettably represents over half the surviving New England corpus. Presumably owing to the salvage nature of the research projects in which Frank was involved, no material of a significantly syncretic nature was recorded, nor was his extensive repertoire of English-language folk songs. This section will examine two of Frank's songs that may well pre-date the arrival of Europeans to the area. This chronology is by no means certain however, and is a presumption based solely on their textual content.

All five of Frank Archibald's songs have been provisionally transcribed and translated from *Gumbaynggirr*, *Baanbai* and *Gattang* by the late Bill Hoddinott of Armidale. The first of these to be discussed is the *Hill Song*, so-called by the translator.

*Ngaia (jara) ngaia nga bula bula mi*

*Bula bula mi jarang*

*Waru njeigi jarang ngaia*

'I am sneaking softly, sneaking while looking about and climbing the mountain. Someone nearly saw me'.

The meaning of this text is not clear, but may possibly relate to the actions of a Dreaming Ancestor. If so, it certainly accords with types for central Australian song verses, containing as it does the elements of a protagonist, a landscape-feature, and a travelling action. On the other hand, the verse could be linked to *Bulagiri*, analysed in section three. It shares the mood of that song, which depicts local people attempting to observe white intruders without themselves being seen.

The second of Frank Archibald's pre-contact pieces is a corroboree song, known by the singer as *Shivery Legs*. The song text describes the movements of the

dance it accompanies, taking the form of instructions. This concept has an analogue in the syncretic *Square Dance Song* discussed in chapter five.

*Ai jε ngalba*

*Ai jε banji banji ba:*

*Ngambala mila ngambala ngaia*

*Jε djalaba beyua banji ngaia*

*Ai jilari jε*

*Jalba jalbanadi*

Hoddinott's translation runs thus: 'Jump about shaking your body and legs. Be quick in the legs, and repeatedly slap the arms and legs together' (Hoddinott n.d.: n.p.).

What Frank Archibald and Leonard de Silva term *Shivery Legs*, Gummow would describe as a 'shake-a-leg' song, a genre which has been documented for most of the east coast of Australia. Gummow considers that the dances these songs accompanied were performed by only a few people at any one time, in contrast to more extensive corroboree participation. It may have been the case that, in their cultural context, the songs were performed in multiple sections, the change from one part to the next flagged by the singer through the use of certain vocal sounds such as 'brrr' (Gummow 1992: 93).

### **Section Three. Songs of Innovation.**

The three songs discussed in this section, all from the repertoire of Frank Archibald, deal with Aboriginal perceptions of European innovations. It appears that the three date from about the same time, which happens to roughly coincide with Frank Archibald's birth in the mid-1880s. It is interesting in this context that this was precisely that period, as seen in the previous chapter, when local white commentators

were most vocal in affirming the degeneracy of local Aboriginal society. Taken together with the lively picture drawn there of the Oban group's 1888 corroboree, the fact that more than half of Frank Archibald's recorded songs were composed at this time, suggests that it was an era still rich in the expression of cultural indigeneity.

The first song to be examined is *Wanggala-ji*, composed by Frank's grandfather King Robert to commemorate the arrival of the railway to Armidale in 1883. Frank told researcher John Gordon that his grandfather was an official guest at the ceremony welcoming the arrival of the train. For the occasion, he and his wife Emily were apparently positioned atop an arch, erected over the line at the newly-built Armidale Railway station. King Robert then composed the song in order to describe the locomotive to his people upon his return to Oban (Frank Archibald 1968). In the following transcription, English-derived words are highlighted in boldface type:

*Wanggala-ji wanggala **guman gou***

*Ngaridjin bubiljang*

*Mial guman guman gou.*

*Wanggala-ji wanggala guman gou*

***Bel, bel, bel** budjaner*

*Mial guman guman gou.*

*Wanggala-ji wanggala guman gou*

*Ngaridjin bubiljang*

*Mial guman guman gou.*

'Oh! The big wheel went round and the train went out. The engine puffed. The boy rang the bell and the train left (with the government men) with a great deal of noise'

(Hoddinott n.d.: n.p.). As a corroboree, there are actions associated with the song that describe the engine's movement (Archibald Family 1995). Furthermore, according to Hoddinott, many of the words used in the song (e.g. *wanggala-ji*, *bubiljang*), are onomatopoeic (Hoddinott n.d.: n.p.). It can thus be seen that the song's communicative potential operates on a number of levels. Indeed, the composition itself is primarily a sound-picture, the perception of which quality is heightened if compared with the following visually-oriented South Australian railway song:

In his translation of "The Railway Train", Taplin (1873: 39) captures the Ngarrindjeri image of this new technology. The smoke "looks like frost,/ It runs like running water,/ It blows like a spouting whale." (Bell 1998: 179).

The next song, *Nga:mi*, was also composed by a senior resident of Oban, and concerns a meeting he had in Armidale with Salvation Army evangelists in about 1885 (Frank Archibald 1968). Again the song is designed to tell a story, and again the textual analysis is provided by Hoddinott, assisted by Frank Archibald's contextualisation:

*Ngaia nga nga:mi*

*Ngaia nga nga:mi*

*Wa:ru wai bungwiara*

*Baranjawung wangandi nga:mi*

*Ngaia nga nga:mi.*

*Ngaia nga nga:mi*

*Ngaia nga nga:mi*

*Wa:ru wai bungwiara*

*Patanjawang wangandi nga:mi*

*Ngaia nga nga:mi*

A rough *précis* of the song's story, drawn from Hoddinott's notes, runs as follows: the old man tells of his experience after being with the people from the Salvation Army (*nga:mi*). First he falls down as though dead, then ascends to heaven (*waru wai* – 'up to the very highest summit'), and finally returns to his home (Hoddinott n.d.: n.p.). Although no such information accompanied the recording of the piece, it would be unusual if actions were not composed along with the text and melody of the song. This throws some light on the actions of the Aboriginal singers at Surveyor's Creek station described below, which might be interpreted as depicting the process of 'tumbling down'.

These two songs illustrate the important role of musical story-telling in Aboriginal society, an aspect further elaborated in chapter six. It was apparently considered by Aboriginal people that putting a story in musical form represented a more effective mode of communication than plain conversational methods (Maisie Kelly 1995). Gesture and tone may have been more easily brought to the aid of verbal description under such circumstances.

The third song considered in this section is composed in the *Gattang* language, whose distribution touched the Tableland at its very south-easternmost corner. Hoddinott calls this the *Drowned Girl* song:

*A: gerwan ngaia ngaia ge*

*[lɛm] bugar [aijɛn] bumbeli:ba*

*Gerwel-bi ang bɛ*

*Nga bugar ngalga bumeliba*

Hoddinott's notes include the following attempted translation:



'I have been hit. Look for me in the reeds in the deep water'. The translation is not only approximate, but also seems to be incomplete. Fortunately, Frank Archibald provided an extensive contextualisation for the song.

The story that Frank Archibald tells is this. A white man partnered an Aboriginal woman, and fathered a girl child with her. This girl was very dark, which was a source of constant shame and annoyance to the man. Finally he decided to kill the girl, so he hit her on the head and threw her into the river where she drowned. The father then fled. No-one else in the group knew what had happened to this pair until one night, an old man in the tribe had a dream in which the young girl sang the song to him — crying and telling him that she had been hit, and to look for her in amongst the deep-water reeds in the river. The old man sang the song that he had dream-composed to his people the next morning. A search was carried out and the girl's body was found in the place she had described. The men from the tribe then followed the killer's tracks from the river to the margins of Murphy's Scrub near Nowendoc on New England. After telling their story to the local police, the men were promised that they could treat the murderer according to customary law, without fear of European consequences. When the tribesmen finally caught up with the fugitive, they accordingly killed him and 'chopped him up on a log' (Archibald 1968, Maisie Kelly 1994). Frank Archibald's daughters still perform the song and its associated dance, which comprises co-ordinated searching movements, conducted in a swaying fashion.

There are a number of interesting points that emerge from this tale. One is that, taken by itself, the song would tell very little of its own story, consisting as it does of cryptic instructions given by the drowned girl. This is a particularly good example of the type of song, surveyed in chapter two, whose literal meaning is obscured by the very abbreviation of its expression. It can be easily imagined that

over time or distance, the less formally-expressed contexts necessary for the full understanding of a song may be lost. *The Drowned Girl* also throws some light on the discussion of chapter one, regarding the killing of 'half-caste' children. It is obvious that the child in this case was considered valuable to her relations, and furthermore, that her killing offended customary law. Some direct evidence is therefore provided to counter the Doomed Race Theory's assertion that New England Aboriginal people killed the half-caste children born into their groups.

#### **Section Four. Songs of Frontier Contact.**

The next four songs analysed below all relate to very early contact on New England, and demonstrate that indigenous responses varied considerably. The first two describe potentially hostile confrontations, while the latter pair introduces evidence of an indigenous cosmological interpretation of the European invasion.

*Bulagiri*, along with its contextual explanation, was recorded by the writer from Mrs. Hazel Vale of Armidale, the eldest daughter of Frank Archibald. While attending a family gathering held in February 1996, Mrs. Vale sang this song of her father's which seems to have had escaped previous documentation:

This is the story I was told...Our people used to live in this little valley  
you know, and on each side the scrub was, and they used to have the  
boys or girls there lookin' out for the...white fellers comin' with their  
guns. And if they'd see them they'd cooe out...'Ai! Yaaban! Yirrali!'  
That means 'white man'. And they'd look. 'Yir!' they'd say, tell 'em to  
run. They'd start runnin' with their spears and that and plant:

*Bulagiri wambul-wambul double-barrel li gu djanaa-ya*

*Bulagiri wambul-wambul double-barrel li gu djanaa-ya.*

That means the white men comin' with their guns you know, and tellin' them, our people, to plant and get away from them. *Yir*, that means 'go, you wait for them'. (McDonald 1996, uncatalogued field tape in the author's collection).

The song is typical of south-eastern corroboree verses, both structurally and in offering resistance to easy translation. Not only does the allusive nature of Aboriginal song-texts usually demand an intimate knowledge of background cultural material (Donaldson 1984a:240), the language of this one is imperfectly understood. It is composed in the *Baanbai* dialect, and its translation has required educated assumptions to be made from knowledge of the related *Gumbaynggirr* language. This work was kindly carried out by members of *Muurbay* Language Centre Sherwood, and with their help, I suggest the following rough meaning for the verse: 'Go and tell that there are two white men coming with guns, take fright and go'.

Dating the song has been equally difficult, but it is quite likely that the events described took place between the years 1839 and 1845. The most significant altercation in *Baanbai* territory seems to have been the 1841 'scrimmage' reported by Eldershaw (Eldershaw 1854: 82-105), although other minor episodes did occur on the tribe's eastern borders a little later (*Armidale Bench Book 1844-1859*, n.p.). The song's internal evidence renders little assistance to precise dating, as double-barrelled guns are expressly documented as accompanying the first Europeans to New England in the mid-1830s (Gardner 1846: n.p.).

The Aboriginal response outlined in the verse is patently one of cautious fear born of the knowledge of guns — an entirely rational appreciation of the power of European technology. It certainly does not portray some mystical awe of the invader, as Eldershaw and Sempill might have it. While the compound adjective *wambul-*

*wambul* would normally indicate great fear in *Gumbaynggirr*, I do not feel the possibility that the song describes an ambush should be entirely ruled out, especially as Mrs. Vale's contextualisation introduces the idea of hiding in wait for the white men. *Wambul-wambul* might then bear the nuanced meaning of something like 'great caution'. Whatever the case, it appears that the song suggests rational and wary observation and appreciation of European behaviour.

Apart from the *Baanbai* and *Gattang* songs of Frank Archibald examined above, no lingo song-texts have been found relating to the musical cultures of other Tableland groups — the *Anaiwan* and associated mobs, or *Yugambal*, *Ngarbal*, and *Marbal* people. But that 'racial' conflict *was* documented in song elsewhere on the Tablelands is attested by Albert Norton, a grazier who spent time with Aboriginal people in the Walcha district between 1852 and 1858, and who wrote of a period of conflict which he said had well-passed by the time he arrived on New England:

Some of their corroborees are both amusing and clever. On one occasion some settlers with whom I was acquainted had had rations stolen from shepherds' huts. This, of course, was attributed to the blacks, who, it was decided, must be 'dispersed.' Accordingly, seven or eight angry men started off with their carbines and ammunition in time to reach the blacks' camp in the early morning; one was left behind a hill in charge of the horses, while the rest moved forward to the scene of battle! They had expected to find a few blacks, but about two hundred were in the camp, and they did not immediately run for their lives. Instead of doing this, they rapidly advanced towards the aggressors, who, with nervous fingers, pulled their triggers, endangering their own lives as much as those of the enemy. The

cartridges were soon exhausted, and it was the whites who ran for their lives. The blacks might have killed them if they had really wished to do so, but there were no casualties on either side. They arrived in a breathless condition at the spot where the horses had been left, and hastily rode away. 'The incident then closed'...It became a favourite corroboree with the blacks, and was 'staged' for the benefit of the principal white performers! (Norton 1907: 101).

The two pieces of musical evidence presented so far are qualitatively different — one is a verse of a corroboree song, the other a description of the circumstances leading to the creation and performance of a corroboree cycle. But it is also clear that they can be regarded as reducible to similar phenomena for the purposes of historical interpretation. As outlined in chapter two, corroborees in south-eastern Australia were often of a programmatic nature, organised into a series of discrete sections or 'acts' that were combined to portray a particular event or process. The Archibald song probably represents one such section, a link suggested by its typical musical structure (Jones 1965: 285ff), and by its possible relationship to *Hill Song*, examined in section one. But even granting structural similarity between the two pieces, one compelling difference remains. This concerns the apparent mood of the corroborees. Both the *Baanbai* song and its contextualisation indicate an air of caution and hostility (Steve Morelli 1995: pers. comm.), suggesting that these people had previous experience or knowledge of armed conflict with whites. A genuine air of Aboriginal hostility is missing from Norton's account, however. This seems odd, as it is hard to imagine either that those Aboriginal people felt entirely confident in the face of concerted white action, or that they had not yet experienced serious conflict. It is also strange that the Europeans in this case did not utilise the strategic advantage of being mounted

on horseback — an advantage for which Aboriginal people freely admitted they had no answer in conflict on the north-west slopes (New South Wales Legislative Council 1839b: 253). Perhaps the Walcha Europeans really wished only to frighten or disperse the blacks, and Norton's indication that this term was used euphemistically may be wrong. In any event, Norton clearly portrays the Aboriginal people exhibiting little fear, and showing no desire to press home a tactical advantage, nor to exact immediate revenge.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Gummow records a strikingly similar episode, unfortunately with tragic consequences. In that instance, Aboriginal warriors placed faith in songs to protect them:

Robinson has...described the use of song in a massacre in about 1835 when Aboriginal people were shot by Ogilvie, who had started a grazing station at Baryulgil. Some of his sheep were killed and he blamed the Aboriginal people instead of the dingoes. Robinson states:

He got aboriginal and white stockmen from Grafton and they gathered to attack the tribe at Tabulam.

Through the night, they prepared to surround the camp of the Aborigines and to attack at dawn to get everybody unawares.

So, when the Aborigines at Tabulam knew that they were going to be attacked, they were warned by their divine powers, they also prepared...

Just at dawn the attackers had the camp surrounded. The Tabulam men were painted white, waiting for the attack. They were singing their sacred songs in order to paralyse the gun-power.

At day-break the attackers sang out to the camp, 'Hoy! Hoy!' The white-painted Aborigines came out of the camp and the attackers had them surrounded with their guns...(quoted in Gummow 1992: 139).

It is interesting to note that precisely the same defensive action in 'singing the guns' was taken by central Australian *Warlpiri* people who were attacked by white aggressors in the first decades of the

But some revenge was achieved. As Norton intimates, one effect of the corroboree he describes was that it thoroughly lampooned the defeated whites. The performance of satirical songs has been recorded as an important feature of local Aboriginal music-making. Radcliffe-Brown noted the occurrence of inter-tribal 'singing competitions' on New England, where 'each side prepares a song and sings against the other' (Radcliffe-Brown 1929a, book 6: 38). It is unlikely that his informant was describing there a simple match of compositional or performance skills, for, as F.J.E. Bootle observed from his experience of *Gamilraay* society in the Moree district:

they also make songs up, one tribe against another; but this often leads to fighting...The tribes by making songs about one another have great fun, but they often annoy the tribesmen, when a challenge is sent to fight ( Bootle 1899: 5).

By composing their corroboree and staging it 'for the benefit of the principal white performers', Norton's Aboriginal people may well have been wielding a time-honoured weapon of derision, and would thereby have gained some satisfaction at the expense of the European transgressors. This not only suggests forceful social action under the circumstances, but also that these people were reacting to the local whites as confidently as they would another Aboriginal group. The fact that Norton indicates later relations to have been friendly enough for the shared performance of the corroboree is also instructive, in that it comprised a type of public 'discussion' which could elsewhere have easily served as an incitement to further violence. It will be seen below that corroborees were treated as vehicles for the creation and maintenance of

---

twentieth century. In those instances, the singing was seen to have been successful (Vaeazon-Morel 1998: 53, 54).

positive relations between groups. This particular dance may have actually brought about an improvement in the relationship between white and black people on southern New England, introducing the idea that Aboriginal musical performance could actually influence contact relations.

Contemporary observers of the Australian frontier typically portrayed Aboriginal people as awe-struck and tractable once they had experienced hostility from whites. Eldershaw clearly overstates the case when he characterises his vanquished opponents as

imbued with a mysterious and superstitious fear of the stupendous power of the white man (Eldershaw 1854: 74),

but it is no doubt true that New England Aboriginal resistance during the 1840s often took alternative forms to belligerent adversarial action (Miller 1985 emphasises the continuing historical importance of the concept of passive resistance in New England Aboriginal society). It is argued from the example of the foregoing songs and other evidence, that *Guris* were eminently capable of employing alternative relational strategies, drawing to varying degrees on a customary repertoire that is barely visible in the historical record. That described by Norton seems to be both a creative and an eminently judicious instance, in that Aboriginal satisfaction was gained without serious risk of an escalation of inter-group violence.

### **Section Five. Jump Up Whitefeller.**

Creative response can be seen to also characterise the following two items under discussion. The first concerns a song performed at a Christmas gathering held on Surveyor's Creek, described in some detail by the station overseer:



Saturday 24th. December 1842. My birthday...after dinner my health was drunk by them all &...we had some famous songs & amused ourselves very much. A number of blacks were invited into the room...to drink my health – they sang us some of their war songs, one was a very melancholic one, something about 2 picaninies having been killed by the whites & by & by they were to jump up 2 white fellows. The grog began to take effect & some of these, viz. the blacks, were actually falling down. There were about 20 of them singing, it had a strange effect. After tea we all played billiards & amused ourselves the best way we could, the stakes for the games was a fig of tobacco each (Surveyor's Creek 1839-1845, n.p.).

It is possible that it was the physical language associated with the song that induced the singers to fall down in this instance, rather than the effect of the grog. It was mentioned above that the song *Nga:mi* may well have involved actions depicting the falling down of the singer 'as though dead' (Hoddinott n.d.: n.p.), and it will be seen that the concept of 'jump up whitefeller' was often associated with that of 'tumbling down'. And just as with the last example, the singing of the song to the white people may have been designed to activate some immediate and dynamic communicative power, in the sense of 'singing' the hearers. Whatever the actual intention of the singers or the sensibilities of the audience, the song certainly had a 'strange effect' on the diarist. But what is perhaps most interesting about this item is its contextualisation of a very early, bifurcated Aboriginal cosmological phenomenon regarding relations with white people. On the one hand, it was commonly held throughout the south-east that the invading whitefellers were the manifested spirits of Aboriginal ancestors. On

the other, Aboriginal people committed to a doctrine of reincarnation believed that they themselves would return bodily after death as whites.

Aspects of these twin beliefs are difficult to reconcile, and perhaps because of this, have so far received scant analytical notice from scholars. Tony Swain's historical/philosophical examination of post-contact south-east Australian Aboriginal religious movements may well be the only framework to which any evidence of these beliefs can be applied at present (Swain 1993). Swain's interpretation of whites-as-spirits is, if I understand him correctly, that far from being a mystification born of ignorance, the belief relates to an early and short-lived bid to place whites within an Aboriginal moral universe — to make some moral sense of European invasion (Swain 1993: 114-158). But once it was perceived that whites could not be so easily located, Swain continues, then a succession of strategies was developed – first 'millennial', then eschatological, until at last the 'cult' of the *bora* provided the necessary required balance in a reformed Aboriginal worldview:

there were two options explored by Aborigines of the south-east in response to the emergent unbalanced dualism created by the dislocation of the traditional locative cosmology. Both focused on the future. The 'millennial' vision of an end to Whites, while understandably having some attractions, was less prominent than the cults concerned to ward off the coming eschaton...the literature will not allow us to specify exactly how these two orientations were historically and sociologically related (Swain 1993: 143).

While there are historiographical impediments to accepting Swain's thesis *in toto*, it does offer opportunities for an increased understanding of early south-eastern Aboriginal cosmology that seem to be unavailable elsewhere in the literature.

Swain and others adduce enough evidence from all over the region to secure the argument that belief in whites-as-spirits was a widespread Aboriginal phenomenon. That the belief was expressed in music almost immediately upon initial contact — certainly suggesting the possibility of pre-invasion roots — is recorded by Goddard, who instances a *Gamilraay* song from the Namoi about the:

seeing of the first white men, who are taken for the spirits of their fathers haunting them...'The spirits of our fathers will not go. Why haunt us? Why frighten us? Go away into the bush. Go away into Bollerangawl. Remain in the clouds. Go away into Butherawawlay.

Leave us, good spirits. Go. Go.' (Goddard 1934: 235).

Lieutenant P.G. King provides evidence of an interesting link between this song from the 1830s, and reactions to first contact in the Sydney region forty years earlier. King described the actions of the imprisoned Bennelong, in a diary entry for April 17th 1790, as follows:

He sings, when asked, but in general his songs are in a mournful strain, and he keeps time by swinging his arms. Whenever asked to dance, he does it with great readiness; his motions at first are very slow, and are regulated by a dismal tune, which grows quicker as the dance advances, till at length he throws himself into the most violent posture, shaking his arms and striking the ground with great force, which gives him the appearance of madness. It is very probable that this part of the dance is used as a sort of defiance, as all the natives which were seen when we first arrived at Port Jackson always joined this sort of dance to their vociferations of *woroo, woroo...go away* (quoted in Egan 1999: 169).

I would agree with Swain that somewhere along the line, and I believe this to have occurred quite soon after initial contact, the perception of whitefellers must have shifted to regarding them as real people, although perhaps different to Aboriginals in more than just skin-colour. This seems to be the only logical way to read the incidental evidence Swain provides of Aboriginal people at first attempting to drive away the white spirits by ritual means (Swain 1993: 124, see also Carter 1992a: 166), and later expecting that they could be destroyed by disease or force of arms (Swain 1993: 134, 135). While the belief in whites-as-spirits must therefore have quickly evaporated, it is argued that the fellow-doctrine of white reincarnation endured for some longer time, its meanings modified to suit changing circumstances.

The two contact songs discussed immediately above show that, even very soon after invasion, their *Baanbai* and *Anaiwan* composers were confident they were dealing there with people and not ghosts. It is argued here that this third song again relates to whites as corporeal, and the belief it expresses that contemporary Aboriginal people would 'jump up whitefellers' after death, relates to a form of reincarnation only, and has little to do with the belief in whites-as-spirits.

As Swain nowhere specifically mentions 'jump up whitefeller', it is difficult to precisely locate the doctrine within any of the cosmological schemes he examines. Swain's interpretation of Aboriginal 'millenarianism' was that it expected the overthrow and eventual extinction of whites, together with their technology (Swain 1993: 135). On the other hand, his eschaton signified the end of Aboriginal existence in the world, which would thereafter be populated only by white spirits (Swain 1993: 137). Swain illustrates the latter with evidence of a post-contact *Yuwaaliyaay* eschatological vision, quoting from the writings of K.L. Parker:

the oldest wirreenuns could see in their sacred crystals...pictures of the future...they said as time went on the colours of the blacks, as seen in these magical stones, seemed to grow paler and paler, until at last only the white faces of the Wundah, or spirits of the dead, and white devils were seen, as if it should mean that some day no more blacks should be on this earth. The reason of this must surely be that the tribes fell away from the Boorah rites...Byamee...had said that...if they failed to keep up the Boorah rites as he had taught them, he would move and their end would come, and only the Wundah...be in their country (quoted in Swain 1993: 138).

Viewed in the pale light of eschatology, the Walcha Aboriginals described above may have been giving despairing voice to a vision similar to the *Yuwaaliyaay* one, but I am not drawn to this reading of the evidence, for two reasons. First, the expression used by Connell is 'whitefellow', which is slightly different in nuance to Parker's *Wundah* ('ghost' or 'spirit'). Second, the corroboree song and the incidental supporting evidence of Breton (1834: 199), give the impression that this reincarnation was considered inevitable, and not dependent on the maintenance of certain ritual obligations, as in Parker's version. Needless to say, local ceremonial life was still vital in 1842. Furthermore, the 'melancholic' mood ascribed to the song may relate solely to the audience's perception of its melody — something that does not translate accurately across broad cultural boundaries. 'Jump up whitefeller' also sits uneasily with Swain's millennial perspective, mainly because it clearly identifies the white with the black, rather than signifying any Aboriginal desire to eradicate the European presence.

Further evidence for understanding this indigenous reincarnation concept might be found in the testimony of two white frontier-dwellers, George Macdonald

and William Buckley. Macdonald, the first New England Crown Lands Commissioner, was himself considered by the members of one Aboriginal group to be the reincarnation of a certain deceased 'head-man' — both men apparently having shared a similar physical deformity — and was accordingly enthusiastically welcomed into their society:

I...had...been conversing for a considerable time in broken English with one of the natives, when he suddenly stopped short in his discourse...and ended by stating that I was one of the King's River tribe who had been killed sometime before, and that I had 'jumped up' again as a white man (quoted in Blomfield 1988: 57, 58),

This was recorded around Port Macquarie in the years 1828-1830, very soon after that district was occupied by Europeans, and it describes what the local diarist Anabella Innes styled an 'established superstition' (Blomfield 1988: 57).

William Buckley is held generally to have been the first white person seen by the *Wada-warrung-balug* people of southern Victoria, and perhaps the only one with whom they had any significant communication for decades thereafter. In canvassing the possible reasons for the *Wada-warrung-balug* joyously greeting him as a reincarnation of one of their own, Buckley wrote of his adoptive people that:

they have a belief, that when they die, they go to some place or other, and are there made white men, and that they then return to this world again for another existence (quoted in Sayers 1994: 40).

Assuming that these people had no previous experience of Europeans, this is persuasively suggestive of a genuine pre-contact currency for the phenomenon which, in Sayers' narrative,

became widely known as the doctrine of 'jump up whitefellow' (Sayers 1994: 41).

But perhaps by a process of post-contact transformation it gradually acquired new meaning. That John Helder Wedge, the surveyor who found Buckley and led him back to European society, considered 'jump up whitefeller' to have been a European invention (Sayers 1994: 41) is interesting in this regard. I believe he is correct only to the extent that the doctrine as it developed — invariably clothed as it was in the familiar pidjin — was a post-contact modification. Importantly, this reading allows acknowledgement of the indigeneity of the original equation.

Alternatively, and considering the well-attested efficiency of indigenous communications systems, the *Wada-warrung-balug* need not have had direct experience of Europeans to possess knowledge about them, and familiarity with a post-contact doctrine that had developed in earlier-settled districts, such as that around Sydney.

There are of course problems with viewing reincarnation in white form as a purely indigenous proposition. If Aboriginal people had long believed this, why was their country not already well-populated by whites at the time Europeans arrived? Why were white spirits sometimes welcomed, and at other times spurned?. Could it have been the number of white people first encountered, or their manner of travelling into Aboriginal country that made the difference? There may be a number of reasons advanced in explanation of all these questions, though perhaps one should rather agree with Roger Keesing that there is an obvious limit to the ability to translate another culture's cosmology in terms of our own logic, and leave it at that (Keesing 1981: 344). Nor is our own logic transparent in this regard. Strong intellectual commitment and observable fact bear a twisted relationship in Finney Eldershaw's

assertion that New England Aboriginal people were killing themselves off by virtue of their own customary social practices, irrespective of the European presence (Eldershaw 1854: 84-87). If the assault on population brought about by a low birth-rate, infanticide, internal warfare and unhygienic living conditions was really as severe as he pictures it, Australia would indeed have been found *terra nullius* by the British!

Notwithstanding the very real limits to our potential understanding of 'jump up whitefeller', the evidence of one more New England song will take the foregoing examination a little further. This comes from the Warren Fahey Folklore Collection, in the oral history archives of the National Library of Australia. The puzzling piece was given to Fahey as a written text by a Tenterfield correspondent, Ted Hoskin, together with the rider 'by W.J. Hoskin, Mingoola 1880', and the following footnote:

On the northern line about 490 miles from Sydney near Sunnyside, Tenterfield, is a place known as Bullock Dray, where it is said, may still be seen the remains of an old bullock dray supposed to have been abandoned by early explorers. There was neither road nor rail nor wire and people steered by the compass. The boss is supposed to have gone back for repairs to Sydney, leaving the stores and stock in charge of a few convicts and blacks.

Here is the text of the song:

Good-bye Master, givem you sack  
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke,  
Can't go no further, can't go back.  
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke.



Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke,  
Can't make it new one, no got it spoke,  
No got it chain – no got it yoke,  
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke,

Serve it right Master, can't take a joke!  
Eat plenty tucker, not work a stroke,  
All a-day sit down, fill pipe and smoke,  
Wheelbarrow broke, wheelbarrow broke.

Long way to Sydney, all a way bush,  
White men muck about, can't make em push,  
Bullock go bong-bong, jumbuck 'e croak,  
Yarraman tumble down – wheelbarrow broke.

Plenty lot tucker – we do 'em brown  
plenty more sugarbag – bush sit down.  
Boss 'e go walkabout, bigfeller smoke,  
Warrigal, warrigal – wheelbarrow broke!

All a-day sleep it, by-m-by tea  
Look out for big fella corroboree.  
Like it 'im koala, like it mopoke,  
Goo-goo goburra wheelbarrow broke!

White man 'e come along, blackfella die,  
Jump up whitefella too by-m-by.  
No more possum, good fella bloke,  
Goodbye sugarbag, wheelbarrow broke.

No more work it – good time 'e come,  
Plenty more bacca, plenty more rum,  
Ride about em touri – flash fella make,  
Goolwall Booligal – wheelbarrow broke (Fahey n.d).

The events detailed in the song and its setting may have occurred as early as 1842, and certainly accord with descriptions of the creation of that northern frontier given by early commentators (Dawson 1930: 45; Gardner 1855: 70, Allman 1940: 3). For reasons set out below, the song might be considered a montage of contributions by several hands — Aboriginal and European — over time, which could explain both the attribution of authorship to Hoskin, and its late date. The text does not appear to be a purely Aboriginal creation, although European activities certainly formed the basic content of some local songs, such as those analysed in earlier sections of this chapter. But in length and formal structure — especially in the use of rhyming quatrains — it is quite uncharacteristic of corroboree verses. Indeed, on first reading it is hard to accept there are *any* genuine indigenous stylistic features in its composition. However, the following eye-witness testimony from Sarah Musgrave of the Cowra district suggests that Aboriginal people were composing in multiple stanzaic form quite soon after initial contact:

At Coombing Station near Carcoar...lived the owner Mr. Thomas Icely,  
and it was his teams that brought the blankets which were a gift to the

blacks on the Queen's Birthday of each year. That year (1854), owing to the wet season, the blankets were late arriving and when the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee blacks applied for them they were told by Mr. Icely that there were none for distribution. On their way back the Murrumbidgee blacks called at 'The Bland' and told us about the blanket shortage. The blacks though disappointed, were good humoured about it, and made up a song at Mr. Icely's expense, and which they sang to us. The chorus ran:

'Wallen tumble down;

Wheel-barrow brokit;

Mr. Icely very poor;

Baal gibbit blanket' (Craze 1977: 20).

Both songs fairly bristle with examples of the ubiquitous Sydney pidgin, which should be viewed as much a European *patois*, often used by whites to parody Aboriginal expression, as itself an Aboriginal linguistic phenomenon. For this reason, to rely on its usage for evidence of indigenous meaning would be perilous, as David Collins intimated in his account of this pidgin's genesis:

Very little information that could be depended upon was obtained through this intercourse and it was observed that they conversed with us in a mutilated and incorrect language formed entirely on our imperfect knowledge and improper application of their words (quoted in Egan 1999: 287).

But there do seem to be truly autochthonous elements in the New England song's composition. Although certain of its lingo words may indeed be local, they are not of much help in isolating its origin, as those such as *booligal* and *gooburra* occur with

different meanings in many widespread languages. However, the noun *touri* (alternatively spelt *taurai*, *tarri* and *thary*) meaning 'country' is a local *Yugambal* lexeme (Curr 1883, vol. 3: 294-297; Wyndham 1889: 38), which both suggests Aboriginal authorship, at least in its essence, and identifies the song as indigenous to northern New England.

Of central concern to the argument at hand is the philosophy contained in the song's last two verses, and here the 'author' is likely to be, at the very least, rehearsing some characteristic Aboriginal expressions of the 1840s. Again we see the 'jump up whitefeller by and by' motif, voiced in a way identical to that of the Walcha song. This time it is stamped unambiguously as a post-contact phenomenon, and is couched in what could be seen as millennial terms — that the white man has failed in his pioneering endeavour, and good times will come for blackfellows to utilise the innovations the whites have brought in a new era of prosperity. While white economic elements such as horses and tobacco will to some extent replace the possum and sugarbag, certain traditional features are retained in the vision, the most important being the concept of *touri* itself. This effectively prevents the 'jump up' concept being read as a simple 'millennial' replacement of the black by the white (either as spirit or incarnation), and holds it firmly within a non-Christian locative cosmological tradition.

In discussing the 'cult' of the *bora*, which he considers to have superseded and to some extent reconciled the millennial and eschatological visions, Swain first recounts its spread throughout the south-eastern region. He then describes its typical physical ritual expression, and proceeds to deliberate upon its possible cosmological significance. The main physical features that set the *bora* apart from putative earlier initiatory rituals, Swain argues, are the inclusion of a central earth sculpture of the

'All-Father' *Baiami* on the *bora* ground, together with symbolic representations of European goods such as domestic animals (including horses), vehicles, playing cards and even effigies of whitefellers themselves (Swain 1993: 141). Tapping into a century-long argument concerning the indigenous south-eastern belief in a sky-god, Swain considers the *bora* to signify both a post-contact shift from a locative cosmology to a ubiety, and an attempt by Aboriginal thinkers to resolve the unbalanced dualism created by invasion:

*Bora* designs thus brought what I have categorised as the origin of unLawfulness, immorality and 'evil' in Aboriginal thought within the confines of a new, broader Law. *Baiami* had introduced both Aboriginal and White culture and hence both were by definition Lawful. The aim of these ceremonies was not to naïvely return to a pristine pre-colonial life by destroying Whites, but to maintain Aboriginal identity within the cosmos by demarcating its place within post-colonial society. In brief, it aimed to define invasion as a morally controllable act (Swain 1993: 143, 144).

I believe Swain's overall thesis may be used to advantage here in achieving some further understanding of 'jump up whitefeller', although I do not consider it necessary to accept in the process his theoretical particulars relating to *Baiami* and the *bora* cult. There are too many difficulties in positively identifying local cosmological expressions with Swain's examples, as all the Tableland languages had their own names for 'God' (none of which is recorded as *Baiami*), together with a panoply of local 'deities', and their own terms for, and local variants of initiation ceremonies (again, none of which is recorded as *bora*). Nor does any description of a local ceremony accord with Swain's illustrations, save for the often-documented occurrence

of earth sculptures of a recumbent human being. While this may well be enough of a link, the figure must then be assumed to be Baiamic without any supporting evidence, which rather begs the question of the All-Father being a post-contact innovation.

Be that as it may, the 'jump up whitefeller' theme as expressed in *Wheelbarrow Broke* certainly seems twinned with the need for a cosmological shift in both accommodating the white presence, and in maintaining a post-contact Aboriginal identity. The song also celebrates the affiliated vision of access to European goods. Swain is no doubt correct in denying the possibility of cargoism developing in Australia, as he says that European goods cannot be shown to have had any soteriological value for Aboriginal people. Consequently, I would not presume to associate 'jump up whitefeller' with cargoism. But he is surely wrong in stating:

Nor...is there any evidence that Aborigines of the south-east particularly  
prized the prospect of enhanced access to European commodities  
(Swain 1993: 143)

— especially in the light of the following perceptive evidence of John Breton, who toured New South Wales in the early 1830s:

Several creditable persons have informed me that the natives imagine they will be happier in a future state than at present, as they are to 'jump up' white men, and to possess all the comforts which they see us enjoy, with plenty to eat and drink, and eternal sunshine to keep them warm! If this be true, their theological ideas must be of recent formation, or have experienced some sudden change (Breton 1834: 181).

As argued earlier, 'jump up whitefeller' indicates a strong identification of black with white, admirably encapsulated in the line 'jump up whitefella *too* by-m-by', and thus resonates with Swain's theory that south-eastern Aboriginal cosmology eventually sought a subsumption of dual elements under the one Law. In this particular case, it is argued that it was achieved by slightly modifying an existing cosmological viewpoint to enable it to bear novel meanings. While one would expect this development to be reflected in local ceremonial practice, there is little evidence to equate 'jump up whitefeller' with *bora*, or any other recorded ritual expression. Despite Swain's reasoning, historical ethnography does not support the contention that the *bora* cult had true pan-south-eastern currency. And while 'jump up whitefeller' may have enjoyed a wider distribution, there is no concrete evidence to justify its elevation to the status of a religious cult.

It was mentioned above that the Walcha singers' 'jump up whitefeller' differed from the *Yuwaaliyaay* vision in that it contained no suggestion of ritual being involved in the process.<sup>6</sup> However, it should be remembered that the *only* expression of the doctrine recorded for New England has been contained in songs, itself a suggestive connection. Again, 'jump up whitefeller' is associated, in nearly every case, with the prerequisite death of Aboriginal people, expressed doctrinally as 'tumbling down' (Backhouse 1843: 557). If death is a necessary component of the philosophy, then surely ritual is implied. Joseph Campbell makes this connection directly:

---

<sup>6</sup> While no direct connection between the doctrine and ritual has been documented so far, Paul Carter does record a ceremonial association with the belief in whites-as-spirits (Carter 1992a: 161, 162).

The principle ritual in most puberty and initiation rites is a death and resurrection ritual in which your name is changed. You die to the name you had and are resurrected with a new identity (Osbon 1991: 93).

The Berndts present the relationship in a different way, by characterising the general Australian Aboriginal view of death as 'merely another form of initiation' (Berndt & Berndt 1988: 489). And if the physical difference between the boy who begins a man-making ceremony and the adult who emerges from it is not immediately obvious, then perhaps Aboriginal people may not have needed to manifest a change in skin-colour to henceforth regard themselves as 'whitefellers'.<sup>7</sup>

This rationalisation pushes the doctrine ever-closer to Swain's understanding of *bora*, particularly suggestive in its reference to the use of ceremonial effigies of whitefellers. It also offers some incidental explanation for nagging questions raised earlier in the chapter. Again, the temptation to build further speculative frameworks on this point should be resisted, purely on the grounds that it would assume a necessary correspondence in logic between European and indigenous cosmological thought. That this is scarcely justified at this point is underlined by Ernest Worms, in quoting W.E.H. Stanner:

'The problem of...'meaning'...is one to which I have no satisfactory answer'. With these words, Stanner...indicated the limits our sort of rational categorisation would set to an understanding of totemism (Worms & Petri 1998: 216).

---

<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the English names by which Aboriginal people are ubiquitously known in early reports were not given to them by Europeans, as is widely believed, but were those they assumed upon passing through the 'jump up' ritual.



Even if a positive link were never made between the doctrine and ritual expression, the significance of 'jump up whitefeller' should not be underestimated. It is in its own way as important as the strategy whereby the *Yarralin* people of the Northern Territory created a new Dreaming ancestor in Ned Kelly. According to Deborah Bird Rose, this process accorded Europeans a completely new moral status in *Yarralin* philosophy, which in turn resolved a destructive cosmological dilemma created by invasion:

Through Ned Kelly an equitable social order is established as an enduring principle of life (Rose 1998: 117).

Rose characterises the Ned Kelly creation myth as a particularly Aboriginal-style response, informed by the principle of reciprocal accommodation:

And whereas Europeans conquer with guns and economic manipulation, Melanesians compete with valuables, as well as with weapons. Aborigines, in contrast, accommodate through reciprocal sharing within and through a cosmic order (Rose 1998: 106).

This accommodation between groups, typically involving the exchange of knowledge encoded in ritual or objects, is widely-documented for Aboriginal society, manifesting itself, in the words David Turner, as

a part of the one embedded in the other and vice versa without affecting the integrity of either (quoted in Rose 1998: 106).

If we apply the analyses of Rose and Swain to 'jump up whitefeller', the doctrine presents itself as an expression of cosmological transformation, marrying the principle of accommodation with an existing philosophical conception to create moral sense of European invasion. However, 'jump up whitefeller' required no shift from a locative cosmology to a ubiety, as Swain maintains *bora* did. And like 'Ned Kelly', 'jump up

whitefeller' incorporated European ideas, processes and objects into a new formulation without any threat to a fundamentally indigenous identity (Rose 1998: 106, 107).

Rose does not labour the question of how a novel Dreaming Ancestor could play a retrospective role in the creation of the Aboriginal local world. Other Europeans' understandings of the Dreaming, however deficient, might go some way towards offering an explanation. Catherine Ellis describes the concept of Dreaming time in western desert *Pitjantjatjara* society as a cyclical entity:

in which the long past is ever present and ties both future and past to the moment when a correct reproduction of a Dreaming performance takes place (Ellis 1984: 153).

W.E.H. Stanner said much the same thing in describing the Dreaming as 'everywhen' (Rose 1998: 111). The important relationship of past to present is further elucidated by Stephen Wild in his analysis of the *Anmatjarra Honey Ant Men's Love Song*:

A fusion of objective and subjective experience is a salient feature of the concept of the Dreaming: human beings are both products of the Dreaming and participants in it, and the Dreaming existed in a far-distant past as well as continuing to exist in an ever present reality (Wild 1994: 49, 50).

This far-distant past may have been closer chronologically than one might expect for nineteenth-century Aboriginal people. Rose documents the fact that those at Yarralin traced genealogies back two or three generations and no further, and that Ancestors belonging to generations preceding that of grandparents were said to come from the Dreaming (Rose 1998: 110). The cyclical nature of the time-concept presented by Ellis and Wild above certainly allows for present actions to influence the past, which

helps explain the crucial importance of correct performance of Dreaming events. This influence in turn enables innovations to be embedded deeply within indigenous conceptualisations and expressions, so that they might truly partake of fundamental Aboriginality. It also allows the customary and presumably ancient south-eastern belief in white reincarnation to enter into a dynamic coeval relationship with 'jump up whitefeller', a proposition which would be considered impossibly anachronistic within a linear time frame.

This understanding of the accommodation process confounds the view that the integration of European elements into indigenous artistic expression of itself signifies cultural loss. It is in fact quite the opposite. Using the example of *Wheelbarrow Broke*, it could be argued that in a reformed cosmology in which European goods and concepts were now firmly embedded, the essence of Aboriginal integrity would spring ever-fresh from relationship to land or country. It is axiomatic that this 'cosmic sharing' was not reciprocated by Europeans in any enduring way, and although relations may have been hostile for only a short while on New England, their continuing history describes the ever-increasing alienation of local Aboriginal people from their land.

The discussion of the redolence of ritual inherent in 'jump up whitefeller', is assisted by certain conclusions offered by chapter two's survey into south-eastern music-making. Out of her work with *Ngarrindjeri* people of South Australia, Diane Bell discusses the opportunity offered by music for an increased understanding of the world:

In the nineteenth century, even before official white settlement, songs rendered the inexplicable consistent with the Ngarrindjeri worldview...Meaning is sought in the wisdom of the sages of the

society, those who can find the stories and songs to explain the new and bring it within the ambit of the known world (Bell 1998: 177-180).

But merely to find meaning through music is a slightly passive depiction for a system of expression as dynamic as that of Aboriginal Australia. Catherine Ellis, who was intimately acquainted with music as power in Aboriginal society, casts light on its ability to directly engage with life-processes and their outcomes:

Throughout his time in the physical world the individual turns to music as the most powerful force for dealing with all the vicissitudes of life which cannot be met by practical measures; it is the link with his eternal self (Ellis 1980: 727).

This reminder heightens considerably the significance of the songs discussed above. If 'jump up whitefeller' was expressed ritually through songs, their performance may have been designed to activate a new, retrospectively productive Aboriginal epoch on the New England Tablelands. The maintenance of this situation may have required the continued embracing of European society through shared performance occasions like corroborees. Carter recognises the accommodation potential of the corroboree in describing it as:

a transitional object, a specially manufactured symbolic event that, quite literally, attempted to articulate the disputed space occupied by Aborigines and Europeans (Carter 1992a: 169, 170).

Again, this perception should perhaps be pushed a little further, so that what is seen as understanding or communication approaches nearer to dynamic influence. By bringing the European listeners within the ambit of the song's influence, the Surveyor's Creek performers may well have been conducting their own programme for shaping the course of New England contact relations. The power for corroborees

to affect relations was seen in Norton's description of the 'routed Europeans' episode earlier in the chapter. This also may have been intentionally created to bring about a new local relationship paradigm. It may indeed have initiated a successful change that lasted whilever local relationship could be sufficiently personal, before later nineteenth-century developments caused the influx of greater numbers of non-related, land-hungry Europeans into the region. That the south-eastern corroboree can be seen as primarily a tool to give dynamic 'ritual' expression to accommodation, is neatly symbolised by William Buckley's description of his ceremonial induction into *Wada-warrung-balug* society:

The scene must have lasted three hours, when, as a wind up they gave three tremendous shouts, at the same time pointing to the sky with their sticks; they each shook me heartily by the hand, again beating their breasts, as a token of friendship (quoted in Hill 1993: 32).

## **Section Six. Conclusion.**

This chapter has surveyed what is known of the nineteenth-century musical productions of New England Aboriginal people. It looked in detail at several examples of local indigenous song texts, together with the circumstances surrounding their composition and performance, considerably narrowing and deepening the broad focus of chapter two's discussion. These songs range in content from Dreamtime expressions, through descriptions of local European innovations, to dynamic relational cosmological concepts. While lack of contextual evidence rendered analytical discussion of many of the songs necessarily brief, the examination of the last two was extended by their obvious connection to other well-documented

indigenous expressions, and to helpful published discussions of south-eastern cosmology.

Although I would certainly agree with Tony Swain that the development of local cosmological reformation must have been fuelled by significant dislocation, I do not consider that his generalised view of the extent of such dislocation, nor of its violence, necessarily holds good for the New England experience of the 1840s. Instead of subscribing to Swain's view that it was involved in an historical succession, 'jump up whitefeller' could be seen as one of a number of contemporarily related and more-or-less enduring cosmological responses — a group which also included the *bora*, and millennial and eschatological strategies. It could be that it was the choice of the New England peoples (and undoubtedly some others), because it fitted their particular experience of invasion. The eschatological response, on the other hand, may have better resonated with the experience of Aboriginal people in western New South Wales — from which region most of Swain's eschatological evidence is drawn — where relations with whites seem to have been desperately hostile. Over such an abyss of time and communication, it would be vain to imagine one could gain an entirely accurate grasp of the 'jump up whitefeller concept' as expressed in the New England corroboree song record, although Swain's thesis obviously provides direction towards a deepened understanding.

In conclusion, I would argue that there may have been considerably greater variation in the style of local response to contact, both black and white, than Swain allows for in his formulation. On the Aboriginal side, the range of attitudes presented in the evidence above includes the entirely rational appreciation of whites as people, strategic caution, confident derision, revenge, and a variegated and sophisticated attempt to smoothly accommodate the European innovation into a long-established,

but developing cosmology. It may well be that a gentling of relations ensued from the success of this latter reformulation. Following Swain, these positions and strategies are seen to emanate from cultures well-equipped to deal with challenges, either by adapting customary action or developing novel responses. I believe this variation and complexity supports the depiction of the course of early contact relations that was surveyed in the previous chapter, and provides evidence to help counter any belief in the inevitable incompatibility of European and Aboriginal systems and world-views. The next chapter will continue this theme of the compatibility of black and white systems in its examination of the on-going development of south-eastern, including New England, Aboriginal music through its relationship with European culture.