Chapter Seven. The Nature of Musical Tradition.

Section One. Introduction.

It was suggested in chapter six that the continuation of the Archibalds' musical culture from the time of King Robert, was and is a function of the operation of an Aboriginal-style tradition. This will be further illuminated in the present chapter, which argues a theoretical case for viewing the phenomenon of tradition as a transcultural entity, subject nonetheless to the designs and cultural commitment of the people involved in its application. In the process, the musical life of Jim Lowe is canvassed and briefly compared with the Archibald's experience, so that the different meanings each party brought to the performance of similar musical material may be emphasised.

Jim Lowe was related by both marriage and blood to Frank Archibald, the two men occasionally worked together, and their respective birthplaces lay within five miles of each other. Each played the mouth-organ expertly, and both were regarded as excellent singers. As will be noticed below, their musical experiences were radically different, however. Just as with the narration of the Archibald family's history, the tape-recorded evidence dealing with Jim Lowe's life will not be cited in the body of the text, but references will be found grouped together at the end of this chapter. Following this introduction, section two below reviews the representation of tradition in the literature. Section three examines Jim Lowe's musical life, to be compared with the Archibalds' experience in the reformulation of the concept of tradition in section four. Section five draws together comparable examples of observed musical transmission, and section six concludes the chapter by concentrating on the ramifications that this reasoning has for viewing the Archibalds' culture as traditional.

What follows immediately below is a closely-argued proposition for understanding more clearly the nature and operation of (mainly) musical tradition. It is, in essence, an argument concerning a fundamental social entity rather than an instrumental concept, the sort of discussion which Immanuel Wallerstein considers 'always difficult':

> First of all, most participants have deep commitments about fundamentals. Second, it is seldom the case that any clear, or at least any simple, empirical test can resolve or even clarify the issues...This involves us in all sorts of secondary dilemmas. Our known 'descriptions' of reality are to some extent a function of our premisses...(Wallerstein 1987: 309).

In just this way, the task of elaborating the present view is complicated by the tightly recursive relationship of intuitions, premisses, empirical experiences, deductions, inductions, theoretical understandings and methodologies that have brought it to its current disposition. Further complexity is added by the involved nature of researchers' perceptions of tradition, and by the very real possibility that authors have had significantly different ideas in mind when using base concepts like tradition and culture. Notwithstanding these problems, a brief summary will be given of the main issues dealt with by the literature, before an alternative view is developed, illustrated chiefly with testimony provided by both Jim Lowe and the Archibald family.

Section Two. Tradition in the Literature.

Aspects of tradition have been discussed in relation to history (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Williams 1961), law (Hobsbawm 1983a: 3; Hunter 1996; Shils 1981; Rowse 1994), literature (Bruns 1991; Williams 1977), philosophy (MacIntyre 1990;

Harré 1993), politics (Eisenstadt 1972; Gross 1992), religion (Levin 1985; Fox 1988; Aitken and Rast 1994), and social theory (Giddens 1979; Turner 1994). It appears however, that it is within the fields of folklore and cultural anthropology (including ethnomusicology), that scholars have been most active in discussing this concept in its own terms, and a number of studies have been written to that end in recent years (e.g. Ben-Amos 1984; Cohen 1989; Coplan 1991; Finnegan 1991, 1992; Gailey 1989; Glassie 1995; Handler and Linnekin 1984; Holbek 1983; Jolly 1992; Linnekin 1983; Newall 1987; Toren 1988; Thomas 1992; Vansina 1985).

This is not to say that scholars in these fields attach equal (or indeed any) importance to understanding what is meant by tradition. Certain researchers see tradition merely as a "grounding trope" that has outlived its usefulness (Marcus 1995: 106), or, equated thoroughly and completely with the concept of culture (Nettl 1982: 3), as an 'impotent concept,' that 'refers...to everything and therefore nothing' (Blum 1991: 6; Myers 1992: 11). Ironically, this same view encourages some authors to use the terms culture and tradition synonymously (Nettl 1982), and others to avoid using the latter altogether, thereby circumventing 'the emotive load' borne by the word (Ben-Amos 1984: 125). These frustrations are shared by scholars who accept the validity of the concept, but have expressed the need for a restricted working definition (Eisenstadt 1972: 4). Specially-convened colloquia, while producing other benefits, have failed signally in that regard, however (Ben-Amos 1984: 14ff). This failure may be a result of tying such examination too closely to the diffuse way the concept has been used in the literature, and because any definitional meaning for tradition must be protected from the relativity of culture by having a primarily transcultural orientation, something which scholars have been unwilling to give it in recent years.

The perceptual starting-point chosen for such an investigation, theoretically located anywhere along a continuum with tradition as a strictly taxonomic entity at one end, and as an ontological entity at the other, would surely also bear upon the outcome. So by restricting themselves to an examination of the *term* tradition, scholars may miss recognising a phenomenon that might be described, in English and other languages, by different names. Again, Ben-Amos found in his review of the American literature, that clear overall understanding was made difficult because scholars, while retaining the term,

> preferred to shift and twist the meanings for their own theoretical and methodological purposes (Ben-Amos: 1984: 124).

All this portrays a situation where, on the one hand, the same term can be used to describe different phenomena, and on the other, the same phenomenon can be described in different terms. For the 22nd Congress of Nordic Ethnology and Folkloristics held in Finland in 1982, this proved to be a fatal obstacle, and definitional failure there was attributed to the fact that

> A synthesis that would take into consideration emic views and analytical demands, stability and change, learned discourse and popular use, past and past projected into the future, simply could not be achieved in the use of a single term that already had a history of its own (Ben-Amos 1984: 99).

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the desire to at least use the concept persists, perhaps because of a suspicion that there is a phenomenon whose existence is evoked by the word, at least in English and in some other European languages. Thus David Coplan considers that

> Tradition, despite such circumstances, does not cease to exist (Coplan 1991: 40),

and Stephen Turner, after demonstrating the ontological improbability of concepts like culture, tradition, *habitus* or social structure, declares:

> Concepts like tradition, however, have a life outside the project of constructing a general social theory (Turner 1994: 117).

Not only do researchers wish to retain the use of tradition, some see it as a 'core concept' in social science, Coplan predicting that

> Ultimately, the concept of tradition may be indispensable as a focus for exchange among anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and historians of Third World societies (Coplan 1991: 47).

But surely this would only be possible if some independent meaning for the concept were to be determined. Ironically, Coplan complains elsewhere that

> It was Franz Boas (1916: 393) who first observed that oral genres are a people's autobiographical ethnography. The concept of tradition, at that time simply identified with culture, has since been reified, manipulated, and stretched entirely out of analytical shape (Coplan 1991: 47).

But as has already been outlined, others who see the terms *culture* and *tradition* as coextensive quite rightly consider that both cannot have an autonomous conceptual existence. This tension was addressed by Henry Glassie in his recent treatment of the subject:

> Though they approach synonymy, culture and tradition remain distinct for reasons that made culture the modern term when tradition seemed fusty, and that make tradition, despite its detractors, better suited for

> use today. Tradition is a temporal concept, inherently tangled with the past, the future, with history. Culture comprises synchronic states of affairs (Glassie 1995: 399).

Whatever other advantages or problems Glassie's approach might have, it is simply not accurate. The literature shows clearly that the concept of culture (and for that matter, those of society and social action), has always more-or-less explicitly included a sense of radical continuity with the past (Austin-Broos 1987: xxvi; Bourdieu 1977: 79; I.J. Cohen 1987: 300; d'Andrade 1984: 114-116; Darcy 1987: 17; Giddens 1979: 70; Ingold 1994: 211).

A great part of this conceptual confusion lies in the orthodox view of tradition as 'artefactual' (Nettl 1982: 3; Waterman 1991: 66; though see also Nettl 1992: 377ff), which embeds the concept firmly in a cultural matrix. In various conceptualisations, the essence of tradition has thus been seen as inhering in: formal cultural objects (either within performance or not) like songs, tunes, stories or beliefs (Sharp 1972, Shils 1981; Vansina 1985); in canons comprised of such objects (Ben-Amos 1984: 105ff.; Bohlman 1988: 104-120); in styles of expression, most often 'folk' or 'indigenous' (Bohlman 1980: 167; Cohen and Cohen 1973; Hopkins 1976); in types of cultural transmission (Bohlman 1988: 14; Bowen 1993; Karpeles 1952; Nettl 1982; also see Ben Amos: 1984: 117); in the fact of cultural continuity (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Finnegan 1992: 8; Newall 1987; Szwed 1970: 150); in community selection or invention of aspects of cultural history (Thomas 1992; Linnikin 1983; Williams 1961: 50-52, 1977: 115-117; Hobsbawm 1983b; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995: 369); and in the group expression of authenticity, used in the sense, perhaps, of the existential philosophers (Coplan 1991: 40; Glassie 1995: 408; Golomb 1995: 7-32; Hobsbawm 1983a: 8; Hopkins 1982: 143, 144). Although

not all these identifications are strictly artefactual, they do present similar problems. The most immediate of these is that such implications either ground tradition irremediably in culture, or they lack the precision necessary to isolate the two concepts. This must also ultimately apply to the reasoning of those who propose what Ben-Amos calls a 'performance model' of tradition (Abrahams 1977; Ben-Amos 1984: 121; Blacking and Kealinohomoku 1979: 5; Messner 1993; Toren 1988). Here tradition is seen to be abstract, and performance or enactment its expression, 'based on the past experiencing of similar events' (Abrahams 1977: 79, 106; Toren 1988: 714). This idea promises the concept some transcendence over culture, by rendering it

> a dimension of folklore that constantly exists regardless of the actual performance. It is *folklore in potential.* It is knowledge that is secured in the minds and memories of the people only to be performed on appropriate occasions; the sense of appropriateness in itself is subject to rules of tradition (Ben-Amos 1984: 123).

In the version of the model outlined by Abrahams however, neither change in tradition, nor the actual relationship between the ideal and its enactment, seem to be adequately addressed. Abrahams suggests that the communication between the two levels is non-recursive, flowing only from the abstract to the particular. If communication were recursive, as in Coplan's detailed description, tradition would then be 'brought down to earth' as it were, to a level where it must be equated with culture, or at least with its performance (Ben-Amos 1984: 124). Whatever the case, there is no indication that tradition, even in its ideal sense, was ever intended to be represented by Abrahams or by Ben-Amos as transcultural. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate a way in which tradition can be responsibly viewed as transcultural however, an insight gained through analysis of the historical and musical testimony of

Jim Lowe and the Archibald family. After the relevant comparative evidence has been canvassed then, the case will be put for a fully-independent conceptualisation of the phenomenon of tradition.

Section Three. The Musical Experience of Jim Lowe.

Chris Sullivan and I first met Jim Lowe at his Guyra home in 1983. Born and reared in the very poor and remote mining community of Backwater, and still an expert singer and instrumentalist eighty-seven years later, Jim seemed to embody the archetype of the folk musician made familiar by the works of Sharp (1972), Karpeles (1973), A.L. Lloyd (1975) Meredith (1979; 1987) and Ward (1977). Friends and I visited Jim on many occasions up until his death in September 1984, to converse, discuss the past and play music.

The taped record of this part of our relationship documents a large number of musical performances, with Jim's repertoire running to 250 separate items — sung, whistled, lilted, played on mouth-organ, button-accordeon, concertina, jaw-harp and fiddle. A wide range of musical genres is represented, including hymns, 'Child' and other narrative ballads, parodies, music-hall songs, sentimental parlour songs, bawdry, country-and-western items, jigs, reels, waltzes, set dances, schottisches, mazurkas, varsoviennas and slow-airs. In addition, the prolonged and casual structure of interviews, coupled with Jim's eloquence and expressed desire for accuracy in any subsequent portrayal of his life, led to the elaboration of biographical information that went well beyond the simple answering of questions-at-hand.

Upon analysis ten years later, Jim Lowe's personal life-story was found to be dominated by the interlocking themes of radical social autonomy, and an idiosyncratic 'continuous present' concept of time (McDonald 1994). Jim maintained that

everything he did in life was as a result of conscious, independent (though no doubt negotiated) choice. As a boy, for example, he was frequently punished for his insistence on choosing just how much he would attend school, and how far he would pursue education of a more immediate kind in the bush. Similarly, although vitally interested in things of the spirit, Jim decided very early that he would resist the influence of any Church. Again, he preferred to remain a 'free agent' in his work, and all throughout his long life spurned permanent employment. A clear instance of this independent attitude concerns Jim's relationship to his father, who was described as being 'too fond of getting his own way', and with whom Jim had two fist-fights in order to settle the issue.

Jim Lowe, with both an experiencing and philosophical nature, constantly measured ideas and concepts against his own direct observations, thoroughly scorning received opinion. That Jim never recognised an unimpeachable authority is well-illustrated by his reaction to Sunday-school education:

> I was interested in religion, but not what they preach. You go readin' the Bible and the — Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain killed Abel because when they were sendin' their sacrifices up, Cain's smoke went along that way, Abel's smoke went straight up to God...and he got jealous with him, this is what you read in the Bible of course. Well he killed Abel and then he was cast out from there...he was sent to the land of Canaan, 'where he took unto himself a wife'. Now where the bloody hell would he've got a wife? They was the only people in the world at the time...There was a lie straight away in what they call the Bible. I didn't agree with it, as young as I was...well if

they could start off with a tale of that sort, there could be a lot more of it not right.

It may not be surprising that Jim showed little interest in family or community history. He knew nothing of the past lives of his maternal grandparents, for example, save that they had come out on a boat from England together, and that his grandmother's family were Gypsies. And what little he was told by his father about his other grandparents, Jim was disinclined to believe! May Lowe commented after his death, that Jim would speak to their own children of the futility of 'looking backwards', advising strongly that life should be lived exclusively in the present. In spite of this, Jim was proud of his wonderful memory, which he employed to merge his own personal past and present in a very interesting and revealing fashion.

Testament to its effectiveness here, and to the fact that Jim would not accept responsibility for another's statement of even simple historical fact, lies in his assertion that he could remember being born:

J.L.: (speaking of his father) That's where he said he was born, I don't 'spose he remembers being born — not like me.

B.M.: Do you remember it?

J.L.: Oh yes.

Further evidence from Jim's reminiscences, too detailed to include here, clearly demonstrates his desire to 'play with' the concept of time, to stand beside it, manipulate its personal meanings, and create thereby the conditions for a temporally-integrated experience of living. In his dreams (which included astral travel), Jim regularly became a young man, he flew around the district to visit relatives and friends, and on one occasion, he woke up still singing from the dream-performance of at least five old songs, all recounted in detail later. It seems that the veil between

waking and sleeping consciousness was, for Jim, diaphanous, which allowed for a significant redirection of the flow of time. One is reminded here of the Taoist parable concerning the dream of philosopher Chuang Tzu:

> But it was hard to be sure whether he really was Tzu and had only dreamt that he was a butterfly, or was really a butterfly, and was only dreaming that he was Tzu (Waley 1982: 32).

Zen-like, Jim's personal time-concept eschewed both the past and future, and emphasised instead the coevality of existence. Anything that had occurred before his birth, and of which he had no direct experience, held little reality for Jim, but all that he had been involved with since (and including) that time, was integrated into a richly-charged 'extended present'. Jim thus effectively packaged the rationale of his own life, giving it a self-contained continuity that was heroically independent of any external validation.

This interpretation appears to be consistent with Jim's description of his musical experience. In relating his beginnings on the mouth-organ, Jim stated:

> I don't remember when I couldn't play a mouth-organ, to start a tune on it so my parents could understand what I tried to play... and I've never been without a mouth-organ since.

Not only does this signify great musical continuity (Jim seems to have been introduced to the instrument at about the age of two), it also foreshadows a complete musical independence from his parents. For although both his mother and father played instruments, not once did Jim mention ever collaborating with them. This picture of autonomy deepens when it is considered that Jim was probably the first to play the mouth-organ in his district:

> It was generally concertina, accordion or violin. I say generally! — that was all there *ever* was out there in them times.

It appears that Jim acquired his first instrument (presumably with some knowledge of its operation), as an innovation to Backwater, from the travelling Indian hawkers Sinna, Fata and Nabob Khan:

> That's who started me off on the mouth-organ in the first place...Used to be a green mouth-organ, sometimes I'd get a red one. They'd only cost sixpence anyhow, if you bought one. If they'd be two or three months before they'd come again, I'd have the one buggered up and they'd give me another one...

Jim's introduction to instrumental music came then, from outside his community — brought by purveyors, not of tradition, but of commerce. And it could well be that the rough coincidence of Jim's birth and the advent of this novel instrument enabled his full identification with the mouth-organ as a symbol of musical freedom, underpinning more deeply his independence of what he regarded as unnecessary ties with the community around him.

Jim did learn tunes and songs from people in his own district of course, but older members of his own family seem to have exercised only a minor influence. Certainly Jim's father Ted was unwilling to participate in such transmission, and as far as is known, Jim himself saw no particular reason to pass on his own musical knowledge or skills. Jim's brother Douglas explained why this might have been so for 'old Ted':

> He was too cranky. He wasn't that brilliant of a player really, but he knew some good old tunes. He was a cranky man — you wouldn't know whether to ask him to play a tune...or not, he'd just as likely tell

> you what to do...If you got him in a real good mood, he might sit down and play half-a-dozen tunes to you sometimes. Ah! I s'pose he was workin' too hard to keep us when we were little.

An analysis of Jim's sources suggested that he learned most of his music from contemporaries at Backwater (other miners, bushworkers, teamsters, and younger relatives), and mainly outside the immediate family circle. This occurred chiefly at house-dances, picnics, bush camps and drinking parties. Whether Jim learned what he heard seemed to be influenced less by the relationship he had with the performer, or by the character of the material itself, as by the immediate circumstances and quality of the performance:

> One uncle on me mother's side — Tommy Hibbert — well, *he could sing a good song,* but he put too much palaver — trying to put more guiver in or some bloody thing. And I know there was an old bloke come to one of these parties one night — 'ooh a singer, Tommy Hibbert's going to sing a song. Order please'! This old chap...was tellin' me after, he said 'When they called out for Tommy Hibbert's going to sing a song', he said, 'I thought I'd hear something'. He said, 'I'd'a bloody sight sooner heard me mother cryin' for bread'! He sang that *Only A Leaf.* He knew quite a lot of songs, but I never learned many of 'em, 'cause he used to put too much palaver in 'em and I didn't like him singin' at all.

Jim's testimony implies that all musical items in his repertoire possessed for him an equal status, no matter where, when, how or from whom they were learned. He never indicated a preference for one part of his repertoire over another, and all pieces were learned, it is argued, within an extended present. Stylistic analysis could

discern neither differential treatment in the performance of songs or tunes, nor temporal stages in Jim's repertoire-formation. What such analysis did show was that Jim participated in a very broad folk music culture, and that he applied individual stylistic preferences evenly across all the genres of music that he played.

Jim Lowe, while no doubt a rather extreme representative of his community, should not be seen as aberrant, either socially or musically. With one or two exceptions, solo musical performance was the custom at Backwater, and perhaps it was so for practical reasons. A formal analysis of several transmissions of the schottische tune, *The Yak on the Mountain*, demonstrated an impressive stylistic heterogeneity from performance to performance, and showed further, that in many cases, scant notice only was taken to received versions of the tune. Where musical integration did occur, it seemed to be tightly circumscribed by family groupings, and it has already been suggested that Jim's own family was not one of these. There could not be discerned at Backwater generally, the existence of anything that might be termed a cultural core or canon to which musical change or its opposite was referred, either formally or casually.

Section Four. Tradition as personal relationship.

When Jim Lowe's testimony is placed alongside the experience of the Archibald family, as described in chapter six, contrasts in social and musical outlook immediately present themselves. While Jim and Frank Archibald inhabited the same rural locality at much the same time; while they shared blood relations, musical skills, repertoire and sometimes performance contexts, their attitudes to cultural history and transmission were profoundly different. In line with Frank's own philosophy, the Archibald family possesses a sense of time that accords great importance to the past.

Its members believe strongly that their Aboriginal culture, as they know it, will not persist unless their history is interpreted and engaged, and they strive to educate younger relatives to this end. Consequently, the family feels it is of the utmost importance to keep alive the repertoire and performance customs of their beloved parents.

While the Archibald family participates in a well-developed network of cultural relationships, consciously stretching backwards in time, Jim Lowe preferred to develop an autonomous position with regard to music, time and his extended family. This disparity could be attributed to many causes: to the fact that Jim Lowe lived a predominantly European lifestyle, while the Archibalds grew up in a fundamentally Aboriginal social milieu; to the methodological exigencies of research in each case — for Jim Lowe it was concentration on the individual, for the Archibalds, concentration on the group; or to the varying political and identity aims of the respective parties to research. Whatever is the truth of these possibilities, they may all be symptoms of a more radical difference, rather than causes in themselves. This is indeed believed to be the case, the radical difference residing in the fact that the Archibalds have chosen to invoke tradition in their musical and social relationships, while Jim Lowe did not. As simple as this assertion appears, it does require careful explication, and some major theoretical issues need to be addressed in the process.

The main implication of this assertion is that here, tradition is disengaged from the expression of culture. In the terminology used so far in this chapter, the similarities that the Lowe and Archibald cases share are on a cultural plane, while it is in their differences that the operation of tradition is believed to reside. This assertion proposes, in effect, the universalisation of the concept, according to it a transcultural status. To carry this proposition, it must be coherently argued that the choice to

invoke tradition is not limited by cultural orientation, but is potentially available to all people.

What sort of choices are meant here? In the Archibalds' case, it is the decision to engage in a certain sort of emotional relationship, which for the moment will be called 'traditional', involving a defined network of people, and a shared musical activity and repertoire. In Jim Lowe's case, it is the decision not to so commit himself, but to pursue his musical activities in a more self-contained fashion instead. To say that Jim decided against engaging tradition is not of the same order as the claim that people may or may not engage with their *traditions,* the word being used in a culturally relative sense (Thomas 1992: 216). The latter assertion is relatively unproblematic, in that it refers to people choosing to express themselves differently by selecting alternative activities, whereas the former avers that people within groups may express themselves fundamentally differently while performing identical cultural operations.

The understanding of tradition presented here is that it is a transcendental phenomenon, and that in its ideality, unlike Durkheim's 'social fact' (Durkheim 1982: 50-59) or Abrahams' concept outlined earlier, it has little to do with cultural expression. Tradition's ontological character resembles that described by Giddens for social structures, which have only virtual existence until instantiated in social action (Giddens 1979: 64). Tradition is not here conceived of as a structure itself, but structures will arise within its purlieu (see also Bruns 1991: 11). Most importantly, unlike social facts or 'deep structures', tradition has no determining action. It is, re-casting a phrase from Ira Cohen, an 'ontological potential' (Cohen 1987: 279), which can be engaged in actual historical circumstances or not, according to normal patterns of human agency. As an ideal entity, the properties of tradition itself may only be

sketched-out very broadly, any precise description being limited to its historical manifestations, which would be, by definition, culturally relative. The reason for this, as Giddens and others point out, is that the success of any description of the 'constitutive potentials of social life', depends largely on the allowance of the widest possible latitude

> for the diversities and contingencies that may occur in different settings
>
> (Cohen 1987: 279).

What then, might be the properties of tradition? It is considered here that certain entities must always be implicated in the basic notion if it is to have any heuristic value. These are: a). a shared, repeatable activity or complex of activities. Music, dance and story-telling are obvious examples, but almost any activity could be the focus of tradition; and b). the activation of a certain spiritual/emotional power in the relationship network of those involved in the collaboration. This power is produced by, and in its turn, generates the conscious desire for the activity, its objects (for example, particular songs, styles or stories), and the relationship network itself to persist — just as they had in the past, so on into the future. It is important to the present formulation that this activation is regarded as intentional action, operating at the level of discursive consciousness. So when Alan Gailey says that

> unwittingness on the parts of transmitter and recipient may be characteristic of tradition (Gailey 1989: 143),

he is considered to be mistaken, and his view taken to be a function of seeing tradition as inhering in the objective cultural sphere, rather than in the relationship of its participants.

To explicate these elements further is far from simple, owing mainly to the paucity of authoritative published resources. The sense of the emotional/spiritual power might be best described as something approaching 'love with respect', which is to use the Archibald family's conceptualisation of it. Others have identified it in terms of fiery inspiration (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989: 133), as visceral communication (Levin 1985: 215), as a relational imperative (Walker 1984: 240, quoted in Somerville 1990: 40), or yet as a sort of *via negativa* (Bruns 1991: 15-18). In all these cases, this shared sensibility is seen, at base, to rekindle the desire for the continuation, re-celebration or re-creation of the personal relationships and cultural activities that are at once its source and its focus.

This implies of course that the cultural materials and contexts through which tradition is invoked are by no means unimportant. So for example, members of the Archibald family relate in a different way to the songs that they learned and performed with their parents, to those they have acquired more recently. The former express a special power missing from the other songs, a power which has nothing to do with their age or structure, as they are not formally distinguishable from the latter. Neither can they be distinguished from those songs that for Jim Lowe were not, it is argued, implicated in tradition. It is notable in this context that Jim was seen to treat his repertoire quite uniformly, with no privilege accorded to any part of it on the basis of either source or age of items, or of any emotional associations. Indeed, tradition may not have been invoked by Jim in any area of his life, indicating a possible indisposition towards the process. Although that particular question was not asked of him at the time, the following exchange was recorded:

> B.M.: Did you feel part of a tradition with mining at all, seeing as your father was a miner, and your grandfather?

J.L.: No. No, we cursed it.

Although there is a risk of making too much of such fragmentary evidence, it may be that Jim held a view of tradition similar to that proposed here, in as much as he suggests that tradition is not equatable merely with shared practice, even if persisting over a considerable period of time, without something added in the way of positive emotional value.

The phenomenon of singers and musicians taking a differential attitude to sections of their repertoire has been documented by other researchers, although none would probably identify with the conclusions reached here. Pandora Hopkins, in analysing the performances of Sara Cleveland, noticed that this singer

> makes a division of her repertory according to 'old songs' and 'new songs' that is not simply a chronological classification for convenience; the two groups of songs are conceived of as different in kind. The 'old songs' are the ones she learned with the utmost precision (principally from her mother); they are sung unaccompanied, and are varied according to deeply-ingrained traditional regulations. The 'new songs' have been acquired later, usually from friends...and are not part of her ancestral heritage (Hopkins 1976: 460).

Documenting a similar practice, Philip Bohlman writes that

> Charles Bannen and his family have copied the texts of many of their songs into a volume they called the *Old Bannen Song Book*. The *Old Bannen Song Book* exists in two parts. The first part contains primarily 'old songs' and Irish-American songs; the second part contains the 'new songs'. There is no doubt that Charles Bannen prefers the 'old

songs', for he sings almost entirely from the first part (Bohlman 1980: 174).

In other descriptions, Bob Copper suggests that he privileged the songs handed down within his own family, 'loved and kept alive' for generations (Copper 1975: 1-4), and Helen Myers says that the singers of Felicity treat the Indian songs of their repertoire differently to those of Western or Carribean provenance, chiefly on affective grounds (Myers 1991: 235-241). Henry Glassie provides a number of examples that tie tradition closely to spiritual and emotional expression in continuing human relationship, in one place suggesting that songs from Ruby Bowman Plemmons' repertoire may have been remembered *verbatim* because 'they had come from her dear mother' (Glassie 1995: 407).

Emile Durkheim proposed that social facts may be observed 'where they present themselves in isolation from their individual manifestations' (Durkheim 1982: 83). Structuration theorists would consider this an impossibility, as for them, ontological entities have only a virtual existence until engaged in social action. However, Durkheim's rule might usefully be inverted to state that the existence of such entities, now characterised as potentials, could reveal itself in their *absence* from social action. It was suggested earlier that the integrity of tradition as an independent concept could be upheld only if it was released from its tight bond with culture. To achieve this, it must be argued that tradition as a social phenomenon either *might not* occur in any given historical situation (in Jim Lowe's musical life for example), or might apply only in part. It is considered that the few instances described above lend valuable assistance to this argument. In each case there is a section of the total musical repertoire, bracketed by performers as an essential expression of personal and group tradition, that allows us to perceive something of the operation of tradition in its

difference, although it must be repeated that in historical situations, this operation will be expressed in varying ways. For example, it is not considered that 'traditioners' will always bracket out the oldest material in their repertoires, nor will they aim to exactly reproduce items or practices in performance, although this is an option observed to have been taken up in many cases (Witmer 1991: 250, 251). The promotion of tradition is likely to be (re)negotiated in performance by each participant in the relationship, and thus the opportunities for personal expression and change (especially to content and context), can be seen to inhere in the process itself.

Some recent explorations of the concept of tradition do make observations that resonate with the propositions set out above, although again, their authors may not support this chapter's conclusions. Consider the following passage from David Coplan:

> Music itself, therefore, is crucial to the reapplication of memory and the creation and re-creation of the emotional qualities of experience in the maintenance of a living tradition. Interpretive analysis of oral genres most often focuses on formal structuring and the exegesis of symbolic images. Yet the ability of oral genres to reverberate between past and present is greatly dependent on their capacity for emotional expression (Coplan 1991: 41).

One would disagree here only with Coplan's focus on music as crucial to the re-creation of emotional qualities in tradition, preferring to see this power located in the relationship of the participants itself. Tradition, though always connecting with the emotional/spiritual side of social action, may well involve 'performances' like reading (Bruns 1991: 13), transcribing (Glassie 1995: 404, Levin 1985: 187), or the collecting of alms (Newall 1987: 142), that are not so obviously affective. In another major

examination of the concept, Henry Glassie emphasises the qualities of love, respect and sincerity as prime features of the relationships that he has experienced as traditional. But where he says 'when actions are shaped sincerely, tradition will be present' (Glassie 1995: 408), objection to the relativity of the term 'sincerity' might prescribe substitution with the related, but more compelling formula 'where two or more invoke my name, there I will be also'.

Section Five. In defence of tradition.

To summarise so far, tradition is considered here to be a human potential which involves personal relationship, shared practices, and a commitment to the continuation — out of the past and into the future — of both the practices and the particular emotional/spiritual relationship that sustains them. It might be objected that the circumscribed arena of personal relationship is an unsuitable location for examining the nature of such a fundamental and variegated social phenomenon. For the present argument avers that, although the style and content that 'traditioning' appropriates will be indicated culturally, all people in all societies and at all times have the power to invoke, or to ignore, tradition-as-relationship. As this view depends on the utilisation of concepts such as the self, agency, emotion, sharing and commitment — seen in some quarters as strictly relative terms — some defence against a possible charge of universalism should be mounted.

First it should be pointed out that social science theory has for some time been looking at personal relationship, not only as an important crucible of social processes, but also for the very purpose of adjusting for gender or cultural biases in past broad theoretical constructions (Cohen 1987; Giddens 1987; Giddens 1995; Layder 1994; Wallace 1989; Weedon 1988; Williams 1977; Yeatman 1986). It is in this vein that

Patrick Kagbeni Muana, invoking the work of Dell Hymes, says that 'the notion of tradition must be rooted in social life', that 'the traditional begins with the personal', and that 'the communicative occasion must become the locus of discussion of tradition' (Muana 1996: 11).

Next, there is a clear trend, in ethnography and ethnohistory, that explicitly accords social agency to people in all societies, not just the substantially-industrialised (Bascom 1958; Creamer 1988; Eliade 1974; Ellis 1984, 1985; Knapp 1992; F. Myers 1986; Peterson 1986; Rogers & Wilson 1993; Rowse 1990, 1994; Sahlins 1985; Stanner 1958; Swain 1985, 1993; Tonkin 1992). This development in its turn has helped greatly the programmes of researchers studying the affective lives of people in non-Western societies. These scholars have shown that probably all societies have a 'native' psychology which includes some concept of the self, and that emotion, far from determining human action, is identified culturally (Harré 1988; Harré 1993a; Harré 1993b; Heelas 1988; Rosaldo 1984; Shweder and Bourne 1984). In response to this latter finding, others have warned that cultural-construction theorising can become overly relativistic (Levy 1984; Spiro 1984, 1992, Srinivasan 1990; Wikan 1994. see also Giddens 1987 and Winch 1977). This would risk losing sight of what might be essentially human about all people's social lives, and of the possibility that certain human communication might supravene the isolation of relativity by the power of 'resonance', a concept similar to the 'empathy' of the hermeneutic philosophers (Crespi 1992: 128, 129; Wikan 1994: 199). So, while it is one thing for Rom Harré to affirm that the identification of emotional 'contexts' differs between cultures (Stainton Rogers et.al. 1995: 185), it is quite another for him to claim that

> concepts like 'belief', 'preference' and commitment' seem to me to be local. I can readily imagine and have indeed heard from

> anthropologists of tribes in whose form of life these concepts either do not exist or play a very subsidiary role...In traditional societies in which every detail of life...is laid down in the sacred books or by the tribal elders, the concepts of 'preference' and 'commitment' play a minimal role (Harré 1993b: 121).

For tradition to operate as has been described above, it is necessary to see it as an option for people in all cultures, including small-scale societies. Just as Jim Lowe, participating in the same broad cultural milieu as the Archibalds, could choose not to tradition, so should this choice be, and always have been possible for people within societies like those of the *Alyawarra* or *Pintupi* (Richard Moyle 1979; 1986). This, however, is a very difficult position to defend, owing mainly to a dearth of directly relevant empirical evidence. On this point, it might be appropriate to consider the following comment from Ira Cohen:

> Most social scientists acknowledge pervasive and enduring repetition of customary practices in tribal societies and other small-scale groups. But the extraordinary diversity of social practices in modern Western civilization obscures the extent to which institutionalized routines are constitutive of the daily transaction of events (Cohen 1987: 295).

In upholding belief in the existence of choice in tradition, it is proposed that Cohen's insight be inverted to help explain this lack of evidence. The re-statement would then argue that the apparent conformity of practice in small-scale societies might obscure the extent to which different attitudes may be taken by participants to the same practices there, and the extent to which the same cultural objects and performances might have varying meanings and identities. As this is different to saying that people within small societies can take or leave their cultural heritage (Coplan 1991: 39;

Thomas 1992: 216), choice in tradition is not a phenomenon that would be so readily apparent to observers. In this way, it suggests Quine's image of bushes which, although they have grown up differently, have been trimmed to appear identical (Turner 1994: 19). On the other hand, it may be the case that, because of the predominantly personal scale of these small societies, the desire and opportunity for all or most people to participate in tradition — to intentionally celebrate a network of shared personal commitment to a certain cultural continuity — is greater than in more diffuse cultures. So most people in small-scale societies may indeed participate in tradition much of the time, although this does not in itself obviate their choice not to do so.

In a trend that ironically both affirms and negates this assertion of choice in tradition, some social theorists and anthropologists have recently expressed doubts that cultural practices really can be shared, beyond the realm of merely 'acting in common' (Crespi 1992: 52ff; Derné 1994: 267; Hannerz 1994: 50; Ingold 1994: 230; Marcus 1986: 166; Marcus 1995: 111; Turner 1994: 100). In a systematic dismembering of the concepts of shared practices, norms and sameness, Stephen Turner characterises practices as 'individual habits' (Turner 1994: 123), which seems to draw his argument away from the arena of significant personal relationship and into the 'interaction order'. While no argument is raised against Turner's conclusions as far as they apply to society-at-large, he appears to have left open the possibility that people can share meaning at a fundamental relationship level, if they intend to do so. Turner builds his criticism around the improbability of the internal transmission of practice, especially inter-generational transmission. Although he does not explicitly deny the existence of tradition in the process, he places on its supporters the onus of rationalising just how it can occur:

> It is difficult to see how to avoid some notion of an inaccessible added element by virtue of which there is continuity. So we are faced with Hobson's choice. We may accept the concept of tradition, but only by bearing the burden of the problematic notion of transmission of some sort of tacit stuff (Turner 1994: 97).

Surely the test for tradition, however the concept is viewed, need not be so severe, however. It seems eminently reasonable to accord to people the ability to negotiate meanings, certainly at the personal level, and ensure their continuation intentionally. In any event, there does exist evidence that might go some way towards answering Turner's challenge directly. Trinh T. Minh-ha, in speaking of tradition, explains the way that African story-tellers 'set about composing on life'. It is worth quoting Trinh at length here, for the light her description throws on all that has been said so far:

> tell me so that I can tell my hearers what I have heard from you who heard it from your mother and your great mother...she does so by re-establishing the contact with her foremothers, so that living tradition can never congeal into fixed forms, so that life keeps on nurturing life, so that what is understood as the Past continues to provide the link for the Present and the Future...Tradition as an on-going *commitment*, and in women's own terms (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989: 149. Emphasis added).

Trinh goes on to describe such transmission as a great spiritual power, certainly not mere mimesis or even 'mind-to-mind' communication:

> She fires her to achievement and she fires her with desire to emulate. She fires her with desire to emulate the heroines of whom she told and she fires her with desire to emulate the heroine who tells of the other

> heroines, 'I too had been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story'. What is transmitted from generation to generation is not only the stories, *but the very power of transmission*" (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989: 133, 134. Emphasis added).

Something along the same lines is intimated by David Levin when he writes

> and, as we listen to the words we sing, as we consecrate our ears and our mouth to the enchanting spirit whose sounds we echo; as even the frame of our entire body yields up to the rhythmic measures and the rising and falling intonations, we gradually recreate within ourselves an intimate, unshakable, non-objectifiable *understanding* of the body of knowledge: the sacred language is woven, is insinuated, into the very fibers and bones of the body. And then we know our tradition in a way that we could never have known it, if we had been *pure* minds or souls, separate from the temple of our body (Levin, 1985: 215. Original emphasis).

These evocations are perhaps extremes that serve to drive home their assertion that transmission in tradition is a matter of communication outside the realm of the merely imitative, and that transmission begets, so to speak, further transmission. Moreover, it is in the style in which such transmission operates that the relativity of culture or personality will play its part. It need not for example, be the burning inspiration that fires emulation in such a dramatic way, and I would propose that participants in traditioning itself, rather than in any particular manifestations such as trance-dancing, are in significant control of their intentions and actions while operating at that relationship level. Transmission can be seen in gentler terms in other cultural situations, such as in the cases of Sara Cleveland, Charles Bannen, or in

Henry Glassie's examples. Most importantly, the cultural components of the Archibalds' traditioning — seen, for example, in the application of accommodation techniques and in the investment of musical material with certain powers — renders it unmistakably Aboriginal. But the idea of the transmission is essentially the same for all — that of a conscious giving-and-receiving relationship that celebrates, not only the continuity of the gift, but, perhaps more importantly, the continuity of the relationship that keeps such giving and taking alive. This is more-or-less in line with the etymology of the Latin *tradere*, from *trans+dare*, 'to give across' (Onions 1969: 935), the second element probably stemming from Sanskrit roots having the sense of 'gifting', 'offering to the god(s)' and 'bestowing' (Monier-Williams 1970: 467-476).

In 1963, the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner urged scholars to 'transform anthropology from what it has often seemed to be — a dialogue of abstract nouns — into so to speak a conjugation of verbs' (Stanner 1989: 57). Taking a cue from Stanner, and re-emphasising that this concept of tradition is not to be understood in a taxonomic sense, the common-noun and adjectival usages of the word are far less descriptive of the present argument's meaning, than is the verb 'to tradition'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* does list a transitive verbal usage for the word (Simpson and Weiner 1989: 354), but much of what has been said about tradition's operation would be better-represented by an intransitive verb. So while one would agree with Shils and Gailey that 'traditionality is compatible with almost any subject content' (Gailey 1989: 159; Shils 1981: 12), this chapter's argument would resist the conflation of tradition with 'objective' entities such as culture, performance, lore, style, transmissional forms, canons, the construction of history, or with the fact of cultural persistence (also see Bruns 1991: 8; Waterman 1991: 66). But as tradition must be invoked within an historical setting, any or all these things will be implicated

in its action. And just as Giddens sees the continuity of structure and action to reside, at bottom, in the memory-traces of social agents, so too do the structures arising within tradition persist in the beings of its adherents. This may not be so reduced a locus as memory-trace however, and such continuity will no doubt involve physical as well as psychological dimensions of the whole person. Stephen Turner is surely correct when he says 'If traditions are not object-like things, they cannot be preserved or for that matter rooted out' (Turner 1994: 117). Notwithstanding this truth, cultural practices themselves may well cease, as might any particular network of traditioning, though determining just where tradition might start and stop would require extremely subtle rationalisation. The prevalence of traditioning as a social relationship might be affected by the increasing privatisation of life in societies like Australia, but the potential for tradition will presumably endure for as long as human existence itself.

Because of the ontological (and therefore self-referential) character of this formulation, validation might present a problem for some. But there is no reason to think that it could not be tested — at least for plausibility — and found wanting, though negative evidence may merely show that the option of tradition was not taken up by the subjects of any study. It is important in this regard to reiterate that, as the focal point of interest here is not just a word or even a concept, the phenomenon may prove difficult to isolate — in some circumstances it might only be recognised through discourse, and it is doubtful whether it could ever be perceived by observation alone. This raises methodological issues concerning the nature of ethnographic research relationships and of the knowledge arising within them (in this case, who is to call what tradition?). Most of these questions have been addressed elsewhere in this thesis, and it may suffice to say here, that any determination of the

existence or otherwise of tradition is likely to be one negotiated by all parties to research.

Section Six. Conclusion.

The thrust of this chapter has been the argument that tradition is a universal phenomenon, potentially available for all people to apply in their various cultural settings. In the process, it was seen that other researchers such as Trinh T. Minh-ha have recorded examples of cultural transmission very similar in essence to that involving the Archibald family. It was argued in chapter six that it is the invocation of tradition that distinguishes the Archibalds' cultural experience from that of some other Aboriginal people. It was further reasoned above that the same phenomenon helps explain differences in the way Jim Lowe and the Archibald family have engaged the same basic musical material, and how the Archibalds' Aboriginal traditioning has long persisted, in spite of radical changes to its formal content.

As tradition is here portrayed as a universal phenomenon, the argument that it lies at the heart of the Archibalds' cultural experience might be seen to deny the family the very identity that tradition is meant to foster. It is only in tradition's potential state that this universality is marked however, and once manifested in an historical setting, the phenomenon partakes fully of the cultural commitments of its invokers.

Audio Sources Used for Chapter Seven.

Lowe, Bill 1984. Red Range, unpublished field notebooks, *McDonald Collection*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, TRC 2720.

Lowe, Doug 1983. Backwater, audio tapes, *McDonald Collection*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, TRC 2720/38/1-2.

Lowe, Jim 1983. Backwater, audio tapes, *McDonald Collection*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, TRC 2720/39/1-24; TRC 2720/40; TRC 2720/41/1-56.

Lowe, May 1993. Backwater, audio tapes, *McDonald Collection*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, TRC 3011

Lowe, Ralph 1983. Red Range, audio tapes, *McDonald Collection*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, TRC 2720/41/41.

Chapter Eight. Conclusion.

This thesis was initially conceived in response to the Archibald family's assertion that their English-language musical repertoire represents genuine local Aboriginal culture. In order to understand that challenging statement, it was considered necessary to first consolidate a rather long and involved series of preliminary arguments.

The broad process was facilitated, in the first instance, by the liberating analysis of Russell McGregor, who demonstrated that the obstructive evidence of a great deal of historical source material might profitably be subjected to a healthy review. Once reasonable doubt was cast on the validity of nineteenth-century reports of cultural decline, the way was cleared to reassess, in chapter three, the relational experience of local Aboriginal people. It was found there that, contrary to expectations, they had retained sufficient independence so as to engage in European cultural activities without any necessary threat to their own indigenous integrity.

Creative Aboriginal response to the white challenge was documented at many points throughout the thesis, particularly in relation to the New England district. The flexibility that was seen to characterise the strategy of accommodation, not only ensured the continuation of Aboriginal musical expression, but also produced cultural developments of the utmost ingenuity. While this response was more easily recognised in songs exhibiting minor modification, compositions predominantly European in style presented a greater challenge. However, analysis of the latter invariably furthered understanding of the whole process.

Aboriginal accommodation constituted an important theme within this study. It can be seen to intersect with chapter two's survey of south-eastern music, especially in the description of performers incorporating musical material from 'foreign'

language groups, and investing it with local meaning. The strategy appeared again in chapters three and four, where New England Aboriginal people were shown to have participated enthusistically in European culture in several ways. This was most marked in relation to religion, where it was argued that aspects of white *being* itself were incorporated into expressions of the doctrine of 'jump up whitefeller'. Chapter five depicted accommodation as underlying the composition of the *Square Dance Song*, which married, most skilfully, representative expressions of European and indigenous cultures, without threatening the integrity of either. Finally, in the experience of the Archibald family, the principle of accommodation was seen to have been most vigorously and extensively activated.

Surveys of south-eastern Aboriginal music served at least two functions here. First, they synthesised varied evidential types into a coherent whole, hopefully stimulating some appreciation of the nature of the regional musical milieu. Next, they provided a set of base data to which the Archibalds' evidence could usefully be referred. In the case of both the contact survey (chapter two), and that of musical development (chapter five), the family's practice was reflected as entirely typical, and founded on solid indigenous principles.

The detailed evidence of indigenous musical development given in chapter five, demonstrated how expertly Aboriginal people modified cultural expression to better represent their social reality. The ability of composers and performers to maintain their music's identity while appropriating novel elements, must be acknowledged as extreme in the case of the Archibald family. Given that its members utilised a particularly Aboriginal strategy to do so, one could mount the most ironic argument that their European-style musical output displayed the deepest indigeneity of all the examples discussed by this thesis!

It was shown in chapters five and six that accommodation involved a deliberate separation of indigenous and white musical expressions. With the Archibald family's repertoire, which contains some European-composed songs regarded as Aboriginal, and several others that are not, that separation was seen to be founded on criteria of meaning and function, rather on formal structure. Aboriginal performers were further observed to have incorporated white musical elements into their songs to all possible degrees, from the occasional borrowing of an English word to the appropriation of entire European compositions. It was argued that Catherine Ellis and Tamsin Donaldson have been mistaken in assuming that this indicates a progressive replacement of indigenous by white cultural entities. Their assumption was refuted on the grounds that some of the earliest syncretic productions exhibited the greatest compositional modification, and that, in any event, every degree of incorporation was found in songs known to have been performed contemporaneously.

The primarily relational character of Aboriginal culture, and specifically music, was outlined in some detail in the study. The failure to appreciate this quality, was recognised as the main reason that primarily 'object-oriented' research surveys were unsuccessful in isolating the continuing essences of south-eastern music, and only partially documented the richness of local musical cultures. It was postulated from the Archibalds' evidence, that these essences related to performance contexts, the circumstances regarding song-composition, and the 'power-laden' qualities of songs.

The Baanbai elders of Oban were seen, in chapter six, to have invoked tradition in their education of Frank Archibald. The operation of this phenomenon was recognised in their handing over not only cultural material — some modified by accommodation — but also the means whereby this material could be further

transmitted. In their turn, the next generation of Archibalds was represented as engaging with the process in order to keep alive Frank's indigenous musical culture. It was reasoned that participation in this style of traditioning has not been an option taken up by all local Aboriginal people.

I was very fortunate to witness, within two days of submitting this thesis, a speech given in Armidale by Aidan Ridgeway. As Australia's sole Aboriginal senator, this man stands in a relationship of enormous symbolic significance to the entire Australian community. Most appropriately, Senator Ridgeway spoke of Reconciliation between Australia's indigenous and white populations, considered by himself and many others to be the single most important social question for the nation at this time. It just so happens that the Senator identifies as *Gumbaynggirr,* and the words he spoke resonated particularly strongly with my involvement in this study. In the face of government attempts to deny the horrors of policies implemented during the Stolen Generations era, Aidan Ridgeway said that 'Reconciliation is all about stories that need to be told' (Ridgeway, Armidale, 18-4-2000). Although I do not claim that the work presented here will materially aid the course of Reconciliation, I believe it could join the body of Aboriginal stories that are now being told to redress some previous misapprehensions. I am more confident in the knowledge that the *Gumbaynggirr* community — and the Archibald family in particular —in taking me to its collective story-telling bosom, has initiated a personal act of healing that has the broadest ramifications for our continuing relationship. That this has been carried out with love, confirms for me the family's belief that therein lies the essence of Aboriginal social philosophy.

Plate 3 **New England, Pastoral Stations**

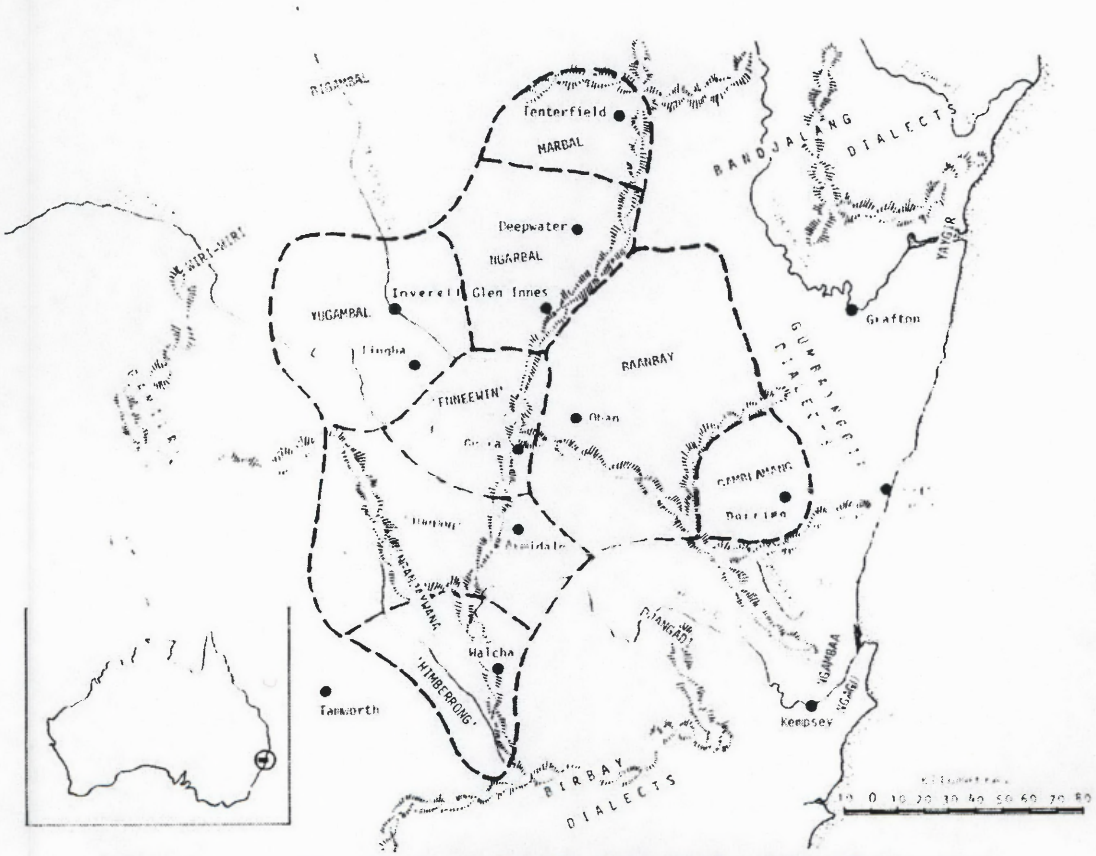

Plate 4 **New England, Distibution of Aboriginal Languages.**

Plate 5 Red Rock Bush Band

Plate 6 New England Ceremony

Plate 7. **Frank Archibald**

Plate 8. **King Robert and Queen Emily**

Plate 10 **Maisie Kelly**

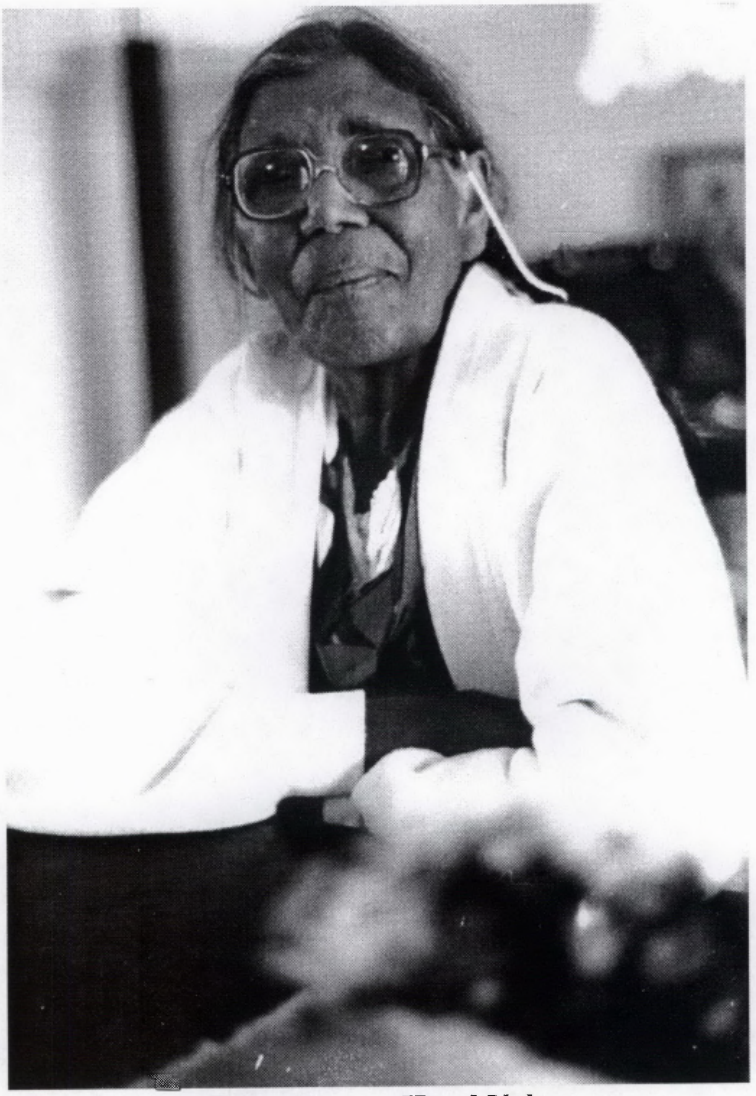

Plate 11 Hazel Vale