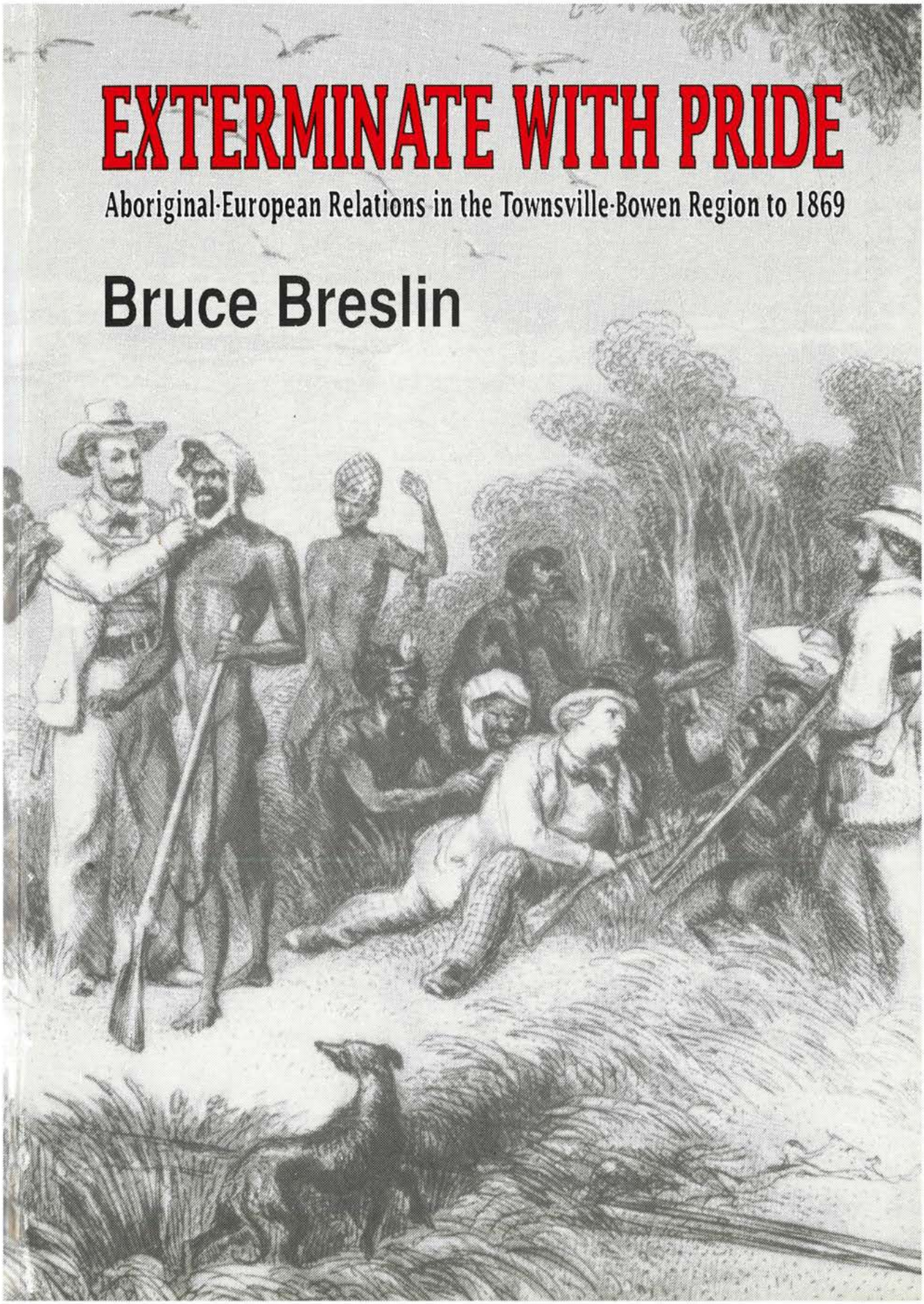
EXTERMINATE WITH PRIDE

Aboriginal-European Relations in the Townsville-Bowen Region to 1869

Bruce Breslin



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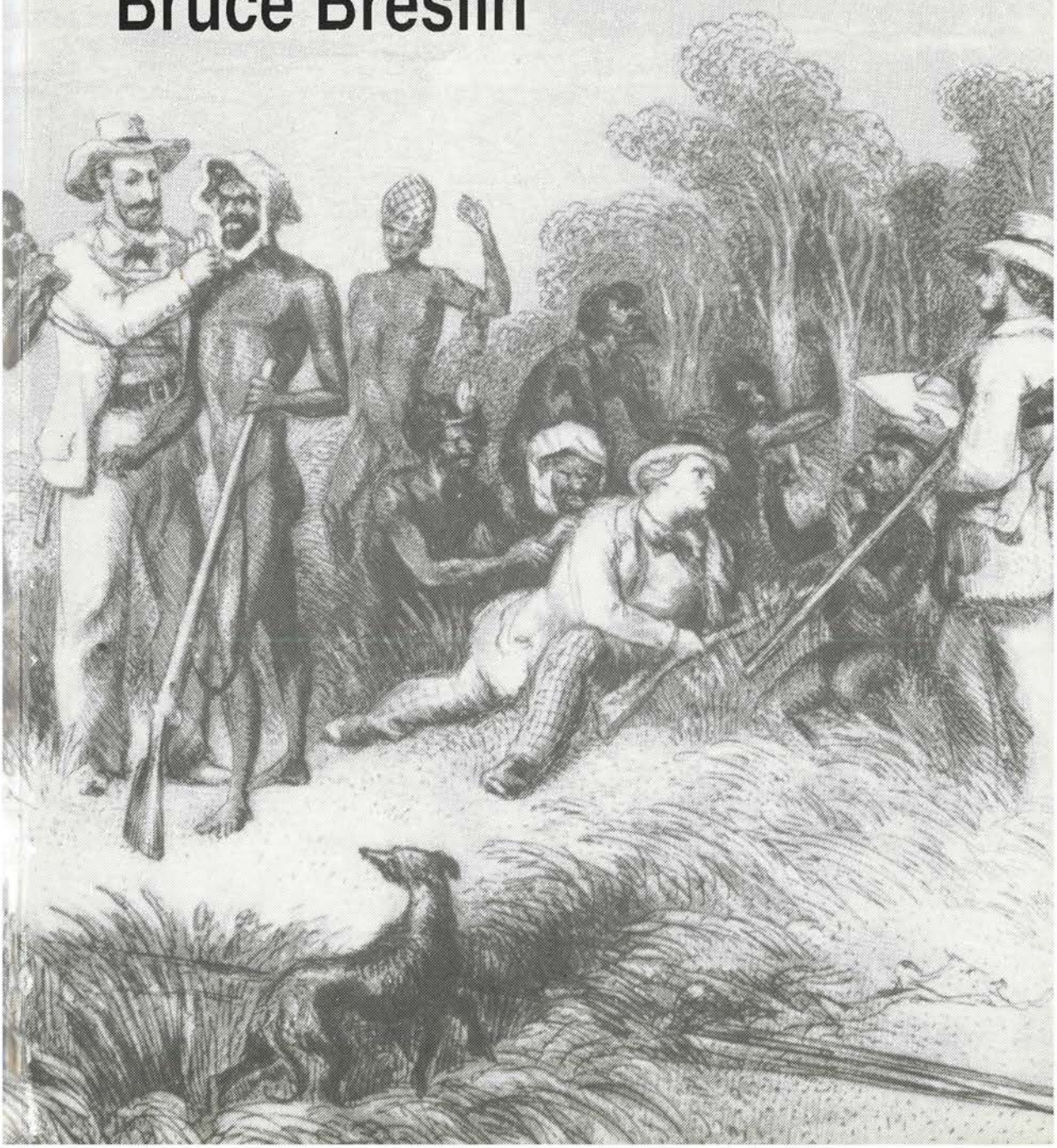

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STUDIES IN NORTH QUEENSLAND HISTORY

1. Anne Allingham, *'Taming the Wilderness': the first decade of pastoral settlement in the Kennedy District*, 2nd ed., 1978, reprinted 1989

2. Peter Bell, *The Mount Mulligan Disaster,* 1978; reprinted 1989

3. Diane Menghetti, *The Red North: the Popular Front in North Queensland*, 1981, reprinted 1989

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5. Dawn May, *From Bush to Station: aboriginal labour in the North Queensland pastoral industry, 1861-1897*, 1983

6. Cathie May, *Topsawyers: the Chinese in Cairns, 1870-1920*, 1984 (out of print)

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EXTERMINATE WITH PRIDE

Aboriginal-European relations in the Townsville-Bowen region to 1869

Bruce Breslin

Foreword by Henry Reynolds

Mourn not the dead
But rather mourn the apathetic throng,
The cowed and meek
Who see the world's great anguish and its wrong
And do not speak.

Anon.

Department of History & Politics
James Cook University
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FOREWORD

It was probably inevitable that historians working in North Queensland would turn their attention to the history of race relations and of Aboriginal-European relations in particular. For those who came north as adults, with no experience of what Charles Rowley called colonial Australia, the local scene was continually surprising and often disturbing. It was a revelation which shaped attitudes to the present and the past, raising questions which could not be answered with the knowledge or the means provided by a traditional Australian education. Students who had grown up in North Queensland often faced the growing realisation that many things their society and often their own families had taken for granted were manifestations of old injustice and deeply impacted prejudice.

But the task required of local historians was wider than the investigation of Aboriginal-European relations. It was necessary to write the history of the region almost from the ground up although Bolton's *A Thousand Miles Away*, published in 1963 two years after the foundation of the Townsville University College, was a fine synthesis of what was known at the time. North Queensland students who wanted to understand their own society could learn little from the general histories of Australia. The region was settled in the second half of the 19th century. Much of what happened - squatting, mining, pioneer agriculture, the founding of towns and networks of communication - had all occurred before somewhere else. Local history seemed to be a mere recapitulation in the tropics of what had happened a generation earlier and a thousand and more miles away.

There was, when the University was founded, little local historiographical tradition - no museums, no major libraries or archives, no art galleries, no historical societies, little interest in family history. Even the towns had an air of impermanence. The houses, perched on their stumps above the sunbaked earth, seemed ready to take flight at a moment's notice - or be blown away in the next cyclone.

Serious study of race relations was launched in 1968 when Noel Loos began his thesis on frontier contact in the Bowen district. At the time it was by no means clear that there would be enough evidence to build the thesis on and almost no earlier work to use as a model. At much the same time, and unknown to either Noel or his supervisor, several other honours students were beginning work on similar topics. At the University of Queensland Ray Evans was researching Queensland government policy towards the Aborigines while in

Adelaide Mervyn Hartwig was re-discovering the events culminating in the Coniston Massacre in Central Australia in 1928. In Townsville we were also unaware of Charles Rowley's Social Science Research Council project on the Aborigines conducted during 1964-67 and culminating in the publication of his celebrated trilogy in 1971.

But the obvious success of Noel Loos's thesis and interested stimulated by the publication of Henry Reynolds's book of documents *Aborigines and Settlers* in 1972 ensured that the history department would continue to pursue the linked question of race and ethnicity. They became progressively more important in general courses on Australian history. Between 1974 and 1978 we taught a course on race relations in Australia and beyond. Unfortunately it had to be given up due to new demands on limited teaching resources. A Black Oral History project was undertaken in 1973-75 which resulted in a large collection of interviews with Aborigines and Islanders. In rapid succession research students began working on Pacific Islands, Chinese and Italian migrants as well as on White-Aboriginal relations. When the Department published *Race Relations in North Queensland* in 1978 the bibliography of work produced up to that time included nine theses and 29 books, chapters, or articles.

When Bruce Breslin came to research his thesis on Aboriginal-European relations between Bowen and Cape Cleveland he had a much richer historiography to relate to with a rapidly growing body of work produced by many hands in all parts of the country. In its increased sophistication and far greater sensitivity to the complex issues involved in writing contact history his book reflects changes which have taken place in the last twenty years, not just in Australian scholarship but in Australian society as a whole. Bruce was also able to reflect on our own local historiographical tradition and to offer significant re-interpretation of earlier Departmental work - not just Noel Loos's pioneering thesis but also D.J. Farnfield's *Frontiersman* (OUP 1968) a biographical study of George Elphingstone Dalrymple, the founder of the settlement of Bowen.

Exterminate With Pride is a valuable contribution not just to North Queensland history; it is also an important addition to the growing number of regional studies of early contact and frontier conflict which are providing the essential building blocks for the first truly continental study of the early years of Aboriginal-European relations.

The History Department proudly presents it to a wider audience.

Henry Reynolds

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the supervisor of the thesis from which this book emerged, Associate Professor Kett H. Kennedy of James Cook University of North Queensland, deserves the highest praise for his untiring assistance and unerring editorial hand. Credit also goes to him for revitalizing his student when the sheer weight of the task threatened to engulf him.

Special thanks also go to Associate Professor Henry Reynolds, Professor Brian Dalton, Dr John Taylor, Dr Athol Chase and Dr Brian H. Glover who have so generously made themselves available for consultation.

Gratitude is also expressed to Thancoupie, Artukanee, Dorothy Gibson-Wilde and Sue Barstow for the many helpful insights which they have given me in the course of my research. I am indebted also to Professor Richard Jackson for drawing the maps.

To
Marjorie, Matthew, Dominic,
Francis, Phillip, Simon and Thomas

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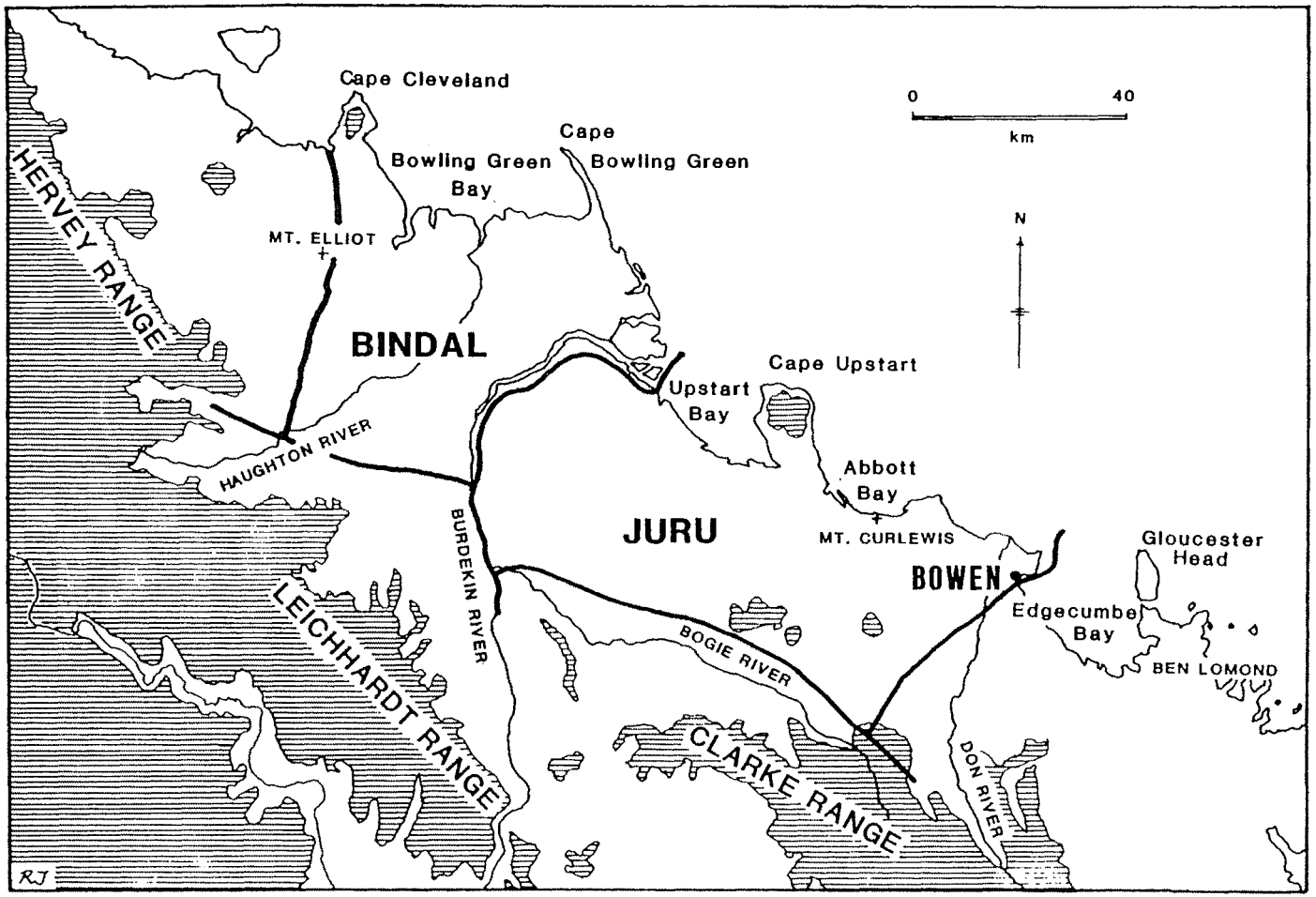

Map I Tribal Boundaries

INTRODUCTION

This book is a revisionist interpretation of Aboriginal-European relations (1843-1869) in a geographical area which was once the homeland of the Bindal and Juru peoples of North Queensland.[1] The time span of just over a quarter of a century provides a sufficient chronological base upon which an examination and interpretation of Aboriginal-European interaction can be made. Prior to about 1859, the intermittent contact between Royal Navy hydrographers, explorers, castaways and Aboriginal Australians was one devoid of any desire to possess and subdue Aboriginal lands. The relationship, therefore, was essentially a friendly one, and the original inhabitants often accepted the Europeans as returned members of the Aboriginal dead. From 1859 onwards, the dynamics of contact changed: the white invasion of North Queensland was about to begin. Any likelihood of establishing a compromise with the Aborigines was vitiated within a decade by the same rigidity of thought and aggressiveness of action which had characterised the European conquest in the southern states. The year 1869 marked the end of several years of open warfare, and the Aborigines were "let in" to the stations and townships. One era had finished, but another - that of more intimate contact with the invaders' Christianity and capitalism - was beginning.

Revisionism was demanded because the existing interpretations were significant for what they lacked: an inside view - one which revealed the perspectives of the Aborigines who played a major role in the history of North Queensland. An interpretation was required which could synthesise the views of both peoples. This study has accepted that challenge.

"For history," said R. G. Collingwood, "the object to be discovered is not the mere event, but the thought expressed in it ... All history is

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1 Today, the titles of the landmarks along the coastal stretch between Cape Cleveland and Bowen, and westwards as far as the Hervey's and Leichhardt Ranges, bear witness to the European conquest and settlement. The linguistic, or tribal, boundaries are based on those delineated by Tindale. He defined the "tribe" as the "normally endogamous unit most commonly recognised in Australia, generally known as occupying a given territory, speaking mutually intelligible dialects, having a common kinship system, and sharing the performance of ceremonial rites of interest to them all." See Norman B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia. Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits and Proper Names* (Canberra, 1974), p.33.

the history of thought ... and therefore all history is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind."[2] In attempting to re-create imaginatively the events examined in this work, it has been necessary to include the past thoughts of both Aborigines and Europeans. While there was a plethora of original and secondary evidence to help interpret the European version of events, there was a paucity of data from the Aboriginal participants who left no written records of their side of the story. The absence of reserves, missions or settlements in the area, and the compulsory removal of many remaining Aborigines to other Queensland reserves during the early part of this century, meant that there was no strong oral tradition in the area upon which to draw. Use has been made, therefore, of an Aboriginal memory culture - the record of Aborigines elsewhere who have themselves either experienced similar events or who have been told about such events by their parents or grandparents. While "'remembering'", as R.M. and C H. Berndt have demonstrated, "is not the same thing as noting down events at the time they took place," it does nevertheless contribute to the building up of a "repertoire of information that enables us to evaluate, perhaps more realistically, what actually took place."[3] Gaining access to the Aboriginal version of events gives Europeans an insight into that shared knowledge which Aborigines have used to interpret their world.

Similarly, there was a dearth of anthropological ethnographies for this area - an indication of the astonishing rapidity of settlement once it had been discovered. It was necessary, therefore, to rely upon ethnographic analogy - a method which finds similar behaviours in other Aboriginal groups which are well described and imputes these same motives to the group in question. Although the field studies of trained anthropologists such as Thomson (1932/4), Stanner (1965/8, 1977), Sutton (1978), Chase (1980) and Taylor (1984) have been utilised, the researches of many others who preceded the professional phase - Smyth (1876), Lumholtz (1889), Walter E. Roth (1901-1910), Howitt (1904), and Spencer and Gillen (1912) - have also been incorporated, as their contribution is often all that remains known of particular peoples. Such a method has helped elucidate the actions of Aborigines whose motives have often been unclear or misunderstood by

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2 R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1946), pp.214-15.

3 R.M. and C. H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians* (Adelaide, 1985), p.547.

ethnocentric Europeans. The evidence thus gained has often been the difference between the "mere event" and the thought behind that event.[4] It was the beginning of a journey to what Henry Reynolds called "the other side of the frontier".[5]

To broaden the Aboriginal perspective, it has also been necessary to explore aspects of visual communication which were heavily relied upon in pre-literate societies. Literate historians have tended to ignore the fact that visual communication - one of the commonest means of communication among individuals - existed in these pre-literate societies in the form of gesture language and hand signals. Although many of the early European accounts made mention of signs and gestures, some historians seem to remain unaware that gesture language was an integral part of Aboriginal communication and not just an aid to speech. Gestures were charged with both information and emotional power and they form a crucial component of this study which seeks to interpret the Aboriginal response.

The synthesis of Aboriginal memory culture, ethnographic analogy and European records has helped to re-create a past which challenges the historiography of Aboriginal-European relations in the area of study. Once the Aboriginal perspectives have been established, a coherent interpretation of events unfolds. The claims of G. C. Bolton - that the Aborigines were bellicose and instinctively knew from the outset that Bowen was to become the base for the pastoral settlement of North Queensland - are seen to have no basis in fact.[6] Similarly, Jean Farnfield's assertions that the Aborigines were "utterly primitive savages, with whom there was no means of communication" are also refuted.[7] Farnfield's argument that Aboriginal hostility prevented George Elphinstone Dalrymple, First Commissioner for Crown Lands (Kennedy), from establishing peaceful relationships with the Aboriginal people is also rejected.[8] It is the replication of past thought

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4 Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p.214.

5 Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier* (Townsville, 1981). See particularly the Introduction.

6 G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away* (Canberra, 1963), p.21. In a more popular context see Glenville Pike, "Bowen's Place in History", *This Australia* 3, No.1 (Summer 1983-4), p.89.

7 Jean Farnfield, *Frontiersman: A Biography of George Elphinstone Dalrymple* (Melbourne, 1968), p.29.

8 *Ibid.*, ch.2.

which creates the inside view and counterbalances the European version to produce a new frontier.

Ironically, it is often the historical sources not previously consulted for this area of study - the *Maryborough Chronicle* and the *Queensland Guardian* - which help to rectify the earlier historical interpretations. Loos' claim, later supported by Allingham, that the infant colony at Bowen "met with intense Aboriginal opposition",[9] is undermined by the overwhelming weight of evidence to the contrary in the columns of both newspapers.

A marked reluctance by Bolton, Farnfield, Loos and Allingham to question rigorously many of the claims made by Dalrymple prevented an earlier reassessment of Aboriginal-European contact. Farnfield's romantic treatment of her subject, Dalrymple, led her to take at face-value most of his claims concerning his motives and those he attributed to the Aborigines. These were later accepted, or remained unchallenged, by Loos and Allingham who, it seems, perceived no disrepancy between Dalrymple's versions and the ethnographic and historical evidence to the contrary. Even today Dalrymple's version remains undisputed as in Alma Bode's recent publication *The Pioneers Went These Ways.*[10]

It is not surprising, therefore, that present day inhabitants in this area of study - in some cases the actual descendants of the early white settlers - remain uninformed about initial Aboriginal-European relations. Indeed, the *Clare Centenary* devoted six paragraphs to the Aboriginal inhabitants and noted that there was "surprisingly little comment on our original Australians in the records of our pioneers."[11]

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9 Noel Anthony Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations in North Queensland, 1861-1897, (Ph.D. thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1976), p. 147; Anne Allingham, *"Taming the Wilderness": the First Decade of Pastoral Settlement in the Kennedy District* (Townsville, 1978), p.149.

10 Alma Bode, *The Pioneers Went These Ways* (Brisbane, n.d.), chs.5 and 11.

11 Clare Centenary Committee, *Clare Centenary* (Townsville n.d.), p.7. It is not uncommon for a local community to believe that there is little evidence available concerning the Aborigines. Jim Threadingham claimed that the main reason the Aborigines were ignored was "not, for the main part lack of interest in these remarkable people but from an almost complete lack, in most cases, of information about them". See Jim Threadingham, *Some Memories of the Boyne Valley* (Rockhampton, 1982), p.14.

This was six paragraphs more than what Ayr's special centenary edition of the *Advocate* produced in the same year.[12]

The ease with which a community's history can be erased was illustrated in 1982 with the production and performance of *A Time to Remember* - a "musical history" celebrating the Burdekin's centenary.[13] This fitting "tribute to the pioneers of the Burdekin" eliminated any mention of the people who had lived in the country for longer than any other nationality.[14] The ultimate had happened: a local community had begun to forget its past and reveal a cultural capacity to exterminate the Aboriginal perspective with pride. However, the evidence produced in this thesis refuses to allow the Aboriginal spirit to be forgotten. It is a time to reflect: a time to remember.

Chapter One establishes from the outset that the Aborigines were people. Like human beings anywhere, they had thoughts and emotions and drew upon a cultural tradition to help them explain the world around them. With the sudden and somewhat extraordinary appearance of "ghosts" (Europeans) on their shores, the Aboriginal response was both complex and comprehensive, and embraced the full range of human emotions. The brief convergence of two cultures posed a challenge to both European and Aborigine. The latter society satisfied its need to come to terms with the European presence by a spontaneous and public expression of its shared values and emotions. The immediacy and nature of the Aboriginal response - dance, drama and music - often shocked the Europeans who had long ago shed that unconstrained communal expression from which the arts had arisen. Those Europeans such as Jukes who responded sensitively to the

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12 *Advocate*, Centenary Edition, December 1982.

13 *Ibid.*, 1 December 1982. A copy of the script of this play is in my possession. It has no author, title, place or date of publication. The above edition of the *Advocate*, however, mentioned that the play was "devised and directed by Graeme Johnson [sic]" who was commissioned by the Burdekin Shire Council to direct its performance. The play was variously entitled *Time to Remember* (*Advocate*, 1 December 1982) or *A Time to Remember* (*Advocate*, 10 December 1982). It was advertised in card form as "A Time to Remember" (Card, "A Time to Remember" Lower Burdekin News Print, Ayr n.d.). The play was performed six times between Friday, 26 November and Saturday, 4 December 1982 and entertained some 2,800 citizens of the Burdekin District. See "thanks to cast and crew", *Advocate*, 10 December 1982. I personally attended a performance of the play in the Burdekin Theatre, Ayr.

14 Card, "A Time to Remember", Ayr n.d.

Aborigines' demonstrative attempts to come to terms with their changed circumstances, established a comfortable contact on the frontier in this area of study. It was they who could share a common campfire. Others, such as James Murrells' shipwrecked companions, found it difficult to adapt to Aboriginal society, and they withered within it. This was a period which lacked the callousness of conquest, but it was far from idyllic: there was ignorance, misunderstanding and stupidity which rendered illusory any suggestion of a utopia.

Chapter two analyses the 1848-1860 period during which potential pastoralists and government- sponsored exploring parties reconnoitred the Burdekin and its adjacent coastline. These people brought with them the same ideas and attitudes which had given birth to violence and dispossession in the southern colonies. In their brief encounters with the Aboriginal inhabitants, most were prevented by their preconceived ideas from accepting the Aborigine as a rational being. The ensuing incidents clearly illustrated that the so-called wisdom of colonial experience became the genesis of genocide in North Queensland. This chapter refutes the accepted long-held belief that Aboriginal intentions were malevolent and questions Loos' claim that an opportunity existed for making "a fresh start" in Aboriginal-European relations.[15]

Chapter Three deals with the 1861 invasion, and examines the philosophy and justification for conquest. It scrutinizes the actions of George Elphinstone Dalrymple who spearheaded the European incursion into Aboriginal lands and who pursued the policy euphemistically called "pacification". It reveals that, contrary to the claims of Farnfield and Loos, Dalrymple consistently demonstrated that he had no real intention of cultivating good relationships between Aborigines and Europeans. Unacceptable also is Loos' claim that the Bowen hinterland could be isolated as having a special and different pattern of conflict to many other areas of North Queensland.[16] The Aboriginal attacks of "suicidal" proportions which, according to Loos, were attempted on the newly formed township of Bowen, existed only in the imaginations of settlers and historians alike.[17]

Chapter Four (1862-1868) argues that the concept of a permanent European settlement in North Queensland took several years to

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[15] Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, p.146.

[16] *Ibid.*, p.146.

[17] *Ibid.*, p.148.

develop in Aboriginal minds. Meanwhile, the dislocation and destruction of their society provoked a black resistance lasting some five years and produced devastating consequences for both black and white. Against this backdrop of violence and dispossession strode the man, Murrells, who, it is postulated, was forced by the turmoil to return to white society. Murrells had high ideals for helping his former companions but became disillusioned by an uncompromising white mentality and, perhaps, willed his own early death. The violence of the frontier produced physical and psychological effects in black, white, townspeople and countrypeople alike. Eventually, when the economic viability of the pastoral industry was threatened, a compromise was sought with the nomads.

The final chapter emphasises that it was a strategic stalemate rather than a European technological triumph which forced frontier capitalism to accommodate Aboriginal society. There does not seem to be convincing evidence to uphold Loos' claims that the "letting in" movement was aided by "a significant change in the balance of power"[18] and that "most Aborigines had lost all desire or capacity to resist".[19] The reverse seems the case: the Aborigines were "let in" because of the strength of their resistance and its effect on a depressed pastoral economy. The resistance changed form, but remained overt - as it does to this day - and adapted to particular needs as they arose. Conversion to capitalism rather than Christianity was the hope held out to the Aborigines by North Queensland's first white community in Bowen. What followed was a debasement of human values which meant that Aborigines would be exploited legally, economically and sexually.

Today, the gulf separating a black from a white humanity persists. The barrier is a psychological one, and whether it will be bridged or broadened is for each one of us to decide. Like the explorers of the last century who sought to know what lay inside our continent, the way is now open for us to explore our national consciousness.

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18 *Ibid.*, p.390.

19 N.A. Loos, Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District, 1861-1874, (M.A. Qualifying thesis, James Cook University, 1970), p.184.

Chapter One

A GLOW FROM THE FIRE

The Bindal and Juru peoples initially feared the strange white beings who appeared among them. Although this fear and caution lingered as perennial characteristics of contact situations between 1819-1848, curiosity and friendship emerged as the predominant responses of Aboriginal society. Inquisitiveness about white people included a concern about such things as identity, destination and property, and often resulted in the Aborigines identifying the whites as the spirits of some past members of the clan made incarnate. From about 1843, Aboriginal hospitality was extended to the visiting British naval officers and white castaways by either convivial relationships or the acceptance of the castaways within the clan as reincarnated spirits. The Aborigines also appreciated the friendship offered by the Europeans, but they reacted with discomfort to the sometimes patronising attempts by whites to communicate with them. To the latter's credit, they often demonstrated discipline and restraint in situations which could otherwise have led to conflict. Overall, the Aborigines insisted that their cultural integrity be preserved and, where necessary, they dealt assertively with those Europeans who attempted to threaten it. For several years, both white and black showed that they could share a common fireplace. This campfire shed not only light but also the possibilities which could be ignited in people's hearts: peace, strength and friendship. It was during this brief - all too brief - period that there seemed to emerge a glow from the fire.

It seems very likely that the "very large smooks" which Captain Cook saw rise from the lowland near Cape Bowling Green and, the next day, those which he saw rise from the shores around Cleveland Bay,[1] signified that something more than Aboriginal hunting activities were in progress.[2] Smokes could also have been the means used by

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1 J.C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery: The Voyage of the Endeavour 1768-1771* (London, 1955), 1:338,339.

2 The Aborigines in the Herbert-Burdekin District used fire to hunt game. See Carl Lumholtz, "A Residence Among the Natives of Australia", *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society*, 21, no. 1 (1889), 23; H. Brayshaw, Aboriginal Material Culture in the Herbert-Burdekin District, (Ph.D. thesis, James Cook

Aborigines to convey important information over long distances[3]: in this case, the important information might well have been the sudden appearance of a strange, new phenomenon on the horizon. In June of 1770, this new phenomenon, Cook's *Endeavour,* passed local Aborigines by, and it seems that they had to wait another forty-nine years before they would personally contact these strange visitors from the sea.[4] In the meantime, the occasional sightings of European

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University of North Queensland, 1977), p.121.

3 Early explorers, colonists and ethnographers often claimed that the Aborigines used smokes for signalling. See J.C. Beaglehole, *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks 1768-1771* (Sydney, 1962), 1:82. Of the fires lit by Aborigines at the Endeavour River, Beaglehole commented: "We may guess in our turn that these fires were made for signalling, and that the aborigines up and down the coast were well apprised of the Endeavour's arrival." T.L. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia; With Descriptions of the Recently Explored Region of Australia Felix, and of the Present Colony of New South Wales* (London, 1839), 1:129; W.G. Stretton, "Customs, Rites, and Superstitions of the Aboriginal Tribes of the Gulf of Carpentaria, with a Vocabulary", *Royal Society of South Australia Transactions* 17 (1892-93), 248; Geo. Sutherland, *Pioneering Days: Thrilling Incidents Across the Wilds of Queensland with Sheep to the Northern Territory In the Early Sixties* (Brisbane, 1913),p.6; A.W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London, 1904), pp.720-23. See also, Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier* , pp.18-19. An opposing viewpoint claims that the Aborigines did not use smoke signals. Ethnologist, Walter E. Roth, asserted: "I am now satisfied after repeated enquiry and cross-examination, that the allegation of a method of communication by so-called "smoke signal" is not warranted by the facts". See Walter E. Roth, "North Queensland Ethnography Bulletin, no. 11", in his "North Queensland Ethnography Bulletins 9-18", *Records of the Australian Museum*, 6-8 (1907-1910), 84; Blake drew a similar conclusion: "They did sometimes make smoke to indicate their presence, but they did not develop a system of varying smoke patterns to convey messages". Barry J. Blake, *Australian Aboriginal Languages* (Sydney, 1981), p.46. It is quite possible, and even likely, that fires and smokes were prearranged signals with relatively low information levels. This can be detected in the tales from the Torres Strait. Walek the frill-necked lizard, volunteered to go to the northern mainland to investigate smoke and fire, and told his friends: "Watch the islands to the north...when you see smoke go up on those islands you will know I am on my way home". See Margaret Lawrie, "How Fire was brought to Torres Strait", in *Tales from Torres Strait* (St. Lucia, 1972), p.1.

4 The first recorded case of contact seems to be that made by Captain P. King. He did not see any Aborigines, but felt confident enough to state: "...we were probably watched by them in all our proceedings". See Captain Phillip P. King, *Narrative of a Survey of the Inter-Tropical and Western Coasts of Australia*

vessels or the tales about these visitors which they would have heard from distant clans,[5] would have both stimulated and sustained their curiosity.

Contrary to Geoffrey Blainey's generalisation that the Aborigines of Australia showed a "calm apathy" to the sudden appearance of whites in their territory,[6] Aborigines between Cleveland Bay and Cape Upstart almost certainly placed the intruders under close surveillance

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Performed Between the Years 1818 and 1822 (1827; rpt Adelaide, 1969), 1:194; for a full discussion of the European discovery of Australia before Cook, see Lawrence Fitzgerald, *Java La Grande. The Portuguese Discovery of Australia* (Hobart, 1986).

5 It seems that Aborigines remembered the passing ships. Frank Reid claimed to have spoken to an aged Aborigine on Whitsunday Island in 1913(?) about a story handed down through the tribe. The elderly man told how an open boat approached early one morning with a number of men and a woman on board. Reid suggested that this could have been William and Mary Bryant who, together with their two children and seven other convicts, left Port Jackson in March, 1791. See Frank Reid, *The Romance of the Great Barrier Reef* (Sydney, 1954), p.23; it is also very likely that tales would have reached the Bindal and Juru people from far to the north and south. (Murrells, the shipwrecked sailor, confirmed that "the news soon spreads from tribe to tribe." *Port Denison Times* (hereafter *P.D.T.*), 10 June 1865. In 1815, Captain Jeffreys of His Majesty's armed brig *Kangaroo*, contacted some Aborigines at Cape Sandwich who "were very friendly, and conveyed fruits to the vessel..." (See the London Sunday newspaper *The Constitution*, 8 March 1818). Close and constant contact between these clans would have ensured a ready exchange of information about the European visitors. In 1865, it was claimed that some Aborigines who had assembled at Jarvisfield Station (Burdekin River) for a "grand 'bora'" were from as far away as Rockingham Bay (*P.D.T.*, 17 February 1865). For a detailed explanation of inter-tribal contact, see Brayshaw, Aboriginal Material Culture, pp.71-79; C. Price, "Vocabulary of the Coonambella Tribe Written in an Exercise Book" MSS.No. 85 QLD, Royal Commonwealth Society, London; E.M. Curr, *The Australian Race: Its Origin, Languages, Customs, Place of Landing in Australia and the Routes by which it Spread Over That Continent* (Melbourne, 1886-7) 2:471. Archibald Meston gave an illustration of the type of information which was relayed up and down the coast in a short story in 1893. See Archibald Meston, "The Cave Skeleton", *North Queensland Register*, Christmas Number, 25 December 1893, rpt. *Literature in North Queensland*, centenary retrospective issue, 9, no.3 (1981), 25. Meston's story cannot be written off as fiction. A record of his experiences was published later in 1898; see A. Meston, "A Fragment of a Description of a Bora at Mt. Milbirraman", *Science of Man and Australian Anthropological Journal*, I, no. 1 (February 1898), 10-11.

6 Geoffrey Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads: A History of Ancient Australia* (Melbourne, 1975), p.253.

until they had time to assimilate the new experience of Europeans and their ships. Captain Phillip P. King, who made detailed surveys of northern waters between 1819 and 1821, felt this Aboriginal scrutiny when he landed at Cleveland Bay in 1819. King observed the very recently imprinted footprints of "human feet, as well as those of a dog", but did not see a single Aborigine. After analysing the evidence, King was quick to conclude that "we were probably watched by them in all our proceedings".[7] Captain Wickham, who undertook further hydrographic surveys in the wake of Flinders and King, commented on this keen Aboriginal vigilance when he visited the Wickham River (hereafter, Burdekin River) in 1838. After observing "a good many smokes" in the distance up the river, Wickham espied one Aborigine who was "crawling on his hand and knees, to catch a glimpse of the strange intruders"[8] No doubt the length of time taken to confront the invader differed markedly from place to place throughout the continent and might range from a few minutes to many years.

Fear of Europeans could often immobilise individuals. This can be seen in the reactions of one young Aboriginal man who had been surprised by the sudden appearance of Wickham's landing party at Cape Upstart. Instead of escaping with the rest of his fellow countrymen, this lad "stowed himself away in a crack between two boulders of granite". According to J. Lort Stokes, who later narrated the incident, every endeavour to induce him to come out proved fruitless. When biscuit was offered, he responded by snapping "savagely with his teeth at the hand that held it". Something of the impact made can be gleaned from Stokes' comment that "no doubt, the account he gave his comrades of us, while under the influence of fright, was sufficiently terrible to take them all away from the neighbourhood".[9]

Although the exact thoughts and feelings of the lad at Cape Upstart will never be known, the behaviour of Aborigines in other parts of the continent does provide some insight into the workings of the Aboriginal mind when first confronted with strangers. Lilardia

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7 King, *Narrative of a Survey,* p.194.

8 J. Lort Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia; With an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle, in the Years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43. By Command of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. Also a Narrative of Captain Owen Stanley's Visits to the Islands in the Arafura Sea* (1846; rpt. Adelaide, 1969), 1:331.

9 Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia,* 1:335-6.

(Margaret Tucker), retelling the tales handed down from her mother's grandmother, related the impressions of Aborigines who had followed the original white explorers down the Murray River. These Aborigines, said Tucker:

> watched these men from behind bushy gum trees, and ran silently from tree to tree as the men rowed down the river. My people were filled with awe and thought the explorers were Spirit Men. The red handkerchiefs they wore around their necks were thought to be a ring of blood.[10]

There can be little doubt that the man who crawled on his hands and knees to catch a glimpse of Wickham's party, and the lad who hid himself away at Cape Upstart, were both experiencing similar feelings to Margaret Tucker's ancestors along the New South Wales - Victorian border. Aboriginal society was being challenged with a new presence, and it needed time not only to absorb the occurrence but also to explain it from within the context of its own world view.

What caused Cape Upstart Aborigines to be thrown into a state of "fright" when they were surprised by a landing party from the *Beagle* is open to speculation.[11] Some explanation could be sought in the reactions of Aborigines elsewhere when they first encountered European ships and men. Goobalathaldin (Dick Roughsey), a member of the Lardil community at Mornington Island, told how the sight of ships could cause alarm to Aborigines. The ships' sails and the loud rattling noise of the anchors, said Roughsey, "sent my father and all our poor naked people running away in fright, and they ran on until they were hidden by the scrub on Dinglemah Hill".[12] Major Edmund Lockyer, who was sent by Governor Brisbane up the Brisbane River in 1825, noted how the Aborigines there "kept constantly pointing with their fingers to the boats and shouting, supposing them, as I concluded to be alive".[13] Several days later, he could not induce the Aborigines

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10 Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared* (Sydney, 1977), p.45; a similar account was also published by Tess de Araugo, "Memories of the Murray River People", *This Australia* 4, no. 1 (Summer 1984/85), 55.

11 Stokes, 1:335.

12 Dick Roughsey, *Moon and Rainbow: The Autobiography of an Aboriginal* (Adelaide, 1979), p.13.

13 Edmund Lockyer, "Journal of an Excursion to Moreton Bay, and up the River Brisbane in the Year 1825, by Edmund Lockyer, Esq., J.P. - Late Major, in His Majesty's 57th Regt of Foot", rpt. in *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay District 1770-1830*, ed. J.G. Steele (St Lucia, 1972), p.191.

to go near the place where the boats were situated. One woman, he said, "shook her head, and put her hand in her mouth, as if she were afraid they would bite".[14] Roughsey also explained why his people feared the men "with faces of white pipe-clay". His people had heard from other clans that the white people "could kill a man with thunder that sent out invisible spears to tear a hole in his body and spill his blood on the sand".[15] Clearly, individuals had fears to conquer and these could not always be overcome immediately. As late as 1838, some Europeans felt that the coastal people were still probably "too shy" to communicate.[16]

By the mid-1840s Aborigines began to show more confidence in seeking to clarify the meaning of these visits from the sea.[17] They demanded to know the sexual identity of visiting Europeans as clothing and clean-shaven faces obscured such knowledge. In 1846 James Murrells (Morrill) and his companions, from the shipwrecked *Peruvian*, were felt all over "from head to foot". According to Murrells, the Aborigines later subjected them to a more minute examination of their persons "to ascertain our sex, which seemed necessary to them on account of our being clothed".[18] In doing so, it was subsequently alleged, each member of the party was "made the subject of a multiplicity of strange and uncouth expressions and exclamations".[19] Just as the castaways of Moreton Bay, Parsons, Pamphlet and Finnegan, became "greatly alarmed" when Aborigines there began to feel them "about the breast and shoulders",[20] so, too, did the party at

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14 Steele, *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay District,* p.195.

15 Roughsey, *Moon and Rainbow,* p.13.

16 Stokes, *Discovery in Australia,* 1:331.

17 It seems that this could have started as early as 1841. Stokes commented that the natives of Magnetic Island who, it seems, may have been able to cross to the island from the mainland at low tide, were "apparently very well disposed". Stokes, *Ibid.,* 2:254-5.

18 James Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence Among the Aboriginals of Northern Queensland for Seventeen Years: Being a Narrative of my Life, Shipwreck, Landing, on the Coast, Residence Among the Aboriginals, With an Account of Their Manners and Customs, and Mode of Living: Together With Notices of Many of the Natural Productions, and of Nature of the Country* (Brisbane, 1863), pp.9-10.

19 *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser,* 19 March 1863.

20 "Narrative of Thomas Pamphlet", rpt. in *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay District,* ed. J.G. Steele, p.60.

Cape Cleveland show concern. Mrs Pitkethly, the ship captain's wife, "strongly resisted" the examination, but the Aborigines persisted. No doubt the imaginations of the castaways had anticipated the worst, but, as Murrells later said of the Aborigines:

> ... when they found we were like themselves - male and female - they were satisfied, and did not further interfere with us. They seemed to understand that the captain and his wife bore that relationship by their being always so close together, and they never afterwards troubled us.[21]

Aborigines seemed to be confused and fascinated by items of clothing when they saw these for the first time. Just as Margaret Tucker's ancestors along the New South Wales-Victoria border had thought the red handkerchiefs around the early explorers' necks were blood, Aborigines at Bowling Green Bay seemed to confuse clothing with skin. J. Beete Jukes, the naturalist on board the *Fly,* remarked in 1843 that "some of the younger men were very inquisitive about our dress, pulling our coats as if they thought they were loose skin".[22] Similar misunderstandings had occurred at Moreton Bay approximately twenty years earlier. Just as John Bingle, the explorer, had to take off his boot and stocking to convince the natives of Moreton Bay that he "had a foot and toes like their own",[23] so, too, did Jukes take off his boot and stocking to convince the Aborigines near Cape Cleveland that he, too, was human. One of the Aborigines, said Jukes, examined the stocking "with great attention, peeping down it like a magpie into a bone".[24] Three years later, Cape Cleveland Aborigines were still fascinated by clothing. Murrells told how they dressed themselves with the clothing that had been saved from the wreck:

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21 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.10.

22 J. Beete Jukes, *Narrative of the Surveying Voyage of H.M.S.* ***Fly****, Commanded by Captain F.P. Blackwood, R.N. in Torres Strait, New Guinea, and other Islands of the Eastern Archipelago, During the Years 1842-1846: Together With an Excursion Into the Interior of the Eastern Part of Java* (London, 1847), 1:59.

23 "Bingle in the 'Sally', March 1822", rpt. in *The Explorers of the Moreton Bay District*, ed. J.G. Steele, p.45.

24 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:59.

> ... a more ludicrous scene could not be imagined; one with only a sleeve of a shirt on, his legs put through the bottoms, and another hind part before - some one way and some another.[25]

If local Aboriginal society was becoming openly curious about these white visitors, it was also beginning to explain their presence in a uniquely Aboriginal way. Murrells and his party were to find this out when their raft brought them ashore at Cape Cleveland.

The white castaways at Cape Cleveland, like some castaways or escaped convicts in other parts of Australia, were accepted by the Aborigines as the reincarnated spirits of their ancestors or deceased members of the clan. Murrells told how, at the time, representatives of two different clans distributed the whites as each was "recognised":

> ... the boy and myself were claimed as relatives of one tribe who had jumped up whitefellows - they camped about Mount Elliott: and the captain and his wife were similarly claimed by the tribe belonging to Cape Cleveland.[26]

In the same way that James Davis, the escaped convict from Moreton Bay, was identified by a woman who claimed to recognise in Davis "the

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25 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence,* p.11.

26 *Ibid.*, p.10; Walter E. Roth clarified the meaning of the expression "jump up white fellow": "instead of a return of the deceased native's actual body after death in the form of a European, the meaning intended to be conveyed was that the vital principle (spirit, etc.) is reincarnated in the white man". Roth offered linguistic evidence from North Queensland and South Australia to support his claims that Aborigines often believed Europeans possessed the spirit of one of their dead. When the Pennefather River blacks first came into contact with Europeans, the Aborigines, said Roth, "believed that they had in them the ngai or spirits...of their dead relatives, and accordingly named them Kai-worda-ngai (i.e., bark-sap-spirit), the nearest approach which they could get to an accurate description of the colour being the sap side of the bark, which is always a lighter hue. As time wore on they learnt, however, that their visitors had nothing to do with the ngai, which suffix was consequently dropped, and the term Kai-worda used by itself as at present". Walter E. Roth, "North Queensland Ethnography Bulletin No.5", in his *North Queensland Ethnography Bulletins 1-8* (Brisbane, 1901-5), p.16; the belief in reincarnation is perhaps universal and persists to this day. When Thancoupie, one of the first Aboriginal potters, visited Brazil to display her work at the Brazilian Art Festival in 1985, she was claimed by a Brazilian woman as her "sister" who had come home to visit her. This lady burst into tears and claimed Thancoupie the moment she walked into the room. (Personal interview - 23 September 1986).

reincarnated form of her deceased son, whose name was Duramboi",[27] so perhaps was Murrells' totemic name amongst them, Karckynjib-Wombil-Moony,[28] after one of their so called "chiefs"[29], an allusion to his specific identification.[30] The acceptance of Murrells, Captain and Mrs Pitkethly and the young boy - all in Murrells' account, the reincarnated spirits of the dead - is not difficult to

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27 W. Robertson, *Coo-ee Talks: A Collection of Lecturettes Upon Early Experiences Among the Aborigines of Australia Delivered From a Wireless Broadcasting Station* (Sydney, 1928), pp.136-7.

28 *Queensland Guardian*, 12 March 1863.

29 There is no reason to believe that the Bindal and Juru peoples had "chiefs". Numerous ethnographic studies in other parts of Australia show that the Aboriginal polity was based on egalitarian distribution of power and authority. See M.J. Meggitt, *Desert People* (Sydney, 1962); L.R. Hiatt, *Kinship and Conflict: A Study of an Aboriginal Community in Northern Arnhem Land* (Canberra, 1965).

30 It is quite possible that Murrells, like Davis, was claimed by a woman as her recently deceased son. E. Thorne wrote of Murrells: "he was at once claimed by one of the gins, who had recently lost a son, as her boy returned to life". See [E. Thorne] *The Queen of The Colonies; Or Queensland As I Knew It* (London, 1876), p.318. Thorne used the pseudonym, "An Eight Years' Resident"; a newspaper article in 1887 stated: "One old dame recognised in him a dear departed son who in dying hoped he should 'return a white'". See the *Townsville Herald,* 24 December 1887, p.29; Murrells probably had different names amongst the blacks. Archibald Meston claimed that he spoke to an old man from the Townsville district who had known James Murrells and who called him "Mogoer-Munya, i.e. 'cloud man' (man from the clouds)". See Archibald Meston "The Cave Skeleton", *Literature in North Queensland*, p.25. Meston's story, while submitted as fiction, cannot be entirely discounted. The 1896 version of Murrells' life with the blacks stated: "They think the falling stars indicate the direction of danger, and that comets are the ghosts or spirits of some of their tribe who have been killed at a distance from them, working their way back again, and that they come down from the clouds on the coast". See Edmund Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells' ("Jemmy Morrill") Seventeen Years' Exile Among The Wild Blacks of North Queensland And His Life And Shipwreck and Terrible Adventures Among Savage Tribes; Their Manners, Customs, Languages, and Superstitions: Also Murrells' Rescue and Return to Civilisation* (Brisbane, 1896), p.39. It is interesting to note that the Aborigines found Murrells' shipwrecked party on the coast, and that for several nights previously "they had observed some falling stars in the direction of the neighbourhood where they found us". Edmund Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells*, p.16. Murrells included the Aboriginal words for both clouds and man in his vocabulary: Moggoor - clouds; Munyah - man. Man was changed in the 1896 version to "Munpah". See Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.21; Edmund Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells*, p.40.

comprehend when it becomes clear that this was often common practice in other parts of Australia. Sir George Grey, who undertook an expedition to north-west Australia between 1837-1839, described how he was greeted as a recently deceased son and embraced by an old Aboriginal woman.[31] G. Windsor Earl, writing from experience with Aborigines at the Coburg Peninsula (Northern Territory), explained that the "spirits of the dead are also recognised in the strangers who visit their country".[32]

If white strangers to the area were being accepted by local Aborigines, it was not without some lingering degree of fear. When the shipwrecked survivors of the *Peruvian* met the Cape Cleveland Aborigines for the first time, the blacks, said Murrells, "were as afraid of us as we were of them".[33] The next day, when the four Europeans were exhibited before the local camp during a grand "corroboree", the sight of white people and the clothes they wore "produced a panic" among the onlookers who then "scampered off in all directions". For the benefit of other visiting groups, this spectacle was repeated each evening for about eight evenings until the most distant known had seen the newcomers. After the initial panic had subsided, the more courageous returned to feel them all over. Soon, said Murrells, most of the Aborigines came nearer "and examined us more minutely, till all fear was removed.[34] Clearly, it took a great deal of courage to confront the Europeans who were received as ghosts. Knowing nothing of Europeans or their home country, individuals were left with the only plausible explanation that their culture could provide.[35]

To know the purpose of one's visit was just as important for Aborigines as to know one's identity. This could be achieved by sign language which transcended spoken language barriers. In 1845, Ludwig Leichhardt, on his overland expedition from Moreton Bay to Port Essington, recorded that Aborigines in the Upper Burdekin

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31 G. Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in Northwest and Western Australia* (London, 1841), 1:301-2.

32 G. Windsor Earl, "On the Aboriginal Tribes of the Northern Coast of Australia", *Royal Geographical Society Journal*, 16 (1846), 241.

33 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.9.

34 *Ibid.*, p.11.

35 It is worthwhile comparing the similar reactions of other peoples when they contacted Europeans for the first time. See Hank Nelson, *Taim Bilong Masta: The Australian Involvement with Papua New Guinea* (Sydney, 1982), ch.15.

showed urgency to enter the camp and were kept "in good humour by replying to their enquiries respecting our nature and intentions; among which one of the most singular was, whether the bullocks were not our gins".[36] Murrells' party at Cape Cleveland also had to be identified and answer, by sign language, questions as to where they had come from.[37] The importance of such etiquette in formal relations with Aborigines has been emphasised by anthropologist, W.E.H. Stanner, who could draw upon many years of perceptive fieldwork among the Murinbata at Port Keats. In commenting on a contact situation in New South Wales between Governor Phillip and some Aborigines, Stanner could intuit what had happened:

> The man's first intent, under Aboriginal convention, would have been to discover Phillip's identity, the purpose of the visit ... having already been disclosed ... But he [Phillip] should then have named himself, and asked after the other's name, both of which he could have done without difficulty by using simple signs.[38]

Such regard for etiquette among strangers was also shown by Lower Burdekin Aborigines who met Jukes in 1843. When Jukes told how he became reacquainted with an Aborigine after a two-day absence, he recounted that the man "embraced me several times, making a purring noise; and whenever a new face came up, he put his arm round me again, and spoke to him; introducing me, I suppose, as his particular friend".[39] Local Aborigines, it seems, were just as aware of greeting procedures as Aborigines in other places. David Collins, Judge-Advocate and Secretary of the Colony of New South Wales, had commented as early as 1802 on the etiquette observed by Aborigines when they met the explorers, Flinders and Cook. As Collins said of Aborigines of Moreton Bay:

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[36] Ludwig Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia, From Moreton Bay to Port Essington, a Distance of Upwards of 3000 Miles, During the Years 1844-1845* (1847; rpt Adelaide, 1964), p.246; it is interesting to speculate on Leichhardt's comment. As Leichhardt's party contained bullocks for both beef and work, the comment might have alluded to the fact that Aboriginal women, like his bullocks, did most of the work. On the other hand, a bullock with a penis but no testicles might have caused much laughter. The ready humour of the Aborigine, even in initial contact situations, needs to be recognised.

[37] Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.9.

[38] W.E.H. Stanner, "The History of Indifference Thus Begins", *Aboriginal History*, 1, pt.1 (1977), 5-6.

[39] Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:82

> Among other friendly interchanges, they learned the names of Mr Flinders and his party ... Three of their names were Yel-yel-bah, Ye-woo, and Bo-ma-ri-go ... When these people joined the party, the strangers were shown, and their names severally told to them until they had gotten the pronunciation. This ceremony was reciprocal, and accorded with what Captain Cook had said before of an inhabitant of Endeavour river, "he introduced the strangers by name, a ceremony which upon such occasions was never omitted". The difference of latitude between these two places is 11°39′, or seven hundred miles.[40]

Aboriginal society seemed to be dealing with these white intruders in the traditional ways which had always been used to facilitate communication between strangers. The protocols of greeting and meeting which conformed with the established precedents in their own society were probably used to greet the Europeans. R. Brough Smyth, who conducted early ethnographic studies in Australia, told of similar practices among Victorian class entering another's territory for the first time: "the duty of those who have to introduce the strangers is something like that which devolves on a master of ceremonies."[41]

As was the practice in other parts of Australia, entering the territory of another was governed by strict protocol.[42] Sometimes this could be discovered fortuitously. Coincidence, it seems, may have played a part in facilitating the acceptance of Murrells and his fellow castaways at Cape Cleveland. Murrells told how the Aborigines kept their distance until "we held up our hands in supplication to them to

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[40] David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* (1802; rpt Sydney, 1975), 2:180.

[41] R. Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria: With Notes Relating to the Habits of the Natives of Other Parts of Australia and Tasmania* (1876; rpt Melbourne, 1972), 1:134.

[42] *Ibid.*, 1:133; Walter E. Roth, "North Queensland Ethnography Bulletin No. 8", p.8; A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, p.565; Donald F. Thomson, "Ceremonial Presentation of Fire in North Queensland. A Preliminary Note on the Place of Fire in Primitive Ritual", *Man*, 32 (July 1932), 162-166; Nicholas Peterson, "Hunter-Gatherer Territoriality: The Perspective from Australia", *American Anthropologist*, 77 (1975), 53-68.

help us". It was only after "some of them returned it",[43] that the Aborigines, said Murrells, "came running down to us".[44]

Although it is open to speculation how these gestures of supplication were given, it is clear that they conveyed some meaning to the Aboriginal onlookers. A.W. Howitt, who has stressed the importance of Aboriginal gesture language, has noted one of the signs for peace in the Yantruwunta "tribe" as : "Hold up both hands at full length, open palms outwards above the head".[45] Signs for peace differed from place to place and it would be folly to draw conclusions without knowing what the sign for peace was at Cape Cleveland. In fact, Howitt's more pertinent comment that "The ordinary inquirer needs to be almost specially trained to the work in order to prevent his falling into errors in interpreting or describing the signs made" seems worthy of the utmost consideration.[46] Although the precise meaning of these signs may never be known, it is still possible that they conveyed some meaning to the Aborigines. As late as 1881, W. Robertson, who was in close touch with Cleveland Bay Aborigines explained how he and a friend approached an Aboriginal camp at Cleveland Bay:

> I told my friend to follow my example in raising both arms and extending them horizontally, with the palms of hands turned upwards. This was the recognised method by which one should approach a camp, indicating that one came unarmed and in friendship.[47]

This sign had been taught to Robertson by Fitzroy River Aborigines in Central Queensland and was also recognised by James Davis (Duramboi) who had spent about fifteen years with Aborigines at Wide

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43 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence,* p.9.

44 *Queensland Guardian*, 12 March 1863. This account was claimed to have been taken down from Murrells' own lips "by a correspondent of our contemporary the *Courier*, signing himself 'Advance Australia', and has been published in that journal"; The exact words in *Sketch of a Residence* were "after a while they came among us...", p.9; In the 1896 version of Murrells' account, the text read: "...we held up our hands in supplication for help, some of them did likewise; and after a while we neared each other, they came amongst us, and felt us all over..." See Edmund Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells*, p.17; an account in the *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863, read: "Mutual signs were made to approach, and at last the blacks came among the whites".

45 Howitt, *Tribes of South-East Australia*, p.733.

46 Howitt, p.726.

47 W. Robertson, *Coo-ee Talks*, p.64.

Bay.[48] Clearly, gesture language, so often used by Aborigines to explorers and others, was an important aspect of Aboriginal communication.[49] Its importance, although stressed by Roth and Blake, has been a neglected feature of Australian historiography.[50] As Howitt said of those early Australian explorers who failed to see the significance of Aboriginal gesture language:

> But the idea did not arise that in such cases these signs and gestures were not merely the natural aids to speech, but, in fact, formed part of a recognised and well-understood system of artificial language, by which these savages endeavoured to communicate with the white strangers passing through their country, just as they would have endeavoured to communicate with strangers of their own colour.[51]

The property of visiting Europeans could either fascinate or frighten the Aborigines. Jukes told how Aborigines at Upstart Bay were amused by a watch, a measuring tape and a dog whistle - "the last especially delighted them, and they begged one after another to be allowed to whistle through it, being greatly pleased when they succeeded". On holding a watch to the ear of one of the Aborigines, he listened attentively, looked at it, listened again, "and then his astonishment got vent in a long drawn cooh! ending in wurhrh! phut! phut! phut!"[52] Murrells told how they "tore the leaves out of the books, and fastened them to their hair and bodies" so that they could

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48 *Ibid.*, p.134.

49 In the Northern Territory the explorer, J. M. Stuart, told how an old Aboriginal man, after conferring with the younger men, turned round and "surprised me by giving one of the masonic signs. I looked at him steadily; he repeated it, and so did his two sons. I then returned it, which seemed to please them much, the old man patting me on the shoulder and stroking down my beard. They then took their departure, making friendly signs until they were out of sight". Spencer and Gillen made the following comment on Stuart's experience which they quoted: "The probable explanation of this is that certain of the signs in their gesture language corresponded closely enough with certain masonic signs to be mistaken by Stuart for the latter". See Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *Across Australia* (London 1912), 2:443.

50 See Walter E. Roth, "North Queensland Ethnography Bulletin No. 11"; Barry J. Blake, *Australian Aboriginal Languages*, pp.43-44.

51 Howitt, *Tribes of South-East Australia*, p.726.

52 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:69.

dance a corroboree.[53] Some Aborigines expressed a wish to go into the boat with Jukes, but when this wish was granted, those on the shore became "clamorous, either to come in themselves, or for them to come ashore again".[54] Another young fellow was "more frightened than gratified" when Jukes set fire to gunpowder with his cigar.[55] Eagerness got the better of another who attempted to pick Lieutenant Ince's pocket of his handkerchief.[56] The extent of Aboriginal curiosity can be understood in the words of Jukes who regretted not being able to learn more of their language because their "curiosity ... was too much excited to allow them to give us many words."[57]

Jukes, unlike some of the earlier colonists in New South Wales, seems to have been able to perceive Aboriginal surprise and delight. According to Jukes, Aborigines between Cape Upstart and Cape Cleveland expressed their surprise with a sound like "phut! phut!" When pleasure or surprise was mingled with satisfaction, the sound was "'wurrah! wurrah! or rather, 'wur-r-r-r' vibrating the tongue continually".[58] As early as 1799, Matthew Flinders had noticed a similar expression at Moreton Bay. David Collins told how Flinders was approached by a man brandishing a spear in his hand:

> This man made great exclamations for the musket to be laid down, calling out "woo-rah, woo-rah," as others had done, and seemed pleased when it was complied with; but he could not have heard many particulars of their weapons, for, on pointing a musket towards him to try the experiment, he did not appear to be sensible of the danger to himself in that case.[59]

A similar expression, "war-re, war-re", as well as shaken spears, greeted the First Fleet at Botany Bay and Port Jackson in 1788. Such gestures, as anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner explained,

> ... did not necessarily indicate outright hostility, and the cries of "war-re, war-re," which were presumed by the early colonists to mean "go away", or "bad, you are doing wrong", may have been no more than a conventional response to anything startlingly new.

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53 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence,* p.11

54 Jukes, *op.cit.*, 1:85.

55 *Ibid.*, 1:69.

56 *Ibid.*, 1:84.

57 *Ibid.*, 1:68.

58 Jukes, *op.cit.*, 1:58.

59 Collins, *English Colony in New South Wales*, p.174.

> Universally, the Aborigines used such gestures at all meetings of great significance; there was always something of ritual in them; and curiosity must have been at least equal to fear or anger.[60]

If the Aboriginal expressions "wurrah" "woo-rah" and "war-re" are all a variation of the same word, then evidence from the local area would tend to support Stanner's contention that such an expression could have been a conventional response to something new. The possibility becomes even more tantalising when it is revealed that "wurra" in the Gudang dialect (Cape York) has been recorded as an "exclamation of surprise".[61] As Jukes observed of one Burdekin Aborigine who sat while his portrait was drawn:

> ... he was tolerably patient and very tractable, putting himself into the required attitudes, and when the sketch was finished, complimented it with a long wurr-r.[62]

The Aboriginal community probably used dancing as an immediate gesture to symbolise its ready acceptance of the Europeans as guests or as relatives of the clan. This was Jukes' experience on the night of 10 May 1843, when three Europeans and seventeen Aborigines entertained each other around a campfire at Upstart Bay for some five hours. The evening consisted of singing and dancing and a general expression of goodwill by both parties as they mingled indiscriminately around the fire. The Europeans were sometimes condescending in seeking entertainment - they drilled two or three of the Aborigines for amusement - but overall the atmosphere was one of conviviality. Similarly, Murrells told how Cape Cleveland Aborigines were "very glad" and wanted the whites "to join with them in a corroboree" after the castaways had agreed to go with them to their camp. As a compromise, the whites sang them a hymn - "God moves in a mysterious way/ His wonders to perform, &c." - which "amazed them

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60 Stanner, "The History of Indifference Thus Begins", p.5. There does not seem to be any real linguistic evidence to support Stanner's suggestion, although it is not hard to see that the Aboriginal cries would have been motivated as much by curiosity as by fear. (Personal correspondence - Nick Reid, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies.)

61 David R. Moore, *Islanders and Aborigines at Cape York. An ethnographic reconstruction based on the 1848-1850 'Rattlesnake' Journals of O.W. Brierly and information obtained from Barbara Thompson* (Canberra, 1979), pp.31, 330.

62 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:84.

much"![63] Even before they reached the camp - a distance of some eight miles - the Aborigines, said Murrells, "wanted us to join them in a corroboree again, but we could not, so they had to have it among themselves".[64]

Sometimes, however, there was a limit to conviviality. Jukes, for example, was annoyed at nothing more than the liberty taken by one Aborigine who rested his head on Jukes' shoulder. This shoulder, said Jukes, was something "which he seemed to think he had acquired a right to use as a pillow". When the flames of the campfire began to fade, it was the Aborigines who "cheerfully assisted" the Europeans to bring wood from the swamp.[65] As an expression of friendship, Jukes was offered a wife by one of the Aborigines who wanted Jukes to go up the country and live with him.[66] Within a very short time, Aborigines and Europeans had shown that communication was possible. Earlier in the month Jukes had experienced friendly relations at Bowling Green Bay near Cape Cleveland, and later he experienced Aboriginal friendship along the Burdekin River. Aboriginal society was revealing an intense interest in the European and his ways, and it offered no hostility to the amiable naval officers and castaways who occasionally contacted it. Perhaps the lack of a personal economic interest in Aboriginal territory helped men like Jukes to listen attentively to what this society was saying.

Evidence also suggests that dance-like ceremonies helped to establish the intent of strangers. Dick Roughsey, for example, told how Gully Peters, a member of the Lardil community on Mornington Island, attempted to contact the Kaiadilt people of Bentinck Island as late as 1927:

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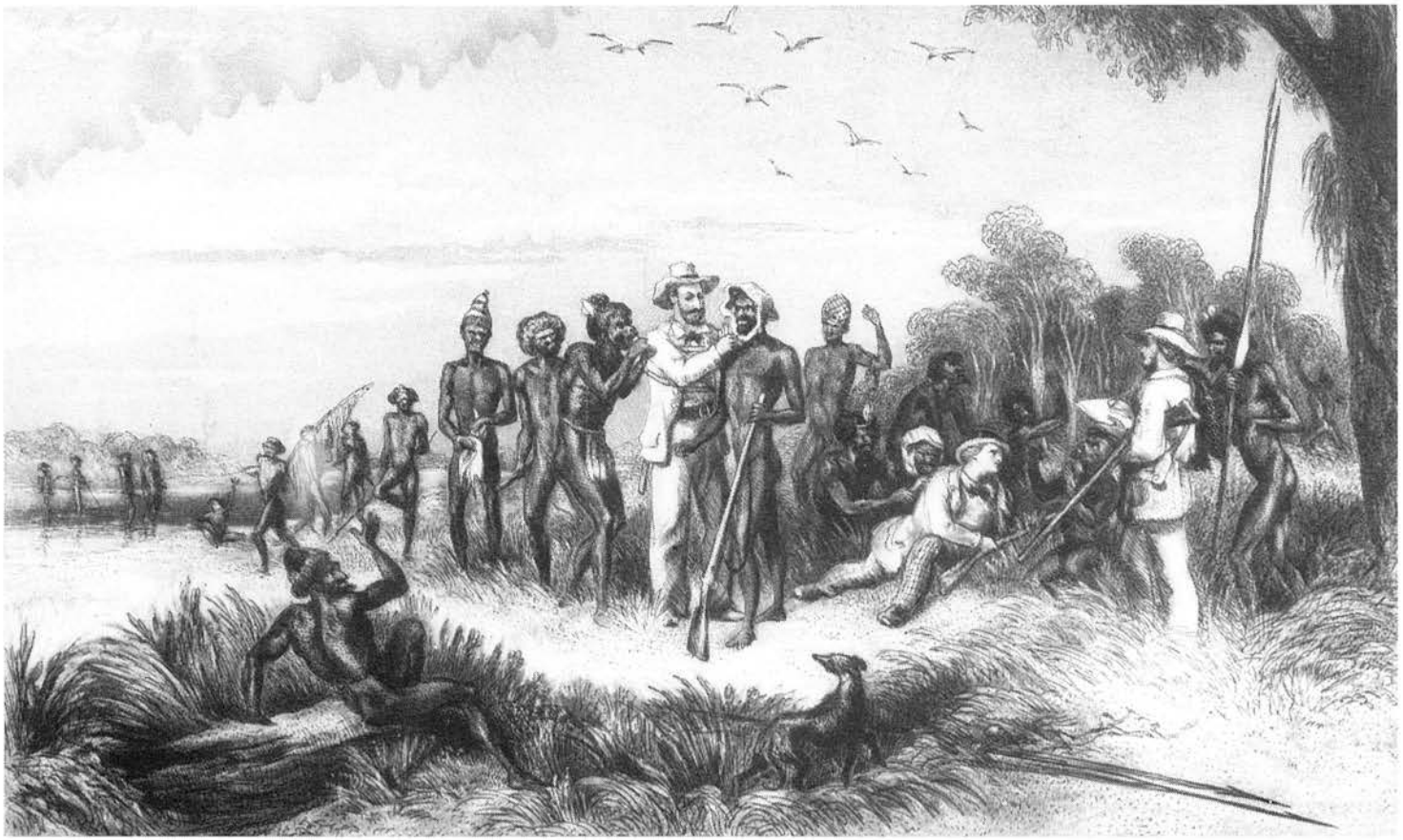
63 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.10.

64 *Ibid.*, p.11; dance-like ceremonies seemed to be common in other parts of Australia. Governor Phillip was greeted upon a return visit to Broken Bay (N.S.W.) with "a dance and song of joy". See Anon., *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* (1789; rpt Sydney, 1970), p.45; T.L. Mitchell recorded that Aborigines that he met in Eastern Australia also wanted the whites to dance with them. See Mitchell, *Three Expeditions*, pp.114-5.

65 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:70.

66 *Ibid.*; Walter Roth makes the following comment on the treatment of non-tribesmen: "...to a friend, the native invariably shows every hospitality, the sincerest expression of which is the temporary loan of his wife". See Roth, "North Queensland Ethnography Bulletin No. 8", p.8.



1. Jukes meeting Burdekin Aboriginies, 1843 (from *The Surveying Voyage of HMS Fly*)

> As soon as the bow of the dinghy touched the beach, Gully and his party jumped out and danced the Kaiadilt dance of welcome. The watching Kaiadilt came down off the ridge, put their spears down and joined in dancing with the Lardil.[67]

Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen witnessed a somewhat similar meeting between the Arunta and a party of armed strangers from the Eastern McDonnells and Owen Springs. In his diary Gillen explained how "both parties when within a few hundred yards of the meeting place began to dance in a warlike manner".[68] Women, too, joined in with "extraordinary antics, as they danced and yelled at the top of their voices". As Spencer and Gillen later said:

> But no one seemed to pay the slightest attention to them: the visitors scarcely took any notice of them, and it proved to be all part of a well-understood method of procedure - it was only a kind of preliminary welcome to men who belonged, in some cases, to the same part of the country as did the women who were thus vociferously greeting them.[69]

The members of the *Fly* seemed to have had a great deal of success when they attempted to communicate friendly feelings to the Aborigines by dancing. Just how meaningful this dancing was to the Aborigines is uncertain, but sometimes the gesture was likely to win varying degrees of friendship. Captain Blackwood, alone and unarmed, approached the Aborigines of Upstart Bay by "dancing, native fashion". When the remaining whites in his party also completed the "introductory dance", they all "proceeded together in a friendly manner".[70] Jukes also used dancing to help defuse a potentially dangerous situation. Having surprised an old Aboriginal man watching the movements of the camp at eight o'clock one night, Jukes explained that "seeing I was inclined to be friendly, two or three others advanced, and we danced a corrobory [sic]".[71] This gesture was perhaps not without its logic. As late as 1975, similar practices were

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67 Roughsey, *Moon and Rainbow*, p.104.

68 F.J. Gillen, *Gillen's Diary. The Camp Jottings of F.J. Gillen on the Spencer and Gillen Expedition Across Australia 1901-1902* (Adelaide, 1968), p.73.

69 Spencer and Gillen, *Across Australia,* 1:249.

70 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:65.

71 *Ibid.*, 1:67; it is interesting to note that when Murrells went as G.E. Dalrymple's interpreter to Cardwell in 1864, the Aborigines, said Murrells, asked "whether we came to have a corroboree with them, or whether we came as enemies". *Maryborough Chronicle*, 25 April 1864.

being successfully used to greet isolated peoples in other parts of the world.[72]

Aboriginal society used two of its most important symbols, fire and the laying on of hands, to demonstrate its formal acceptance of the white explorers and hydrographers. Jukes wrote of the experience that he and others underwent with Burdekin Aborigines in 1843:

> As soon as the fire was lit, each of them held his hands for a short time in the smoke, and then smeared them over our faces, repeating it two or three times. Whether this was a ceremony meant to welcome us to their country, or equivalent to eating bread or salt with an Arab, I cannot tell.[73]

The Aboriginal practice of "putting hands" on people seems to be to protect and strengthen people. In general, this was done to protect people from potentially dangerous spirits (to which strangers and young children are particularly susceptible), and to protect people from the ill effects associated with powerful sites and sacred dances, or from illness in general.[74] In west Cape York this practice often consisted of giving underarm sweat to people. The hands were rubbed under the armpits, sometimes blown upon, and then rubbed over the head and body of the recipient. It was usually performed by "bosses" (male or female) senior enough to "speak for" a place, song or ceremony. Labumore (Elsie Roughsey) devoted a full chapter of her book *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* to the importance of this healing touch and chant. Warming hands at a fire and then placing them on an individual seemed to symbolise the giving of strength to individuals and it is perhaps not surprising to find that

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72 Brazil's *sertanistas* (men wise in jungle ways) used similar methods to contact the Kreen-Akarores whose first extended contact with non-Indians took place in the mid-1970s. W. Jesco Von Puttkamer explained: "We do the only thing possible for *sertanistas* in a hurry. Singing, laughing, shouting at full voice, we move towards them. In the jungle, the man who comes with noise cannot be an enemy". See W. Jesco Von Puttkamer, "Brazil's Kreen-Akarores. Requiem for a Tribe?", *National Geographic*, 147, no. 2 (February 1975), 258.

73 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:79-80.

74 Peter John Sutton, WIK: Aboriginal society, territory and language at Cape Keerweer, Cape York Peninsula, Australia (Ph.D. thesis, University of Queensland, 1978), pp.68-69; personal correspondence - Athol Chase, Griffith University; Paul Memmott, "Rainbows, Story Places, and Malkri Sickness in the North Wellesley Islands", *Oceania*, 53, no. 2 (1982); Labumore: Elsie Roughsey, *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New* (Melbourne, 1984), pp.65-84; See also, the A.I.A.S. film, *Lockhart Festival* (1974).

grandmothers often did this to their grandchildren when they told them to be upright and strong members of the community.[75]

Fire was also used by Aborigines to give protection from evil spirits as well as to give solace to a dead person's spirit. Walter E. Roth explained how "a firestick even when extinguished acted as a protective at night, the cold charcoal itself quite sufficient to scare away any evil spirits".[76] In some parts of Australia Aborigines often placed fire in a grave before placing the corpse in the ground. The purpose, says Sylvia Hallam, was "thought to be to drive away evil spirits". Alternatively, fire was used to give solace to the spirit of the deceased by frequently lighting a flame over the dead person's grave. This seeming ambiguity in the use of fire was commented upon by Hallam:

> Fire was powerful and destructive, and could avert the malignancy of evil spirits and of the dead, but it was also life-giving and comforting, and could provide solace to the friendly dead.[77]

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[75] Interview with Thancoupie (originally from Weipa), 30 March 1985. Thancoupie told me that her grandmother did this to her. It meant "Be strong, stand up tall, be good, share, don't be greedy"; the following is from an interview with Ar-tuk-a-nee (Weipa), 17 August 1986. She explains what happens when she takes her grandaughter to the fire: "... warm one hand, put it on knee: walk strong; warm both hands, put one on knee, one on ankle: run fast like the emu". The grandmother then takes the child's hand and opens it in an outstretched manner. "Give who ask: no closing hands...give". The grandmother's hand is then warmed at the fire and put on the child's forehead: "no be cheeky go rude way and pick up food...ask first...you must have shame". The grandmother then places both hands on the child's cheeks: "Don't give cheek...be friendly to people". The warm hands are now placed on the child's chest and back: "...strong heart for anything and everything...separate people from fight". John Taylor (James Cook University) has also confirmed such ceremonies from evidence gathered in the course of his own field researches; (personal correspondence). In early 1986, I visited some Aboriginal people in Kuranda who had a young child who was just beginning to walk, but fell frequently. One of the ladies said that "the old way" to help the child was to warm your hands at a fire and place them on the child's legs. This would give the legs strength.

[76] Walter E. Roth, "North Queensland Ethnography Bulletin No. 5", p.11; G. Windsor Earl explained that at the Coburg Peninsula fire afforded protection against ghosts and evil spirits. See Earl, "Tribes of the Northern Coast of Australia", p.241.

[77] Sylvia H. Hallam, *Fire and Hearth: A Study of Aboriginal Usage and European Usurpation in South-Western Australia* (Canberra, circa 1975), p.80. At Cleveland Bay a large fire was made over the grave of the deceased; see Curr, *Australian Race*, 2:442. For a full account of Aboriginal mortuary practices in the

The precise meaning of what happened to Jukes and other members of his party at the Burdekin River with fire is uncertain. It is clear that they were ceremoniously and ritually greeted. If their ceremony was a variant of ceremonies elsewhere, it is possible that the local Aborigines were offering strength and protection to returned members of the friendly dead while at the same time ritually purifying themselves.

Murrells and his fellow castaways, received by the local Aborigines as returned (and friendly) members of the dead,[78] experienced a ritual similar to that experienced by Jukes' party. Murrells told how their party was met by three new arrivals from the camp:

> After we had got a little way, three new arrivals came from the camp; they were told to stay somewhat in advance of us, and wait till we came up - it was on the edge of a plain - where they had made a small fire. When we came up with them they were sitting round the fire ... and they seemed to be sitting in State ... I suffered myself to be led up to them, and I sat down. They looked at me, and observing me shake with fear, they warmed their hands at the fire, and put them on my face, and all over my body, to re-assure me, seeing which I took heart again. The captain, his wife, and the boy underwent the same scrutiny.[79]

Again, the precise meaning of this short ritual is elusive. Anthropologist Donald Thomson, who has emphasised the symbolic value of fire amongst Aborigines in North Queensland, has suggested that fire was often ceremoniously presented to visitors by the "big" men of the camp. Around the Edward River area, for example, a firestick was often presented to a visiting party before its admission to the camp. Thomson contends that this was a symbolic act of incorporation and solidarity.[80] Murrells recounted that he and his

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Herbert-Burdekin district, see Brayshaw, *Aboriginal Material Culture*, pp.91-100.

78 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.10.

79 *Ibid.*, pp.10-11.

80 Thomson, "Ceremonial Presentation of Fire in North Queensland", pp.162-166. Nicholas Peterson also deals with Thomson's article; see Nicholas Peterson, "Hunter-Gather Territoriality", p.61. See also Howitt, *Native Tribes of South-East Australia*, p.668. Aborigines in other parts of Australia placed great importance on fire. See Kenneth Maddock, "Myths of the Acquisition of Fire in Northern and Eastern Australia", in *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, ed. Ronald M. Berndt (Perth, 1970), 174-199; Hermann Klaatsch, *The Evolution and Progress of Mankind*, ed. Adolf Heilborn, trans. Joseph McCabe (London, 1923), 4. It is also worth noting that Thancoupie decided on a circle theme for her exhibition of pottery at the Brazilian art festival in 1985. The circle, she said,

party also underwent their ceremony prior to their admission to the main camp, and that the fire was made for them by men "sitting in State"[81] - an allusion perhaps to the "big" men mentioned by Thomson. While the precise symbolism of the ceremonies experienced by Murrells and Jukes remains tantalisingly unverifiable, it is clear that both parties were undergoing rites of introduction that preceded acceptance by the clans. Jukes had been able to share a common campfire with Burdekin Aborigines and Murrells shared a common fireplace for seventeen years. Aboriginal society had begun the process of incorporation and bonding and showed in a very short time that it could use traditional beliefs to respond to casual European contact. Aboriginal society was active rather than apathetic and was clearly versatile enough to assimilate European contact within the framework of an Aboriginal world view.

Europeans could be sometimes condescending in trying to enlist the friendship of the Aborigines. Captain Blackwood and Jukes often pressed goods on Aborigines who then attempted to respond as much as their means would permit. Near Cape Cleveland members of the *Fly* gave the Aborigines "some bottles and other trifles, on which they offered us their armlets, made of plaited grass, and seemed anxious to find something to give us in exchange".[82] Perhaps their anxiety was illustrative of the cultural differences about which Europeans were still very much unaware fifty-five years after settlement. The Europeans had no notion of the Aboriginal concept of "balanced reciprocity" which meant that, in direct exchange between certain peoples, "the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing

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stands for "unity, warmth, fire, strength and love". (Personal interview - 30 March 1985.)

81 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.11. In other parts of Australia fire was also presented to visitors. See Anon., *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay; With an Account of the Establishment of the Colonies of Port Jackson and Norfolk Island: Compiled from Authentic Papers, which have been obtained from the several Departments, to which are added, The Journals of Lieuts. Shortland, Watts, Ball, and Captain Marshall, With an Account of their New Discoveries* (1789, rpt Adelaide, 1950), p.82; James Demarr, *Adventures in Australia Fifty Years Ago. Being a Record of an Emigrant's Wanderings Through the Colonies of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland During the Years 1839-1844* (London, 1893), pp.143-44; Gordon Reid, *A Nest of Hornets* (Oxford, 1982), p.16.

82 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:60.

received without delay.[83] Commenting on a similar situation involving Captain Phillip's offer of beads to the Aborigines at Botany Bay, anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner commented: "To press goods on the man at once was also a mistake. Under Aboriginal custom they could not have been given or taken without consideration of return".[84] Aborigines would not always be so tolerant of European ideas as the members of the *Fly* were to discover at Bowling Green Bay near Cape Cleveland. When Jukes' party exhorted an Aboriginal man to share with a woman some of the brown sugar he had been given, the man, wrote Jukes, "hastily crammed the remainder into his mouth, as if to settle the business, and seemed to treat our efforts at gallantry with profound indifference and contempt".[85] The same mistakes made by Captain Phillip and his officers at Port Jackson and Botany Bay were being repeated in North Queensland. As Stanner so succinctly noted of the early colonists in New South Wales:

> Later, the Aborigines must have concluded that Europeans were simply soft-headed because of their largesse with valuable things. The notions of forcing friendship, and of winning liking by prestations, were psychological and sociological nonsense.[86]

Even the most sensitive visitors to the local area could be alarmed by Aboriginal behaviour. When Jukes and his party returned to their boat on the Burdekin River, they noticed that two "tribes" had appeared whereas before there had been only one. Jukes commented that with all the "shouting and crying from one to the other", he fully expected "a scrimmage".[87] Jukes and his men, who had already singled out the first man to shoot, remained calm and soon decided that it "was probably the jealousy between the two tribes, or the ceremonious introduction at meeting, that had caused all the shouting and uproar, which we had taken for preparations for hostility". Whatever the behaviour between the two Aboriginal groups indicated,

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83 Marshall Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange", in his *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago, 1972), p.194.

84 Stanner, "The History of Indifference Thus Begins", p.6. For a general account of the importance of etiquette in Aboriginal society, see John Von Sturmer, "Talking with Aborigines", *A.I.A.S. Newsletter*, 15 (March 1981), 13-30; see also Hyllus Maris and Sonia Borg, *Women of the Sun* (Melbourne, 1985), pp.31-32.

85 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:59.

86 Stanner, "The History of Indifference Thus Begins", p.6.

87 Jukes, *op.cit.*, 1:80-81.

it did not seem to have hostile motives. As Jukes related, "We saluted our old friends by dancing, on which they began dancing, laughing, and singing, the others sitting still and looking on".[88] It seemed that a quiet mind rather than a quick trigger could be a valuable asset on first encounters between black and white.

A lack of knowledge about Aboriginal society was apparent in many of these earliest contacts. When John MacGillivray, naturalist to the H.M.S. *Rattlesnake*, claimed that Cape Upstart Aborigines had made a "wanton attack" on a previous ship's seining (fishing) party, he was revealing an ongoing European ignorance of the Aboriginal concept of territoriality which Europeans had transgressed since the time of Cook.[89] Studies by Tindale (Bentinck Islands), Memmott (Mornington Island), Taylor (Edward River) and Chase and Sutton (Nesbit River region) all reveal,[90] as John Taylor has pointed out, that "marine and terrestrial resources" were considered by Aborigines to be "co-extensive".[91] This meant, as Athol Chase wrote of the Lockhart River area, Aboriginal estates [92]extended:

> beyond the beachline, out to sea to include coastal islands, cays, sandbars, and reefs: all important resource sites at different parts of the seasonal calendar ... These estates contained the myth and totem sites

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88 *Ibid.*, 1:82.

89 John MacGillivray, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Rattlesnake, Commanded by the Late Captain Owen Stanley, R.N., F.R.S. &c. During the Years 1846-1850 Including Discoveries and Surveys in New Guinea, the Louisiade Archipelago, etc. To Which is Added the Account of Mr. E.B. Kennedy's Expedition for the Exploration of the Cape York Peninsula* (1852; rpt Adelaide, 1967), 1:79-80.

90 Norman B. Tindale, "Geographical Knowledge of the Kaiadilt People of Bentinck Island, Queensland", *Records of the South Australian Museum,* 14, no. 2 (July 1962), 259-296; Norman B. Tindale, "Some Population Changes Among the Kaiadilt People of Bentinck Island, Queensland", *Ibid.*, 14, no.2 (July, 1962), 297-336; Paul Memmott, "Rainbows and Story Places", pp.163-182; John C. Taylor, An Overview of Traditional Aboriginal Fishing Rights in Queensland (unpublished paper, 1984); A. Chase and P. Sutton, "Hunter-Gatherers in a Rich Environment: Aboriginal coastal exploitation in Cape York Peninsula", in *Ecological Biography of Australia*, ed. Allen Keast (Hague, 1981), 1818-1852.

91 Taylor, unpublished paper, p.16.

92 Stanner defined this term as the "traditionally recognised locus ('country', 'ground', 'dreaming place') of some kind of patrilineal descent-group forming the core or nucleus of the territorial group". See W.E.H. Stanner, "Aboriginal Territorial Organisation: Estate, Range, Domain and Regime", *Oceania*, 36, no. 1 (September 1965), 2.

> which linked an individual to the land as territory, to the life forces of people and the environment, and to the remote past.[93]

Although most Europeans did not seem to realise it at the time, they were unintentionally breaching Aboriginal law by fishing in Aboriginal territory without permission. It was not surprising that they often incurred swift retribution.

To exploit marine resources without conforming to the obligatory rules regarding the use of someone else's country usually invoked, as John Taylor recorded of the Edward River people, "physical or supernatural sanctions from aggrieved custodians".[94] When the European seining nets were cast at Cape Upstart, it was well nigh a certainty that both insult and injury were being offered. Just as local Aborigines at the Endeavour River took offence at the turtle catch made by the *Endeavour's* crew in 1770, so, too, did Aborigines at Cape Upstart and other places along the northern coastline take offence when their rights were infringed.[95] Moreover, Jukes' observation that the natives of Rockingham Bay had been friendly and familiar until the boats' crews caught "a good haul of fish in the seine", underlines the magnitude of the offence of using someone else's country. The boats' crews at Rockingham Bay, like the seining party at Cape Upstart, "were suddenly assailed, as they were dragging the boat into deep water, by a shower of spears and stones from the neighbouring bushes".[96] The pattern clearly discernible in these instances reinforces the claim made by marine anthropologist, James Acheson, that "Despite the variations, it is clear that in many fishing societies in the world, rights to fish are controlled and fishing territories are not common property resources".[97] Clearly, it was a Western cultural

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93 Athol Chase, "Cultural Continuity: Land and Resources among East Cape York Aborigines" in *Contemporary Cape York Peninsula*, ed. N.C. Stevens and A. Bailey (Brisbane, 1980), p.85; see also Bruce Rigsby, "Land, Language and People in the Princess Charlotte Bay Area" in *Contemporary Cape York Peninsula*, p.94.

94 Taylor, unpublished paper, p.11. Seining parties in early New South Wales were sometimes pelted with stones; see Stanner, "The History of Indifference Thus Begins", p.9.

95 Beaglehole, *The Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks*, pp.95-6.

96 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:92.

97 James M. Acheson, "Anthropology of Fishing", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 10 (1981), 281.

attitude towards marine resources which regarded them as the property of all.[98]

Five decades of contact experience revealed a remarkable dearth of accumulated knowledge about Aboriginal society. British naval officers who showed so much tolerance and restraint towards Aborigines also showed a remarkable reluctance to learn from either their predecessors or past experience. MacGillivray's ill-informed assessment of the Aboriginal response at Cape Upstart as a "wanton attack" echoed Captain Phillip's 1788 claim that the Aboriginal seizure of a catch of fish after some had been shared was an "unprovoked act of violence".[99] It is not surprising, then, that the Aborigines at Cape Upstart received a "just chastisement" for the defence of their territory.[100] The history of indifference was emerging, at least on the coast.

Although word about the white people would most likely have passed into the interior by contact between clans,[101] it seems clear that fear of Europeans was still very strong inland. Leichhardt, for example, noted that the "cooee of the natives had been heard only once during our journey along the banks of the Burdekin".[102] Further south along the Suttor River, Leichhardt had encountered the mixed reactions of some Aborigines who were "horror-struck" at the sight of white men, while others had attempted to communicate. Those who did attempt to communicate often interrupted their speeches by spitting and "uttering a noise like pooh! pooh! apparently expressive of their disgust".[103]

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98 A scrutiny of the log-book of the *Bramble* reveals just how frequently seining parties were sent out. See Log of the *Bramble*, 15-18 May 1843, James Cook University.

99 Stanner, "The History of Indifference Thus Begins", p.13.

100 MacGillivray, *Narrative of the* ***Rattlesnake***, 1:79-80.

101 Aborigines exchanged information when they traded with one another. At the Suttor River, Leichhardt noted: "A basket (dilli), which I examined, was made of a species of grass which, according to Charley, is found only on the sea coast"; Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.194. For a detailed analysis of group contact, see Brayshaw, Aboriginal Material Culture, pp.71-9.

102 Leichhardt, *op.cit.*, p.216.

103 *Ibid.*, p.93. It seems more than likely that the Aborigines were expressing surprise. As previously mentioned, Jukes had noted that they expressed surprise with a sound like "phut! phut!". Domville Taylor, who was a member of Christopher Hodgson's party in search of Leichhardt in 1845, noted that

By 1849, local Aboriginal society remained intensely curious about the white people, though, at times, somewhat fearful. As long as there was no perceived threat, it accepted the Europeans who occasionally visited its territory. If its laws were broken it dealt assertively with the offenders. Aboriginal society had actually begun the process of incorporating and bonding some Europeans. To the warmth, strength and protection of fire were extended the Aboriginal hands of healing so that warmth might pass from one to another. Europeans were perplexed. Murrells told how "Great fear seized hold of me ... and ... I struggled against it".[104] The white people had missed the symbolic significance, but managed to feel later its strength and presence. Perhaps someone at some time crossed the cultural frontier to see in the flames that it was the "heathens" who embraced Christians in the wilderness with the laying on of hands.

Aborigines in southern Queensland expressed their astonishment "by making a noise like the barking of a dog"; see Journal and Sketches of Domville Taylor, 1840-46 (originals are in the possession of Mrs. M.G. Gillon, 56 Chester Row, London SW1).

[104] Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.11.

Chapter Two

THE FLICKERING FLAME

Although the inexorable spread of pastoral expansion did not begin in North Queensland until 1861 with the opening of the Kennedy District, the harbingers of white civilization - potential run seekers, private explorers and government-sponsored parties - set the pattern of conflict which would become the basis of future contact between black and white on the frontier. The Aborigines were no longer confronted by castaways or "objective" observers trained in the traditions of the Royal Society of London. The intellectual environment in Australia at this time was not one conducive to patience, tolerance, understanding and humanitarian endeavour. "Experience" was now the vogue word and it had "proved" beyond doubt that the Aborigines epitomized the worst features of humanity: savagery, hostility, treachery and cannibalism. Ever since Bennelong had shunned "civilized" ways, case after case of Aboriginal rejection of white civilization confirmed that the black would refuse all that was white and worthwhile: education, culture, Christianity and materialism. Such thoughts helped to rationalize the white conquest of Australia and certainly were part of invasion ideology in North Queensland. In the period 1848-60, the precursors of white civilization transformed thought into action on the Kennedy frontier and gave the Aborigines a glimpse of what lay ahead. While the vanguard of white civilization shot freely at the imagined Aboriginal aggressors, the chroniclers and, much later, the historians followed in their footsteps by shooting wide of the mark in recording the conflict. The pioneers generated the myths; later writers perpetuated them. Both were imprisoned by them. This period is the history of the potency of myth and the men and women who became its prisoners.

If there had been any radical speculation about the nature of humanity in the first half of the nineteenth century,[1] there was now a

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[1] See the following works: R.H.W. Reece, *Aborigines and Colonial Society in New South Wales in the 1830s* (Sydney, 1974); J.A. Barnes, "Anthropology in Britain Before and After Darwin", *Mankind*, 5, No. 9 (July, 1960), 369-85; M.C. Hartwig, "Aborigines and Racism: An Historical Perspective", in *Racism: The Australian Experience. A Study of Race Prejudice in Australia,* ed. F.S. Stevens (New York, 1972), 2:9-24; Henry Reynolds, "Racial Thought in Early Colonial Australia", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 20, No. 1 (April, 1974), 45-53; Ross

plethora of "evidence" to confirm that the Aborigines of Australia were not only base but also irredeemable.[2] What Charles Darwin had mused on a trip from Sydney to Bathurst in 1836 - "The varieties of man seem to act on each other in the same way as different species of animals - the stronger always extirpating the weaker"[3] - had now become a well established feature of colonial life. This "hideously ugly" race with only "the very smallest intellectual development"[4] was, according to the visitor, Chas. Allen, unable to be rescued from its "primeval barbarism."[5] There was no savage in the world, an ex-Native Police Officer was to later write, "so thoroughly low and degraded as the Queensland Black."[6] Even the Frenchman, Arthur de Gobineau, claimed that "The European cannot win the Asiatic to his mode of thinking; he cannot civilize the Australian or the Negro ..."[7] In 1861, the *Report From the Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the Condition of the Aborigines Generally* simply confirmed

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Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise. Changing Literary Perceptions of Australia* (n.p., 1984) Ch. 5. Even in the early part of the twentieth century there was speculation about developing new "breeds" of people. See R. Hamlyn-Harris, "Some Anthropological Considerations of Queensland and the History of its Ethnography", *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland*, 29 (1917), 1-45.

2 See Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders and Kathryn Cronin, *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland* (Sydney, 1975), especially the Introduction; a glance at colonial newspapers at this time also confirms this point. On the relative merits of the English race, see Anon., "How the English People are Constituted, and of What Races They are Composed", *Science of Man and Australasian Anthropological Journal*, 1. No. 5 (June 1898), 111-113; See also J. Mildred Creed, "The Position of the Australian Aborigines in the Scale of Human Intelligence", *The Nineteenth Century and After*, 57 (January-June 1905), 89-96.

3 Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches Into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited During the Voyage Round the World of H.M.S. 'Beagle' Under the Command of Captain Fitz Roy, R.N.* (1890; rpt. London, 1913), p. 463. Darwin said on this voyage that the Aborigines "appear to me to stand some few degrees higher in the scale of civilisation than the Fuegians." *Ibid.*, p.462.

4 Chas. H. Allen, *A Visit to Queensland and Her Goldfields* (London, 1870) p. 181.

5 Allen, *A Visit to Queensland*, p. 179. Allen also stated that before the arrival of the white people, the Aborigines had been "living in a state only just removed from that of the beasts of the forest." p. 179.

6 E. B. Kennedy, *Four Years in Queensland* (London, 1870), p. 67.

7 A. de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* (New York, 1967), p. 174.

perceptions, ideas and thoughts which had been in existence for a considerable time. The evidence, said the report, showed

> beyond doubt that all attempts to Christianize or educate the aborigines of Australia have hitherto proved abortive. Credible witnesses shew that they are addicted to cannibalism; that they have no idea of a future state; and are sunk in the lowest depths of barbarism.[8]

Armed with such thoughts came the early explorers and pioneers of North Queensland.

One of the first expeditions to reach the Cape Cleveland - Abbott Bay area was that of W.H. Gaden, a station manager from near Gympie, who marked off several prospective runs in 1857.[9] Accounts of Gaden's expedition are derivative but they were supplied by Gaden who at the time of publication was still alive. Aspects of Gaden's journey confirm an attitude of Aboriginal friendship and a well-developed means of facilitating communication between strangers. Gaden claimed that the five Aborigines who approached his camp near the Broken River came in peace because "they carried green boughs in their hands as a token of friendship."[10] Like Aborigines in other

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8 *Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the Condition of the Aborigines Generally: Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, and Minutes of Evidence* (Brisbane, 1861), p.4.

9 J.T.S. Bird, *The Early History of Rockhampton, Dealing Chiefly with Events up till 1870* (Rockhampton, 1904), pp.386-96: There were earlier expeditions: for example, William Kilman (1854) - see Edward Palmer, *Early Days In North Queensland* (1903; rpt. 1983), p. 94. Even earlier, Christopher Allingham allegedly made a trip to the area. See G. Bolton, "The Exploration of North Queensland: Some Problems," *J.R.A.H.S.*, 46, (Dec. 1960), 352-9.

10 Bird, *Rockhampton* p. 393. There is ample evidence to prove that the Aboriginal practice of waving a green bough, or boughs, when meeting Europeans on the frontier was fairly common throughout Australia. The difficulty lies in correctly interpreting this gesture. There does not seem to be any anthropological research that suggests this practice was part of pre-contact Aboriginal meetings; but this is not to say that it wasn't. James Kirby, one of the earliest of bush pioneers of the colony of Victoria, told how Aborigines returned to the whites the next day "with green boughs in their hands ....they began swinging the boughs over and round their heads... and those who had no boughs took up hands full of sand and earth and threw it over their heads...We...did not know what their meaning was by these antics, but we guessed by it they meant we were welcome to their land." James Kirby, *Old Times in the Bush of Australia. Trials and Experiences of Early Bush Life in Victoria, During the Forties* (Melbourne, 1894), p.32. Brough Smyth recorded a ceremony which a strange tribe undergoes when

areas, they asked Gaden from where he had come and where he intended going. An old Aboriginal man then introduced himself and his companions to Gaden's party. Their names were "Bunda," "Bootha," "Martha," "Epitha," and "Cobitha". When each member of Gaden's party (five in all) adopted one of these names, it produced "great merriment among the black visitors, who yelled, and jumped, and danced, evidently considering they were all a family party". Despite the obvious gestures of goodwill, and a curiosity about the horses, it was still felt that "the savage black can rarely be trusted."[11] This lack of trust had certainly manifested itself the previous day when Gaden's party had become alarmed at the movement of twenty blacks towards the direction of the camp. The group was followed by a second group with "loads of spears". Although these "unwelcome visitors" did not as much as throw a spear, the order was given "to fire steadily at them". If Gaden's account is to be believed, the only "black" to be hit was the man shot by Gaden himself.[12]

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it is invited to come into a district which it has not previously visited: "Their entertainers make them welcome, first to the forest lands to which they are owners; then to the trees, from which they cut boughs and present them to their visitors ....and the boughs and the branches and the leaves and the grass are symbols of friendship which are well understood by all the givers and the receivers." R. Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria*, p. 134; Daniel Bunce, naturalist and botanist on Leichhardt's 1846 expedition to traverse Australia, noted that in southern Queensland the Aborigines brought in their hands "branches of an integral-leaved wattle, or Acacia, as tokens of peace." See Daniel Bunce, *Australasiatic Reminiscences of Twenty-Three Years' Wanderings in Tasmania and the Australias, Including Travels with Dr. Leichhardt in North Tropical Australia* (Melbourne, 1857), p. 116. Often, Europeans would wave boughs to Aborigines as tokens of peace. Whether this would have conveyed any meaning to the Aborigines is an open question. T. L. Mitchell often waved a bough whenever he stumbled upon an Aborigine and Jukes did the same, too. Mitchell, *Three Expeditions,* 1:207,209; Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:34. It is also worthy of note that when Gaden attempted to wave green boughs at the Aborigines they did not, according to Gaden, "respond". See Bird, *Rockhampton* p. 391.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 393.

12 The "Aborigine" shot by Gaden in the shoulder was described as a "small left-handed myall, who raised a boomerang" to throw at Gaden's party after it had fired at the blacks. He was described as "lighter in colour than the others". In 1863, after Murrells had returned to white society and was working at Bowen, he was questioned by Joseph Walker who had been second in command of Gaden's trip. Bird takes up the story: "Without any allusion being made to Nora Creek, it was found he [Murrells] knew all about the country, and had seen the

A.C. and F. T. Gregory's North Australian Expedition also passed down the Burdekin during October 1856 without detecting signs of Aboriginal hostility. Along the Upper Burdekin, the only Aborigines encountered either climbed trees in fright or ran off. On one occasion three, who had obviously overcome their fright, attempted to communicate with Gregory but when neither party understood the other, they abandoned the attempt.[13] Later when Gregory's party heard blacks calling in the rear along the Suttor River, he sent a cantering horseman to tell them to "pursue an opposite route."[14] In this same locality, several of the blacks also climbed trees in fright. It is somewhat astonishing to find that A. C. Gregory, who later gave evidence before a committee on government, would say that, when the Kennedy District was opened, its new Commissioner would have "to fight his way through the country tendered for."[15] What is even more curious is that Gregory's opinion, which bore little resemblance to his actual experience, would be later relied upon by Commissioner Dalrymple's biographer, Jean Farnfield, to bolster her claim that early pioneers in the in the Kennedy, especially the Commisioner himself, "did not greatly exaggerate the menace of the Aboriginals to early white settlement in the North."[16]

If any claims were to be isolated as examples of exaggerating Aboriginal hostility, the ones which would readily qualify would be those of Dalrymple - and his biographer. In the hope that the Kennedy District would soon be declared open for settlement, George

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first white men who came to it.' From this it was inferred that he was the left-handed man with the boomerang.If the surmise is correct, the wonder is that Morrell did not then leave the blacks, if he had any wish to do so." *Ibid.*, p.391-2.

13 Augustus Charles Gregory and Francis Thomas Gregory *Journals of Australian Explorations* (Brisbane, 1884), p. 185.

14 *Ibid.*, p.188.

15 Minutes of Evidence, *1860 Votes and Proceedings* (Hereafter, *V.& P.*), p.5; Gregory had only one instance of conflict with the Aborigines in North Queensland, at the Gulf between the Albert and Leichhardt Rivers: 5 September 1856. Gregory also had his own ideas about the blacks, as his comment early that September morning indicates: "At day break ... nineteen blacks came to the camp, all armed with clubs and spears. They did not make any hostile demonstration and a person unacquainted with the treacherous character of the Australian might have thought them friendly." Gregory, *Journals*, p. 173.

16 Jean Farnfield, George Elphinstone Dalrymple - His Life and Times In Queensland 1859 - 1874, (PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1968), p. 71.

Elphinstone Dalrymple led a private exploring party in 1859 to mark off "two hundred square miles of the best Burdekin land" for each subscriber to his syndicate.[17] Dalrymple's own journal of the trip cannot be located,[18] and subsequent accounts of his expedition were noticeably short on specifics;[19] nevertheless, he spoke about "the

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17 Bolton, "The Exploration of North Queensland", p. 355. Dalrymple's proposals, which were for private circulation only, contain the stated aims of the expedition. See G. E. Dalrymple, *Proposals for the Establishment of a New Pastoral Settlement in North Australia* (Brisbane, 1859).

18 It is not unreasonable to assume that Dalrymple would have kept a diary or journal for recording important information for the syndicate. Attempts to locate his journal at the John Oxley and Mitchell Libraries have proved fruitless. There is no record at the Queensland State Archives nor The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, London - (personal correspondence). A hint that a journal was kept also appeared in H. Ling Roth, *The Discovery and Settlement of Port Mackay, Queensland,* (Halifax, 1908), p. 45. Dalrymple had grounds for keeping what information he had gathered a secret. Firstly, he was in charge of a private expedition and owed that information to his backers. (A report in the *Moreton Bay Courier* of 12 April 1860 read: "We hoped to have been able to give our readers a detailed account of this expedition, [Burdekin]... but we learn that Mr. Dalrymple is compelled to secresy [sic] by the association of gentlemen who fitted him out, until such time as his report has been presented to them.) Secondly, he was unlikely to make this information public while he was using it as a bargaining ploy to obtain some sort of compensation for his efforts in the Kennedy. This annoyed the government, as Dalrymple seemed to give them just enough to whet their appetites for more. The Colonial Secretary certainly expressed his irritation about Dalrymple's failure to give information. Reporting a parliamentary discussion about whether Dalrymple's petition to the House for compensation should be printed at government expense, the *Moreton Bay Courier* of 14 July, 1860 stated: "So far as the merits of the case were concerned he [the Colonial Secretary] might remark that the government had repeatedly endeavoured to elicit from this gentleman some information as to the nature of his discoveries but to no purpose although he had frequently promised to supply it." See also Petitions, *1860 V.& P.* When Dalrymple was later compensated for his efforts, he was again asked by the government to provide information. This was revealed in a letter from the Colonial Secretary to A. C. Gregory, Chief Commissioner for Crown Lands: "...and that the Government shall be placed in full possession of the results of the explorations already done by him, in that portion of the Colony." (SUR/A28:1674 of 1860, QSA). I have been unsuccessful in locating Dalrymple's response, if indeed he ever supplied the information.

19 Governor Bowen to the Secretary of State, No.34, 12 April 1860: GOV/220, p.203-207; No.54, 10 July 1860: GOV/22, pp.254-260 QSA; also in G. E. Dalrymple, "Exploration of the Burdekin, Suttor, and Belyando Rivers in North East Australia", *Royal Geographical Society Proceedings*, 5, No. 1(1860), pp.4-7.

numbers and hostility of the aborigines".[20] Historians have responded with alacrity to his claim although an examination of what evidence is available throws doubt on his assertions.

Ernest Henry, who accompanied Dalrymple on his trip to the Burdekin, left in his letters an account of the trip up till his premature return to Rockhampton. Evidence in Henry's records suggests that Dalrymple's actions were more a result of typical attitudes in contemporary colonial society than a response to the situation at hand. This was evident the day after Dalrymple's party arrived at the Burdekin River. Henry and three others stayed at the camp to rest the horses while Dalrymple and the remainder of the party attempted to follow the Burdekin to its mouth. Although prior to this the party had not previously encountered any signs of Aboriginal ill-will - most Aborigines they had seen had fled in horror[21] - they soon began building, presumably at Dalrymple's request, "a sort of barricade for protection against the blacks as it would not be safe for so small a party to remain there long without something of the sort." (Aboriginal hostility was an elaborate myth and it is not surprising that upon such myths could be erected some elaborate edifices.) In the light of later controversy over Aboriginal hostility in the region, it is worth recording in full Henry's description of the first such edifice in North Queensland:

> We first placed four upright poles in the ground enclosing a space about 12 ft. by 8 ft. then joined them by long saplings passed through the forks at the top, dug a trench about 1½ft. deep all round in which we placed saplings leaning a little outwards against those at the top. We then placed all plates against the uprights to keep them firm, filled in the trench, first laying poles on either side at the base of the saplings. We then placed two very tall forked poles at either end with a ridge pole across and spread our largest tent over all. Altogether it was very strong and well loop-holed, the walls were 8 or 9 feet high.

Henry could stay in his fortress for only two weeks. The real enemy who drove him out was not the blacks - he did not mention a single contact situation with them - but his own capitalist brothers - that other party which had followed their tracks and, as Henry said,

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20 Despatch No. 54, 10 July 1860, as above.

21 Ernest Henry, Extracts from Early Letters of Ernest Henry, 1:69.

> determined us on altering our former plans so it was agreed between us that Hood and I ... should return on our outwards tracks to Rockhampton with tenders for the country we had got.[22]

Dalrymple's stockade became a matter for public ridicule as early as February 1861. In a letter to the *Queensland Guardian*, a person with the pseudonym, "Sylvanus", wrote of his friend, unnamed, who had spent five months exploring and had been on Dalrymple's tracks in the Burdekin "from week's end to week's end":

> "I never saw a country," said my young friend, "where natives are so scarce and so frightened!" ... They passed and repassed Mr Dalrymple's stockade, and wondered what on earth it was built for, they unearthed his buried ammunition, but did not wonder why he had no use for it; they were on his tracks from week's end to week's end, but saw no vestiges of battlefields; and, in short, they saw nothing connected with the natives ...[23]

The pseudonym, Sylvanus, makes it difficult to identify the motive or motives - aside from questioning Dalrymple's credibility as an explorer - which prompted such criticism of him. If by remote chance these were humanitarian motives, then the evidence is compelling. Even if they were not, Dalrymple's record towards Aborigines cannot stand up to close scrutiny. Certainly, the party which followed Dalrymple's tracks had a very different impression of the Aborigines than did Dalrymple. Sylvanus wrote of his friend's experience with the Burdekin Aborigines:

> ... they spent months upon that river and its affluents, their greatest desire sometimes was to fall in with the natives, their greatest wish, when they did, was to mingle with them ... What natives they saw generally ran away ...[24]

It is indeed remarkable that two parties in the same territory at the same time could produce such divergent views. The fact that Henry recorded no instance of hostile contact at the Burdekin tends to reinforce the evidence that Dalrymple's party responded to predetermined attitudes rather than belligerent Aboriginal actions. The barricade was the outward manifestation of internal paranoia and

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22 *Ibid.*, I 72-3.

23 *Queensland Guardian*, 4 February 1861.

24 *Ibid.*

symbolized the ultimate danger in the propagation of myth - the reality of becoming the victim of one's own propaganda.

Dalrymple, who at this time was now separated from Henry, claimed that his party had been attacked by the Aborigines while attempting to trace the Burdekin to its mouth. According to him, the Aborigines were "savage and hostile ... they attacked my camp twice in one afternoon in large numbers, and were only prevented from 'rushing' and overwhelming our small party by a timely charge on horseback."[25] In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, one might temporarily accept his version of events and place them within the context of a further trip to the Burdekin in 1860.

As compensation for his exploration work along the Burdekin River, Dalrymple was appointed to the position of first Commissioner of Crown Lands (Kennedy).[26] In the meantime, he was given the task of accompanying Joseph W. Smith R.N. on the Queensland Government Schooner, *Spitfire*, to search for the mouth of the River Burdekin. The report of this expedition reveals Dalrymple in action: preconceived ideas taking precedence over facts. An incident at Upstart Bay demonstrated that Dalrymple and Smith distorted the reality of their situation by anticipating hostility under the confused influence of past happenings:

> Aborigines were seen on the beach with a canoe. We landed, and found the newly killed carcass of a dugong, from which they were cutting steaks to roast on the coals in a very systematic matter ... The blacks retreated at our approach, many of their smokes rose from the land behind the hill; *and to prevent molestation, this being*

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25 *Report of the Proceedings of the Queensland Government Schooner "Spitfire", in Search of the Mouth of the River Burdekin on the North-Eastern Coast of Australia and of the Exploration of a Portion of That Coast* (Brisbane, 1860), pp. 21-22. Dalrymple was reflecting on his 1859 trip to the Burdekin. A.D.Broughton, a former subscriber to Dalrymple's syndicate who later became a member of the Queensland Parliament, also mentioned the hostility of the blacks: "Here the hon. member read the petition particularly instancing the fact that Mr. Dalrymple had, in the course of the expedition, been twice attacked by the blacks, that for six or seven days he was closely pursued, and could only rest for an hour or so at sundown on each day, and that during the greater part of the day both him and his companions had to live on less than half rations." *Moreton Bay Courier*, 14 July 1860.

26 Colonial Secretary to A.C. Gregory, SUR/A28:1674 of 1860, QSA.

> *part of the tribe which attacked me last year, we took possession of the canoe, and it is now in the Botanical Gardens in Brisbane.*[27]

Smith's report of this same incident confirmed the absence of Aboriginal aggression. In fact, it emphasised that European vandalism of both property and food supply was clearly in retribution for alleged *past* misdeeds - but now changed to the "attack" on the *Santa Barbara* the previous year. As Smith explained:

> On our landing to ascend the heights, two natives were on the beach, but they decamped, lighting signal fires as they went. Their canoe being on the beach, *and these natives belonging to a tribe known to be hostile to white men (having not many months previously attacked the "Santa Barbara"), I made no scruple in taking their canoe and spear, and towing off a Dugong, which had evidently just been caught.*[28]

Clearly, the presumptions of Aboriginal hostility, reinforced by past "experience", worked together to produce a very potent and distorted version of events: the punitive actions of Smith and Dalrymple were out of context in time, place and circumstance. They communicated no rational explanation to the Aboriginal victims and demonstrated that government-sanctioned attacks on Aboriginal property would have an early start in North Queensland. The European act of confiscation exhibited some of the worst features of white civilization: it contained, maintained and sustained the belief that the blacks were an inherently hostile race open to plunder and punishment. It went a long way to explain why Jean Farnfield would later say, "Never on any of his expeditions did Dalrymple lose a man by Aboriginal attack."[29]

The impact of such behaviour on Aboriginal society could be quite significant. If the more northerly examples are taken as evidence, it can be readily seen how such actions could strike savagely at daily life and beliefs. The capture of a dugong and the disposal of its flesh was an important event in Aboriginal society.[30] It was surrounded by a

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27 *Spitfire Report*, p.29. My emphasis.

28 *Ibid.*, p.9. My emphasis.

29 Farnfield, *Frontiersman*, p.29.

30 Donald F. Thomson, "The Dugong Hunters of Cape York", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 63 (1934), 237-262, and "The Fishermen and Dugong Hunters of Princess Charlotte Bay," *Walkabout*, 22 (1 November 1956), 33-36. In a more modern context, see Athol Kennedy Chase, Which Way Now? (Ph. D. thesis, University of Queensland, 1980); personal correspondence with Athol Chase, Griffith University; Chase, "Cultural Continuity", p.86; Roughsey, *Moon*

2. Bark canoe, Bowen district, 1909

Canoes like this were stolen and smashed by Dalrymple during the Spitfire expeditioin.
(John Oxley Library)

wealth of magic and ritual. The hunter not only had to exhibit great skill and prowess in hunting the animal but also had to observe certain practices which, if not heeded, would bring him "bad luck" and the loss of his own people's confidence.[31] Dugong flesh was also a highly prized category of food as it yielded rich meat rewards and huge quantities of fat - scarce in Australian marsupials. Dugong oil was also sought after and used in technology.[32] The capture of a dugong might also have been anxiously awaited by hungry members of the clan who, as anthropologist Thomson has revealed, could have gone hungry for "some days".[33] Some seventy to eighty kilograms of dugong meat would have easily spread itself throughout thirty households[34] and half-cooked dugong flesh was often carried inland to stave off possible hunger.[35] The taking of the canoe and harpoon was also potentially injurious to the welfare of the local community. It possibly deprived it of a means of obtaining food supplies and might have exacerbated a condition of hunger in the camp. The manufacture of a harpoon alone might also take an Aborigine "weeks of intermittent work".[36] The making of the dugong rope similarly required considerable skill and was highly valued by its owner. The very technological processes associated with dugong hunting and its capture were, in some instances, firmly rooted in Aboriginal mythology.[37]

Ironically, it did not take Dalrymple long to identify "savage" traits in the Aborigines he contacted. He was quick to identify cannibalistic tendencies in the Aborigines he met at Cape Cleveland. This was the classic manner in which authors could, as Ross Gibson

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and Rainbow, pp.47-52.

31 Thomson, "The Dugong Hunters of Cape York", pp. 250-55. Thomson instanced the following: "Chief among the practices that bring "bad luck"... are the burning of the hide of the dugong, the use of its blood to dye the shafts of spears, and the touching or carrying of the body or bones of the dead." *Ibid.*, p.253.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 241. The oil was stored in the bladder of a turtle.

33 *Ibid.*, p.247.

34 Chase, "Cultural Continuity", p.86.

35 Thomson, "The Dugong Hunters of Cape York", p.249.

36 *Ibid.*, p.257.

37 *Ibid.*, p.256.

said, "scandalise at the same time as they thrilled the reading public."[38] Dalrymple wrote of this group who were known to Murrells:

> I accompanied Mr Smith and Mr Stone ashore. These gentlemen were taking sights on an isolated rock Some of the blacks came down and we gave them biscuit and tobacco etc, being kind and civil to them, which they appeared to appreciate. They, however began to feel us all over, and especially the Botanist, who was in good condition - smacking their lips and giving other unmistakable evidences of a relish for human flesh, and a desire to gratify it. More blacks came down; they attacked us with stones and spears, when we were necessitated to fire upon them, repulsing them with loss.[39]

Initially, Murrells and his fellow castaways had also alarmed themselves at Cape Cleveland by "imagining that the examining and chattering blacks were excited by cannibal considerations." They soon learned, however, that it was "only a matter of curiosity."[40] Dalrymple's description of events epitomized the accumulated ignorance of colonial society. His obvious unfamiliarity with the earlier accounts of exploration and his fantasies about cannibalism augured ill for future Aboriginal-European relationships.

Dalrymple's account of this incident later provoked comment from Murrells who was at the time living with the Aborigines just a little further inland. According to Murrells:

> the men from the vessel went on the rocks and brought down the sun to the water. I told them before, if they ever saw white men again to try and make them understand that there was a white man living with them; well they tried their hardest, but seemed to have failed; the white men became alarmed and thought they

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38 Gibson, *Diminishing Paradise*, p.156. For an interpretation of cannibalism, see C.O. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Melbourne, 1978), p.164; Brayshaw, Aboriginal Material Culture, pp. 300-10. See also E.G. Heap, "Some Notes on Cannibalism Among Queensland Aborigines, 1824-1900", *Queensland Heritage*, 1, No.7 (November 1967), 25-9; W. Arens, *The Man-eating Myth: anthropology and anthropophagy* (Oxford, 1979). Murrells also said, "Human flesh cannot be considered part of their food. See Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.20.

39 *Spitfire Report*, p.23; The lip smacking could have been as a result of the tobacco. According to Murrells' account, they knew "nothing of the use of tobacco". Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.24.

40 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863.

> meant mischief, whereas it was only their earnestness in trying to make them understand ...[41]

Neither Murrells nor Dalrymple was a keen observer of Aboriginal behaviour and both their accounts probably omitted some important aspects. But the words in which Murrells conveyed what his Aboriginal companions had told him - "the men from the vessel ... brought down the sun to the water" - are an exact description of what a navigator does when taking an observation of the sun's altitude in order to calculate latitude. Since the "gentlemen were taking sights"[42] it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that an Aborigine was induced to look through a sextant while a European went through the procedure for "shooting the sun". How this extraordinary sight would strike Aborigines is another matter. Murrells said elsewhere in his short pamphlet that "they think all the heavenly bodies are under their control," and that when there is an eclipse of the sun "they are uneasy during its continuance.". In fact it was believed by the Aborigines that "some of their tribe hide it with a sheet of bark to frighten the rest."[43] Because the Aborigines felt uneasy about tampering with the sun, it could be conjectured that the very act of bringing the sun down to the water was seen not only as an act of magic by the Europeans but also as an act of usurpation of Aboriginal control of the sun. Such is pure conjecture, but it could help to explain why Dalrymple said "they attacked us with stones and spears" - for no obvious reason.[44]

Because Smith and Dalrymple began their 1860 exploration work with fixed beliefs about the Aborigines being "a savage and hostile people",[45] it was only to be expected that they would "see" examples of this in harmless Aboriginal activities. Aboriginal fires and smokes could conjure up all sorts of imaginings in European minds, and Smith and Dalrymple lost few opportunities to make such activities virtually synonymous with hostility. At least one bushman at the time publicly challenged the official report of the *Spitfire* expedition:

> The report appears to have been put forth by the Government as a trump card regardless of the contempt which it must call up in the

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41 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.13.

42 *Spitfire Report*, p.23.

43 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, pp.20-21. My emphasis.

44 *Spitfire Report*, p.23.

45 *Ibid.*, p.2.

> minds of all experienced persons and I will premise my notice of it by supposing that the majority of your readers know something of the natives of this coast; and know that neither their "smokes," their "canoes," nor their carcases strike terror, worth recording, into the heart of a bushman.[46]

Although Dalrymple and Smith's claims of Aboriginal hostility were threadbare, and this was even perceived at the time, some historians failed to see it a hundred years later. Jean Farnfield was convinced of Aboriginal "ferocity". To some extent she had been seduced not by the evidence, but by Dalrymple's assertion that the Aborigines were hostile, a pitfall not uncommon to biographers sympathetic to their subject. Her claims of "hostile to white invasion", "ferocity", and "a primitive instinct to repel invaders", is not borne out by the evidence available from these expeditions.[47] Yet the myth of innately hostile northern blacks - fortified as it was by the "accounts" of Leichhardt and Kennedy[48] - has persisted into the twentieth century. Farnfield, however, is not alone in her claims of Aboriginal ferocity. Noel Loos has also accepted uncritically the accounts of Smith and Dalrymple as well as Farnfield's conclusions. According to Loos, Smith and Dalrymple published accounts of their 1860 expedition which "again stressed the numbers and ferocity of the Aborigines whose reputation was being established even before settlement."[49] It seems he placed his faith in Farnfield's *Frontiersman,* for as Loos himself said: "The account of Dalrymple's plan and expeditions depends heavily on this book." Six years later, after exhaustive research into Aboriginal-European relations in North Queensland, Loos had still not modified or questioned Dalrymple's views of Aboriginal attitudes. He simply restated what had always been so readily accepted - Dalrymple's version. "On both his 1860 and 1859

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46 *Queensland Guardian*, 4 February 1861.

47 Farnfield, George Elphinstone Dalrymple, p.58.

48 Reports that the blacks made sudden attacks for no reason are being seriously questioned. See Brian Dalton's seminar papers, The Search for John Gilbert, and The Death and Burial of John Gilbert, June 1845 (History Department, James Cook University); it is also probable that the Aborigines were trying to act as hosts for Kennedy's party, but became angry once they saw their overtures rejected. See John MacGillivray, *Narrative of the Rattlesnake*: Carron's narrative.

49 Loos, Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District, p.113.

expedition" wrote Loos, "Dalrymple reported frequent clashes with the Aborigines and stressed their numbers and aggressiveness."[50] Later, the failure to question the accounts of Dalrymple and others would lead Loos to misinterpret the early pattern of Aboriginal- European relations in the Bowen hinterland.[51]

In stressing the relative merits of Dalrymple and white society, it was probably to be expected that this noble frontiersman would have to be compared with the most ignoble of savages. In stressing Dalrymple's commendable record of never losing a man to Aboriginal attack, Farnfield commented:

> This was a striking record in the history of the North, where a number of pioneer parties had already perished from foolishly underestimating the ferocity and cunning of the natives.[52]

Farnfield could also empathise with the task of "North Queensland's foremost pioneer"[53] when he was given charge of planning the new settlement at Port Denison in 1861:

> He planned wisely. The responsibility of settling a white community in the midst of nomadic, utterly primitive savages, with whom there was no means of communication, presented a difficult problem.[54]

Other explorers in the Kennedy also helped generate the myth of Aboriginal hostility. Captain Henry Sinclair, James Gordon, Benjamin Pool and William Thomas, who sailed north on the *Santa Barbara* in the expectation that the New South Wales government would give a reward for the discovery of a secure harbour to the north of Port Curtis, also claimed that they encountered Aboriginal enmity in 1859. Their accounts produced no real evidence of antipathy although they implied treacherous intent in virtually every Aboriginal action. The Aborigines of Upstart Bay showed "animosity" and "treachery" in four ways: a refusal to go away and fill some tins with water when they were requested to do so by the crew of the *Santa Barbara*; pretending to have filled the tins when they allegedly had not; beckoning the whites to go themselves and fetch the tins from the shore; and

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50 Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, p.127.

51 See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

52 Farnfield, *Frontiersman*, p.29.

53 *Ibid.*, p.25.

54 *Ibid.*, p.29.

swimming after the boat after it shoved off from shore.[55] Here in one incident were all the indications of Aboriginal ill-will. As the log of the *Santa Barbara* recorded: "and having suspected treachery, we now felt convinced that their intentions were not at all friendly."

These Aboriginal actions would call, several days later, for a demonstration of European firepower. A lone man left in charge of the vessel saw about thirty blacks, presumably unarmed, coming towards him. It seems that they were either walking or wading in shallow water. The log takes up the story:

> ... but the craft being in deep water rendered it rather difficult for them to get close. When they were about one hundred yards off he fired a blank charge at them, to drive them away; they then brought a canoe having five men in it and armed. As soon as they found ball whistling amongst them, they at once retired.[56]

A passenger was quick to impute motives in his journal, presuming that there was intent to take the vessel by force:

> We learnt that at low water they had crossed the sand banks dragging a canoe after them, their intention being to carry the vessel by boarding ... The treacherous character of the natives resolves us to leave Upstart Bay at once ...[57]

As for the general summary of the Aborigines, this passenger described them as being "exceedingly treacherous and vindictive".[58]

By 1865 a person calling himself "The Compiler" told citizens of Port Denison something of their early history in a letter to their newspaper, the *Port Denison Times*. Referring to the two incidents at Upstart Bay involving Captain Sinclair's crew of the *Santa Barbara*, he wrote:

> The blacks also were very troublesome, at one time attempting to seize or intercept the small boat while exploring the creeks and on another occasion attempting to force their way on board the

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55 The log and the journal were published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November 1859; later they were also published in the *North Queensland Herald*, 3 June 1896 and 10 June 1896.

56 Sydney Morning Herald, 24 November 1859.

57 *North Queensland Herald*, 10 June 1896. (This did not appear in the report contained in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.)

58 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November 1859.

schooner by means of a canoe when Thomas was left alone in charge.[59]

So began the chronicles of Aboriginal-white relations in North Queensland. What the Aborigines thought, felt and did was filtered through European prejudices to become "history". The errors made in recording this history were ones of inference, not observation - and it needed only a trickle of evidence to become a torrent of interpretation. A number of historians later unhesitatingly accepted the accounts of the whites and ignored a possible Aboriginal perspective. In doing so, they reduced history to a series of events rather than an investigation of the thoughts behind those events. Eliminating the Aboriginal perspective no doubt helped to rationalize what would be otherwise too painful to remember. It was just one of the many "mechanisms of forgetfulness".[60]

Even before the initial white settlement had begun in North Queensland, the Aborigines had been given an accurate preview of what white civilization had to offer: disruption, denigration and disrespect. There was nothing new about this, certainly not in the experience of the southern colonies: it simply reflected white society's disregard for the Aboriginal people. If a flame of hope had been once lit at the campfire, it was now beginning to flicker in the haze of sporadic gunfire.

European settlement was now near at hand and white behaviour was not about to change just because Port Denison was to be 200 miles from the nearest settled district. Loos believed it could. "An opportunity existed," he wrote, "for making a fresh start in establishing relations with the local Aborigines, one which might avoid the brutal dispossession which had occurred elsewhere." How this was to be accomplished he really did not explain, except perhaps by mentioning Dalrymple's "naive optimism".[61] Dalrymple was to be in charge of the new settlement and white society was about to embark on another mission of conquest northwards - but distance was not about to conquer the tyranny of European ideas.

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59 *P.D.T.*, 20 December 1865.

60 I owe this expression to Bernard Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini* (Boyer Lectures, Sydney, n.d.), p. 17.

61 Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, p.146,147.

Chapter Three

FROM FIRE TO FIREPOWER

The taking of Aboriginal land in North Queensland in 1861 was justified by the same thoughts, ideas and actions which had assuaged Christian consciences in the south since 1788. According to British law, the Aborigines were nomads and, therefore, had no right to the land which they had always occupied.[1] Nomadic habits offended British proprieties - unless, of course, these same habits were found in British colonial adventurers. One of the reputable textbooks on international law at the time, Vattel's *Law of Nations*, summed up the legal fiction of the day concerning the Aborigines: "Their removing their habitations through these immense regions cannot be taken for a true legal title. Their removing of their habitations cannot be taken for a true and legal possession."[2] The land, therefore, belonged to no-one - it was *terra nullius* - and consequently it could not even be conquered; the Aborigines, in the eyes of the law, had not even achieved the status of a conquered people. There was also a deeply religious significance in all of this. Had not God preordained the mission and the destiny of the British race? One nineteenth century clergyman put it succinctly:

> God, in making the earth, never intended it should be occupied by men so incapable of appreciating its resources as the Aborigines of Australia. The white man had indeed only carried out the intentions of the creator in coming and settling down in a territory of the natives. God's first command to man was: "Be fruitful, multiply and replenish the earth". Now that the Aborigines had not done and therefore it was no fault in taking the land of which they were previously the possessors. It was no fault. Aborigines had no right to the land.[3]

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1 Marc Gumbert, *Neither Justice Nor Reason: A Legal and Anthropological Analysis of Aboriginal Land Rights* (St.Lucia, 1984), pp. 26-7.

2 Quoted in Henry Reynolds, "The Legacy of the Past: European justification for taking the land", in *Black Australians: The Prospects for Change,* ed. Erik Olbrei (James Cook University, 1982), p.3.

3 *Ibid.* George Carrington, who spent quite some time in the Kennedy District, commented: "The argument seems to be, that God never intended them to live long in the land in which He had placed them." G. Carrington, *Colonial Adventures and Experience by a University Man* (London, 1871), p.143.

White was right and God obviously was white!

Colonial newspapers were influential in spreading the gospel of conquest northwards. In 1860, the editor of *Wide Bay and Burnett Times* felt proud that his newspaper's position was to "work out the moral and social improvement of a people possessing within themselves those germs of intellectual superiority so eminently characteristic of the British race".[4] The next year, the editor of the *Queensland Guardian* explained the invasion of North Queensland as "man's sacred mission to multiply and replenish the earth." He continued:

> To redeem from waste a noble territory which, however beautiful in the eyes of its Creator, has not yet subserved the high purpose for which it rose out of chaos - to make it musical with the sounds of labour, gay with the sight of art's civilising victories these glorious aims of human enterprise are *well fitted to enlist the sympathy of every man worthy the proud destiny of his race.*[5]

Here in a nutshell was a marvellous opportunity to exterminate with pride! Because the Aborigines had not used the land the way the British people - and God - said it *ought* to be used, the Aborigines deserved to be dispossessed. As a correspondent wrote from Port Denison to the *Queensland Guardian*:

> Wretched caricatures of the human race as they have made themselves, and faithless stewards of the fine property upon which they horde, the right - the duty of civilisation to occupy and "subdue" the soil which they disregard and disgrace is not an open question, in view of either reason or revelation ...[6]

This ideology has even found its acceptance well into the second half of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most daunting and deceptive aspect of this ideology is that it has been barely perceived by those living through it. As recently as 1984, one of Australia's foremost historians, Geoffrey Blainey, was still echoing nineteenth century beliefs: "To me, the fact is unmistakable that by modern standards the Aboriginals couldn't make full use of the lands - and it's in the

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4 *Wide Bay and Burnett Times*, 6 March 1860.

5 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 May 1861. My emphasis.

6 *Ibid.*, 29 June 1861.

interests of the world that someone else got them."[7] Historians, it seems, do not necessarily make much progress in their views over one hundred and twenty years; but, while the nineteenth century brandished the carbine, the twentieth century embraced Blainey - and both bit deeply into black Australia.

The armoury of British ideas fired the ammunition for Aboriginal genocide. There was nothing new about British beliefs being bolstered by the bullet. Had not a mobile liquidation squad of Native Mounted Police been a "success" in the southern states?[8] This force also became the legitimate instrument of government policy in Queensland. A Native Mounted Police detachment generally consisted of a senior European officer, sometimes a subordinate European officer, and a body of Aboriginal troopers ranging in numbers from four to ten. The Native Police had three duties: to break up - "disperse" - large assemblages of blacks, and at the same time to intimidate them by constant patrolling; to apprehend Aboriginal "criminals"; and to act as a punitive force for the local settlers.[9] The *Maryborough Chronicle* explained its principle of action:

> Taking advantage of known hostility between the various tribes of Aborigines, and training their savageness rather than endeavouring to overcome it, able-bodied blacks belonging to one district are transferred to another 200 or 300 miles away, taught the use of firearms, fully equipped, and then, under the guidance of European officers - upon the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief - they are sent out with full licence to shoot and to destroy as many blacks as they can find.[10]

Despite an investigation into the workings of the Native Police in 1861, it was found that any excesses attributable to the troopers had arisen "mainly from the inefficiency, the indiscretion, and the

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7 *Courier-Mail*, 2 May 1984. Blainey's statement differed little from an opinion expressed in the *Sydney Mail*, n.d. 1880 concerning Aboriginal land use: "He has had two chances: Nature...[had] given him a splendid country, [and] he has been brought into contact with a highly civilised race; but he has proved unworthy of both. [The] blood is therefore upon his own head." Quoted in Richard Sadleir, *The Aborigines of Australia* (Sydney, 1883), n. pag.

8 This was, as Rowley explained, the "only instrument of 'native administration' which the new [Queensland] government inherited from New South Wales". *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, p.159.

9 For an insight into the workings of the Native Mounted Police, see H. Reynolds, *Aborigines and Settlers, the Australian Experience, 1788-1939* (Melbourne, 1973).

10 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 14 March 1861.

intemperate habits of some of the officers, rather than from any defect in the system itself.[11] The government, it seemed, was not suddenly going to relinquish the system whereby state terrorism equalled normalcy. The violation of human rights had become too firmly and satisfactorily integrated into colonial society as official practice to warrant its abolition.

It was probably fitting, therefore, that George Elphinstone Dalrymple, still basking in the afterglow of his significant paramilitary "victories" during the *Spitfire* expedition, would be given charge of white civilisation's great leap forward into North Queensland. Contrary to recent academic claims, Dalrymple had no intention of avoiding bloodshed and establishing good communications with the Aborigines.[12] What he *said* and what he *did* were often two very different things. Regrettably, these historians did not bother to distinguish his rhetoric from reality.

Dalrymple showed from the very beginning that he would arm and alarm the frontier.[13] Firstly, he won approval from the

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11 *Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force...*, p.2.

12 Farnfield, *Frontiersman*, pp.10, 29; Loos, Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District, pp.114-5, 119,121. Loos did not seem to distinguish Dalrymple's propaganda from his actual actions. Despite acknowledging that Dalrymple's attitudes were naive, Loos continued to believe Dalrymple whenever he said that he wanted good relations with the Aborigines. Dalrymple gave a repeat performance at Cardwell in 1864 and Loos again believed in his "good intentions". *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier 1861-1897* (Canberra, 1982), pp.34-5. The fact that Loos could not come to terms with Dalrymple led him, in many respects, to misinterpret events in the Bowen hinterland as the "most notable exception to the pattern of conflict" in North Queensland. Aboriginal-European Relations, p.146.

13 This was obvious from the evidence he gave to the Select Committee on Police, 12 July 1860:

Dalrymple:

I think in the first place that the number of the force ought to be increased...I think also that the accoutrements of the force ought to be of a better description that they are at present.

Question: Do you think they [the Aborigines] are inclined to be hostile?

Dalrymple: I have every reason to believe so...

Question: You mentioned that the accoutrements of the Native Police were not good, do you mean fire-arms?

Dalrymple: Yes, the old ones were not good at all; I saw some capital double-barrelled carbines issued from the Surveyor's Department at Rockhampton...

government to have all power vested in his hands. He was to be Police Magistrate, Commissioner for Crown Lands and Commander-in-Chief of the Native Mounted Police[14] - a power he cherished and a power he exercised with relish. Secondly, he broke with tradition and immediately set about increasing the strength of his own private "army". A commissioner was normally allowed three European troopers and an "office-keeper" when a new district was opened up. Dalrymple, convinced that the northern blacks were innately savage and hostile, set a precedent by increasing the strength of his force by an additional five Aboriginal troopers.[15] Thirdly, his initial entry into Port Denison on 10 April 1861 was a charge on horseback designed "to clear off Aborigines" from the land which had always been theirs. Within a short time, he had taken over the native wells and was gratified to report back to the colonial secretary that the British flag was now flying over the spot he had found "a wilderness". Dalrymple was proud that this small but orderly population of men, women and children were now "quietly settled where a few days ago the wild Aboriginal held undisputed sway."

Dalrymple's very philosophy of conquest revealed that he had no intention of establishing good relationships with the Aboriginal people. His specially co-ordinated land and sea invasion of Aboriginal territory in 1861 had been designed, he said, to either "strike terror" into the Aborigine, or, alternatively, to "enable a blow to be struck in the event of attempted outrage which would prevent future bloodshedding".[16] This had already been foreshadowed during the *Spitfire* expedition when his impetuosity showed respect for neither Aboriginal property nor person. Yet, his biographer left him a glowing tribute:

> He showed a keen interest in Aboriginal customs and behaviour; and he was concerned over the problem, with which he was

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See "Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee Appointed to Enquire Into the Efficiency and Management of the Police Force", *1860*.

14 Col. Sec. to Chief Commissioner for Crown Lands, SUR/A28: 1674 of 1860, Executive Minute, 7 January 1861, EXE/E3 61/1 S; Executive Minute, 18 March 1861, EXE/E3 61/12 R, QSA. This Minute gave Dalrymple control of the Native Police, but stated he "will be instructed to interfere as little as possible with the discretion of the Officer in Command". Morisset to Col. Sec. 12 June 1861 COL/A17, 1523 of 1861, QSA.

15 C.C.C.L. to Col. Sec., 12 January 1861, COL/A11, 121 of 1861, QSA.

16 Dalrymple to Col. Sec., 24 April 1861, 1261 of 1861, QSA.

> frequently confronted, of establishing good relations between white settlers and Aboriginals in the initial settlement of new country.[17]

From the moment Dalrymple had cleared off the indigenes from the site of the new township, the Aborigines seemed to pursue a policy of deliberate avoidance; this persisted throughout all of 1861. This was an intelligent Aboriginal strategy and probably reflected both a healthy regard for and a prior knowledge of the white invaders and their firepower. The Aborigines of the Kennedy District had clearly understood the power of the gun at least eighteen years before white settlement. Jukes, anxious to give the Aborigines at the Burdekin River "a high opinion of our guns", had shot a quail to demonstrate their effectiveness.[18] Further upstream, a kite was shot, presumably to show the Aborigines the power of firearms.[19] When a gun was afterwards pointed at one Aborigine who took hold of the lead line of the boat, the fellow "dropped it and ran off".[20] Leichhardt's party had also chanced upon a camp of natives along the Suttor River "who were not a little frightened by the report of our guns.[21] When MacGillivray visited Cape Upstart in May, 1848, he noted that the Aborigines visited the vicinity of the Cape "only at rare intervals". He claimed that the "just chastisement" bestowed upon them some years previously for attacking a fishing party would "probably, for some time to come, render them cautious of coming in contact with white men".[22] By 1860, the destructive capacity of guns was well known. Gaden, Smith, Dalrymple and Sinclair's parties had all brandished firearms with a vengeance. Murrells later confirmed that someone from the *Spitfire* had shot his friend and wounded another.[23]

Fear of the invaders' animals undoubtedly also kept the Aborigines from the settlement. The 140 horses, 121 cattle, 2 sheep and 7 pigs were probably a frightening spectacle to the Aborigines

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17 Farnfield, *Frontiersman*, p.10.

18 Jukes, *Narrative of the* ***Fly***, 1:71.

19 *Ibid.*, 1:77.

20 *Ibid.*, 1:81.

21 Leichhardt, *Journal of an Overland Expedition*, p.193.

22 MacGillivray, *Voyage of H.M.S.* ***Rattlesnake***, 1:79-80.

23 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.14.

who, in most cases, would not have seen such animals before.[24] There was nothing unusual about Aborigines being afraid of animals alien to their experience. Dick Roughsey recorded the story of some of his people who set eyes on a horse for the first time:

> Then a great big animal came rushing at us out of the dark and the ground shook as it rushed past. We all dived into the grass and bushes and were so frightened that we lay there for a long time before we could speak to each other.[25]

Aborigines around Port Denison seemed to have similar fears. Murrells told how a Mr Humphrey, who was out searching for runs, left the party with two horses and endeavoured to return to Port Denison by a new track. According to Murrells, this white man fired his gun amongst a group of Aborigines who were lamenting the death of an old man. Later, the Aborigines murdered him and, as Murrells said, they also "tried to kill the horses, thinking they could speak and do mischief as the man had done, but they got away".[26] Even as late as 1863, many Aborigines were still encountering European animals for the first time. Murrells told how he was accompanied by an Aboriginal woman who went with him to witness some signs of European civilisation - the first he had seen for seventeen years: "When we got clear of the hill going down towards the hut," wrote Murrells, "we saw the sheep feeding in the grass, the sight of which so frightened the gin, she not having seen any before, that she ran away back".[27]

Although the Aborigines avoided the new settlement, their constant curiosity seemed to keep them up to date with European movements. A correspondent for the *Queensland Guardian* explained his arrival at Port Denison just one month after the first settlement had been founded:

> During the night numerous native fires were observed on Gloucester Island and on the main land, as though a system of

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24 Dalrymple to Col. Sec., 24 April 1861, COL/A16, 1261 of 1861, QSA; *Queensland Guardian*, 29 May 1861. The sheep and pigs were mentioned in the newspaper account, but not in Dalrymple's communication.

25 Roughsey, *Moon and Rainbow*, p.97.

26 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.14. Murrells probably correctly identified this man. A report in the *Queensland Guardian*, 6 November 1861, told how a Mr Salisbury Humphreys, with two horses, had been lost and that no trace has been found; see also L.E. Skinner, "Pastoral Frontiers of Queensland Colony" in *Settlement of the Colony of Queensland* (Brisbane, 1978), p.1.

27 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.15.

> telegraphic communication was going on between their camps, which, on our arrival at the Port, we ascertained to be their custom on the arrival of any new vessel.[28]

The Aboriginal communication by smokes was probably very real, but so was its incendiary effect upon European imaginings. Because the new settlers brought with them both ill-conceived and preconceived ideas about Aboriginal savagery and hostility, it was only to be expected that they would eventually respond irrationally to those beliefs. The first contingent of white settlers in North Queensland repropagandized *their* minds with all the old stock colonial fears - "tracks", "numbers", "spies", "smokes" and "fires" - so that their imaginations were capable of being inflamed into a state of burning agitation. This happened even before the Europeans set foot on the mainland.

The passengers and crew of the *Jeanie Dove* - the maritime arm of Dalrymple's combined land and sea invasion - were ordered by Dalrymple to wait on Stone Island until the arrival of his overland party. Dalrymple had argued that, had the seaparty landed, "hostilities would have *inevitably* taken place and our relations with the Aborigines would have commenced with the lust for revenge." As it was, his charge on horseback, he said, left now only a "jealousy of the stranger which would soon yield a quiet resignation to an irresistable [sic] force".[29] Even in the passengers' minds loomed the possibility of Aboriginal attack. Stone Island might be isolated from the mainland, but there were still those Aboriginal "numbers" and "fires" to be seen. One passenger explained: "On the island there was but little reason to apprehend danger from the blacks, although numbers of them and their fires were to be seen at several points around the harbour: still some thought it necessary to maintain a night watch".[30] The night watch, however, resulted in the death of a passenger. A fellow night watchman explained what happened:

> Watch being kept at night on account of the blacks being in the neighbourhood, Peter Craigie and the writer of this were waiting to be relieved when Craigie, who was standing on a heap of planks, slipped, and thrust his gun on the ground to recover his balance, the gun went off, and the charge entered the belly near the groin:

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28 *Queensland Guardian*, 6 July 1861.

29 Dalrymple to Col. Sec., 24 April 1861, as above.

30 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 May 1861.

> the intestines, which were lacerated, protruded, and he bled to death in about two hours ...[31]

The first death statistic from Stone Island was both eloquent and profoundly prophetic: Aboriginal-European relations in North Queensland were destined to be a prolonged and painful struggle, and blood would be needlessly spilled on a ground barren of humanitarian achievement.

Both pioneers and historians have unswervingly insisted that the Aborigines at Port Denison demonstrated hostility towards the white invaders from the moment of contact. Close analysis tends to reveal the contrary. The brother of one of the original pastoralists who accompanied Dalrymple on his overland trip to Port Denison, Michael W. Cunningham, claimed that the Aborigines exhibited "hostile indications of an unmistakable nature" and prevented the passengers of the *Jeanie Dove* from reaching the shore.[32] The passengers, however, told a different story. Despite much dissatisfaction being expressed with Dalrymple's instructions, one passenger confirmed that "our camp remained" on Stone Island and no-one went ashore until the arrival of the land party.[33] This is precisely what Dalrymple had ordered. Dalrymple later communicated: "This order, Captain McDermott acted up to in the most praiseworthy manner".[34] Another passenger, B.P. Watkins, also confirmed that the passengers had waited on Stone Island. Watkins' comments probably reflected both Dalrymple's instructions and something of his underlying philosophy. The captain, he said,

> received particular instructions not to allow any one under any pretence to go upon the main land, for a fear of a collision with the natives, and the probability of their getting off, in the absence of horses, *without a proper amount of chastisement.*[35]

Yet, Geoffrey Bolton has insisted that "Hostile Aborigines had deterred [the settlers] from coming ashore". He argued that the "Aborigines' instinct was sound; Bowen was to become the base for the pastoral

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31 *Ibid.*, 12 June 1861.

32 Michael W. Cunningham, *The Pioneering of the River Burdekin* (Rockhampton, 1895), p.3.

33 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 May 1861.

34 Dalrymple to Col. Sec., 24 April 1861, as above.

35 *Queensland Guardian*, 12 June 1861. My emphasis.

conquest of North Queensland".[36] If this were the case, nothing happened initially; certainly not on the part of the blacks. Twelve days after coming ashore from Stone Island, a passenger summed up the situation:

> Up to the present time not a single collision is known to have taken place, and only once have blacks been well in sight to either the sea or land party, and that was when the *overland party* surprised a number of them on the beach where we now live. They were but a short time in sight ... *and have made no sign since.*[37]

The passengers' impressions stand in contrast to the recollections of one settler who was to have a long association with the district. Cunningham's claim that the Aborigines of Port Denison "several times tried to surprise the camp, generally a little before daylight", seems to be firmly rooted in colonial fiction rather than fact.[38] Dalrymple had often expressed trepidations that the Aborigines, who were in large numbers, were gathering with hostile intent. He certainly feared an attack on the settlement, *especially a night attack.*[39] To have been able to report an actual attack on the settlement would have vindicated his constant fears, but he was never provided with a pretext to report one. Neither did any of the newspaper correspondents present at Port Denison at the time record an attack on the settlement. An Aboriginal assault on white settlers in North Queensland would have made good copy in the newspapers of the day, but it was not forthcoming. Reports from Port Denison in the *Queensland Guardian* throughout all of 1861 continued to portray the Aborigines as anything but vindictive. A correspondent reported in July that the settlement had been "vacated for us by the savages but little over three months ago.[40] One subscriber could, therefore, correctly state the following month that "up to the present time" the

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36 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p.21.

37 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 May 1861. My emphasis.

38 Cunningham, *Pioneering of the River Burdekin*, p.3.

39 Dalrymple to Col. Sec., 28 April 1861, as above; Dalrymple to Lt. Powell, in charge of the Native Police Detachment, Bowen, 27 April 1861; Lt. Powell to Dalrymple, 6 May 1861, encl. COL/A17, 1527 of 1861, QSA. When Dalrymple sent Powell's letter to the Col. Sec. he made the following note: "During which time any number of Blacks could have secreted themselves in the mangroves near the township *and attacked it by night*". My emphasis.

40 *Ibid.*, 24 July 1861.

Aborigines "do not appear to have caused much annoyance to the settlers of Port Denison".[41] Visitors from the south returned and reported that "the natives are by no means so troublesome as we had been led to expect".[42] If this were the case, why have historians perpetuated the myth of Aboriginal hostility in the Port Denison District? The most plausible explanation is that they have tended to rely heavily on what Dalrymple reported to his colonial secretary in Brisbane and have somewhat neglected other perspectives. Cunningham's reminiscences, three decades after the events, are an even more unreliable and unrepresentative source. There *were* other views to be considered - both black and white - and these views did not necessarily accord with those from government house verandah, the land commissioner's tent or a squatter's station office.

According to Cunningham's account, the Aboriginal attacks at dawn allegedly occurred within the first three weeks of settlement. This period was clearly a tense time for the new settlers who felt so "threatened" by imagined Aboriginal hostility that virtually any "fear" could set alight rumours throughout the whole settlement. A resident who arrived at Port Denison during the latter part of the first three weeks of settlement captured the atmosphere of the moment:

> The night previous to our arrival the settlement was on the *qui vive* in consequence of a report having been spread that the natives purposed attacking the settlement. This rumour it seems had arisen through a great many native fires having been seen all the day, around the township, and the howling of numerous native dogs the night previous.

In the chiaroscuro of conflict, the glow from the fire had now become the glimmer of gloom on the distant horizon. Imaginations were powerful, and smouldering rumours could easily ignite in the sinister shadows of the "enlightened" European mind. The resident continued:

> Every person on the settlement was on the alert until daybreak, with his arms loaded, in hourly expectation of their approach, *but, as usual in such cases, the natives did not deem it prudent to make their appearance* I should be inclined to think it was a false alarm.[43]

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41 *Queensland Guardian*, 21 August 1861.

42 *Ibid.*, 24 July 1861.

43 *Ibid.*, 6 July 1861.

It would be but a short time before the raked embers of the feverish mind would reach their flash-point as colonial fiction. Cunningham's version of events later helped to form the basis for Loos's claim that the settlement was characterised by sustained Aboriginal resistance and counteraction. Although Loos seemed to be aware that Cunningham's account contained "some factual errors", he nevertheless felt that it was probably accurate in the main.[44] In reiterating his argument, he stated:

> The infant colony met with intense Aboriginal opposition and retaliated vigorously. Eight years later, a resident of Bowen wrote: "We know that our town at least had its foundations cemented in blood".[45]

Loos added that no-one disagreed with this resident's claim "despite the fact that the author was then involved in a controversy on the subject" in the *Port Denison Times* during 1869. This seems ostensibly convincing - until the remarks by the resident in Bowen are read *in context*. The resident was referring to the Native Mounted Police:

> These monsters take a real pleasure in their work, and it is said of them that they have often dishonoured the widow beside the corpse of her murdered husband. *We know that our town at least had its foundations cemented in blood.* As one episode of its early history it is told that a boat sighted a canoe with two natives and gave chase. The Aborigines, finding they were losing ground, jumped overboard. One gained the shore, the other having taken a wide offing, was less fortunate, and after all other means to kill him had failed, the commandant, enraged, leant over the boat and battered out his brains with one of the beams.[46]

This seems hardly a case for "intense Aboriginal opposition",[47] but it could be seen as vigorous European "retaliation"!

There has been a marked reluctance to question earlier writing on North Queensland history, whether these be the accounts of early settlers or later historians. Anne Allingham, for example, relied heavily on Loos's work, acknowledging that the "following details on European policy and attitudes derive mainly from this source".[48]

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44 N.A. Loos, "Aborigines and Pioneers at Port Denison" in *Race Relations in North Queensland*, ed. Henry Reynolds (James Cook University, 1978), p.53.

45 Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, p.147; "Aborigines and Pioneers", p.53.

46 *Port Denison Times*, "Shall We Admit the Blacks", 1 May 1869.

47 Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, p.147.

48 Allingham, *"Taming the Wilderness"*, p.147n.

Because neither the historians' accounts nor the pioneers' accounts were being questioned, the belief in Aboriginal "attacks" on Bowen persisted. As Allingham said:

> Settlers must have felt particularly threatened during the first foundation days for they were an isolated settlement two hundred miles north of the nearest centre of population at Broadsound, and Michael Cunningham recorded that on several occasions Bowen itself was attacked, presumably in retaliation by the tribe who had been driven off from the settlement.[49]

Colonial imagination, it seems, formed the basis for the belief that Bowen would be attacked. On 27 April 1861, when Dalrymple reported to Lieutenant Powell that three gentlemen had already been "attacked by a large number of armed Aboriginals" just six miles from the settlement (near Abbott Bay), he also revealed something of the underlying fear which often sustained such irrational beliefs:

> I have observed for some time signal smokes of import beneath and on Mt. Dryander, on the face of Mt. Darvall and last night beneath Mt. Little, and am of opinion that the Aborigines are collecting with hostile intent ...[50]

Whether the three gentlemen (Bode, Allingham and Powell) were actually "attacked", as Dalrymple claimed, is very much open to question. The *Queensland Guardian*'s resident correspondent reported that the settlers had been "menaced by them"[51] while another correspondent reported that the three men had been "threatened and pursued by a large body of blacks".[52] It did not take much evidence to use the word "attack" - especially if the word were used by Dalrymple. What was substance and what was shadow was often difficult to distinguish in the sinister twilight of the mind.

Despite the lack of evidence of Aboriginal hostility, Dalrymple insisted that the Aborigines be immediately "dispersed". Because some of the Native Police had already deserted, he instructed Lieutenant Powell to take a number of "gentlemen" with him and to "establish order among the lawless savages who threaten the safety of the township from the direction of Upstart and Abbott Bay's [sic]"[53] The

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49 *Ibid.*, p.149.

50 Dalrymple to Lt. Powell, 27 April 1861, encl. COL/A17, 1527 of 1861, QSA.

51 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 June 1861.

52 *Ibid.*, 29 June 1861.

53 Dalrymple to Lt. Powell, 27 April 1861, as above.

actual number of Aborigines who were found at their camp seems somewhat elastic. One correspondent reported that 200 were found. Another correspondent said "some say 300, some 400 to 500".[54] Regardless of the number, the "lawless savages"[55] outwitted their pursuers by hiding in a nearby swamp, where they found safety and could not be dislodged. They were, however, still given a lesson in British civility. The search party, said the correspondent:

> returned the following day, bearing with them boomerangs, stone tomahawks, and other trophies. On searching the camp they were greatly disappointed at not finding the usual eatable delicacies ... In vain were the fires raked for roasted yams, and other fruit.[56]

Dalrymple claimed to have had better "luck". Within two miles of the township, he said, he met "a party of armed natives and at once dispersed them".[57] The *Queensland Guardian*'s correspondent provided a different version of events by saying that "the blacks retreated with great rapidity - so rapidly, in fact, as in one way or another to out travel the mounted party".[58]

Dalrymple's irrational fear of attack seemed to dominate life at Port Denison. He criticised Lieutenant Powell for not undertaking daily patrols around the settlement and drew Powell's attention to the necessity for carrying out daily patrols forthwith.[59] When Lieutenant Powell, unaware of the Commissioner's authority over the Native Police, told Dalrymple that he would dispose of his command in whatever way he considered best, Dalrymple simply pulled rank on Powell.[60] Loos's contention that Dalrymple was taking defensive measures while Powell had been pursuing offensive measures is not an argument in view of the lack of evidence of Aboriginal hostility.[61] Dalrymple was simply exacerbating the situation. According to Dalrymple, daily patrols were necessary so that "any new *tracks* of approaching blacks may be at once discovered, and their intentions

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54 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 June 1861.

55 Dalrymple to Lt. Powell, 27 April 1861.

56 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 June 1861.

57 Dalrymple to Col. Sec., 28 April 1861, COL/A16, 1262 of 1861, QSA.

58 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 June 1861.

59 Dalrymple to Powell, 6 May 1861, encl. COL/A17, 1527 of 1861, QSA.

60 Lt Powell to Dalrymple, 6 May 1861, Dalrymple to Lt. Powell, 7 May 1861, encl. COL/A17, 1527 of 1861, QSA.

61 Loos, Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District, p.119.

frustrated whether they be of attack or merely espionage".[62] "Espionage" was a term which could be readily applied to Aboriginal curiosity or any other harmless Aboriginal activity. Dalrymple reported that "three spies were actually tracked up to and one was secured by Lieutenant Williams".[63] The "securing" of a spy was vividly reported in the *Queensland Guardian*:

> ... close down to the town beach and to the immediate vicinity of the official tents, the traces of two natives, apparently acting as spies, were observed and followed ... they were overtaken: one of the two was shot: the other escaped.

The settlement was constantly put on the *qui vive*[64] and Dalrymple asked the colonial secretary to send him the previously ordered "three or four pounder gun, with grape, to place in the settlement in case of night attack." One of the guns from the *Jeanie Dove* was already emplaced in the settlement. Indicative of his siege mentality, Dalrymple said that he would also "form a sort of stockade" to defend the settlement and that it would be "absolutely necessary" for him and his men to remain at headquarters.[65] Port Denison was in reality Fort Denison.

Despite the clear lack of evidence of Aboriginal aggression, Loos has claimed that the "initial reckless daring of the Bowen Aborigines" was partially a result of their lack of knowledge about European firepower. In isolating the Bowen area as having a special and *different* pattern of Aboriginal-European conflict, Loos further argued that "a lack of information of the firepower of the invaders was an important factor in such apparently suicidal confrontations" by the Aborigines. Notwithstanding the absence of concrete evidence of Aboriginal attacks, one of the reasons the Aborigines probably avoided Port Denison was because they knew a great deal about European firepower *at least* eighteen years before white settlement. To say also, as Loos did, that it was "impossible with the data available" to give a comprehensive account of the pattern of conflict, is simply to set aside crucial evidence which has always been available to the historian.[66]

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62 Dalrymple to Powell, 6 May 1861, as above. My emphasis.

63 Dalrymple, minute on Powell to Dalrymple, 6 May 1861, as above.

64 *Queensland Guardian*, 29 June 1861.

65 Dalrymple to Col. Sec., 28 April 1861, 1262 of 1861, QSA.

66 Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, p.148.

Consequently, Aboriginal behaviour has again been thrust into the twentieth century by historians as "reckless" and "suicidal".

The killing in August 1861 of two white men by Aborigines far to the south on Shaw Island (Cumberland Islands) drew from Dalrymple a clear expression of his attitude towards the northern Aborigines. He thought back to Kennedy and Leichhardt and then castigated the Aborigines for being "a race of bloodthirsty miscreants who believed in no God, nor in any spiritual power, who cannot even trust each other in their own domestic intercourse and who are enemies to all men until fear enforces submission".[67] What Dalrymple articulated, he had already demonstrated in his relations with the Aborigines. The Queensland public, too, had a better opportunity of knowing what happened at Port Denison in the nineteenth century than it did in the twentieth century. The *Maryborough Chronicle* put it succinctly in October, 1861:

> The new settlement of Port Denison, under the guidance of misrule and causeless violence, is preparing to undergo that baptism of fire and blood through which it is fondly hoped it will attain civilisation and greatness. We have it on good authority that the plan pursued at Port Denison with reference to the aborigines has been to hunt out of sight everything in the shape of a blackfellow, and when the intruder has not been sufficiently agile to elude his pursuers he has been without mercy shot.[68]

By 9 December 1861, Lieutenant Powell could still report only "immense numbers" of blacks opposite stations along the Bowen and Burdekin Rivers.[69] On the mainland, there was still no confirmed European death from Aboriginal hostilities - remarkable considering that "attacks" had been of allegedly suicidal proportions![70] Yet, white historians have, for various reasons, continued to present the Aborigines as savage and aggressive. The reasons for this are not simple and they might never really be explained. Bernard Smith sees Australian culture as suffering from a guilt problem, and he sees the nightmare of conquest as something which has "to be thrust out of mind."

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67 Dalrymple to Col. Sec., 10 October 1861, 2787 of 1861, QSA.

68 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 10 October 1861; see *Ibid.*, "The Ghost of Snatch 'Em" to the Editor, 17 October 1861.

69 Powell to Dalrymple, 9 December 1861, encl. COL/A23, 8151 of 1861, QSA.

70 See Loos' own statistics in *Invasion and Resistance*, p.194.

> Yet like the traumatic experiences of childhood it continues to haunt our dreams. And as with childhood so with the childhood of a nation. As Freud has put it: "It is universally admitted that in the origin of the traditions and folklore of a people, care must be taken to eliminate from the memory such a motive as would be painful to the national feeling".[71]

By 1870, the editor of the *Port Denison Times* revealed something of this guilt of conquest. The previous decade, he said, was one "in which our cowardly fears led us to believe that our own safety lay in reckless appeals to powder and lead."[72] But that was not how the twentieth century was to receive the story - the historians saw to that.

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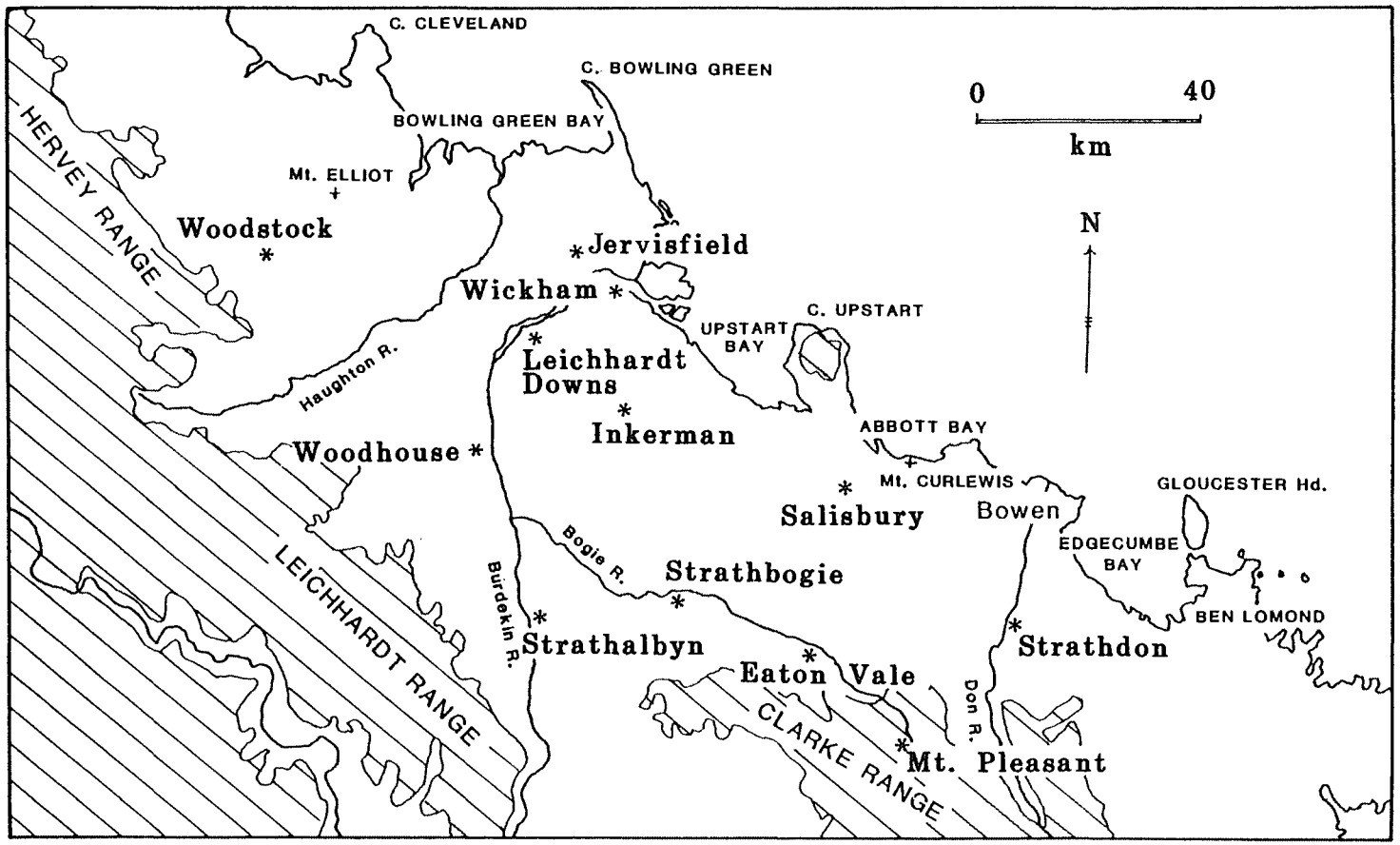
71 Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini*, p.17.

72 Quoted in Henry Reynolds and Noel Loos, "Aboriginal Resistance in Queensland", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 20, No.2 (August 1972), p.226.



Map II Major Pastoral Stations

Chapter Four

CONFLICT AND COMPROMISE

The concept of European invasion with its aim to occupy permanently Aboriginal lands took the Aborigines several years to comprehend. Although particularly fierce blood-feuds were known to have taken place in traditional Aboriginal society, there was no attempt, by the successful raiders, as T.G.H. Strehlow has shown, "to seize the hunting grounds of the vanquished for their own use".[1] The European idea of taking another's country was a foreign concept and had to evolve through direct contact with the invader. Aborigines between Cape Cleveland and Bowen may have taken longer to perceive what was happening if it had not been for the explanations given to them by the shipwrecked sailor, James Murrells, who was still living amongst them. Murrells could offer them explanations about the invaders' animals and equipment, guns and desire for Aboriginal territory. He was the one person who brought some meaning to what were now becoming regular encounters with the invaders.

Murrells explained to the Aborigines what the strange animals were that had suddenly appeared in their territory. The provision of the 1860 Land Act meant that runs would have to be stocked quickly. By August 1862 there were some 50,000 sheep in the Kennedy District;[2] this number rose to 80,000 in 1863.[3] In referring to the cattle which had also appeared in the neighbourhood, Murrells told them that "they were what we ate, and they chaffed me about their great size, long tails, big ears and horns."

The Aborigines also sought explanation about the new articles and accoutrements of the settlers. Murrells told how the Aborigines asked

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1 T.G.H. Strehlow, *The Sustaining Ideals of Australian Aboriginal Societies* (Melbourne, 1956), p.14. As Stanner explained: "When we took what we call 'land' we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and focus of life and everlastingness of spirit." See W.E.H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming* (Sydney, 1969), p.44.

2 The *Rockhampton Bulletin* claimed that by August, 1862 there were some 50,000 sheep in the district around Port Denison. In the course of one month alone (July-August 1862), there were 10,000 sheep brought to the upper part of the Bowen River. Communicated to *Maryborough Chronicle*, 1 October 1862.

3 Skinner, *"Pastoral Frontiers of Queensland Colony"*, p.15.

him about "the saddles for the men to sit in, the stirrups, bridles, guns, smoke, and the noise it made when fired." Murrells explained it all to them, which "surprised them much."[4] These explanations were capable of allaying some of the "unnecessary" fears which the people were experiencing. He could explain, for example, that the sound made by cracking a stockwhip was not the report of a gun being fired. Initially, the cracking of a stockwhip caused Burdekin Aborigines to hide themselves in the trees "till night came on ".[5] The whole idea of invasion evolved gradually in Aboriginal minds and they did not know instinctively, as Geoffrey Bolton said, that "Bowen was to become the base for the pastoral conquest of North Queensland."[6]

Invasion meant immediate physical deprivation for many Aborigines. This had been the ongoing process of conquest since Captain Phillip's landing at Sydney Cove in 1788. What Stanner wrote of Phillip's invasion, was just as valid for the incursion into Aboriginal territory in North Queensland in 1861. The Europeans, said Stanner

> ... had no idea, it seems, that they were crowding at every place on to a confined estate whose every feature and object entailed proprietary rights and religious significances. Nor did they suspect for some time that they were upsetting a delicate balance between population and food supplies.[7]

Indeed, this delicate balance became obvious to the four survivors of the *Peruvian* (1846) who, because of poor health and scarcity of food in the dry season, had to be divided among three Aboriginal parties to enable them to obtain enough food to survive.[8] The invaders' animals also disturbed the precarious balance of nomadic ecology. The Aborigines told Murrells "that there were so many cattle, that they had drunk all the water that was in the hole, they said they would have got the fish out only they were too much afraid."[9] Such disturbances would have exacerbated the already fragile ecological

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4 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.14. Murrells did not know at the time that the black men on horseback were in the Native Mounted Police. *Ibid.*, p.15.

5 *Queensland Guardian*, 12 March 1863; Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.15.

6 Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p. 21; Murrells related that even on the eve of his return to white society the Aborigines thought the white men were "without any settled place of abode, constantly roaming from place to place... "Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells*, p.27.

7 Stanner, "The History of Indifference Thus Begins", p.9.

8 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863.

9 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p. 15.

balance, especially during the dry season when, as Murrells explained, the obtaining of food became "more difficult".[10] This would have been especially true during the 1862 drought which, according to Murrells, "was the most severe experienced during the whole period of his residence with the Blacks."[11]

Aboriginal hunting and fishing parties were also being disrupted and jeopardised by the European presence. The clearing off of Aborigines from the vicinity of Port Denison, and the shooting down of others at Cape Upstart, as well as regular patrols by the Native Mounted Police, made the obtaining of food supplies hazardous. Fishing parties which normally went to the coast to catch fish, turtle and dugong were exposed to grave dangers.[12] Even fishing in the rivers and lagoons could be fatal. Murrells told how "about 15 blackfellows of a fishing party belonging to the tribe I was living with, were shot down dead."[13] Destruction by both white settlers and Native Police "frightened the blacks, whenever they found themselves in the neighbourhood of the strangers."

By 1863, attempts to avoid both the settlers and Native Police led to demographic disorder. The strains on both territory and food supplies became obvious, even to the settlers who noticed that Aborigines had to leave their usual territory to seek refuge elsewhere. The *Maryborough Chronicle* summed up the situation shortly after Murrells returned to white society:

> ... without a single instance of aggression on the part of the blacks in the neighbourhood, shot down and hunted on this side the Burdekin and in the interior, they have been and are accumulating in great numbers in the Cape Bowling-green and Mount Elliott

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10 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863.

11 *Ibid.*, 14 May 1863; *Pugh's Almanac*, 1864.

12 Coastal Aborigines, as Helen Brayshaw wrote, normally "enjoyed a reliable and abundant source of food from the estuaries and reef-sheltered inter island waters, augmented by bush foods", Aboriginal Material Culture, p. 78; Murrells also confirmed such habit: "On one occasion when I was on the coast fishing ..." - *Sketch of a Residence*, p.13; Murrells' shipwrecked party at Cape Cleveland also found on the coast a canoe, lines and spears of a "fishing party of natives who had evidently been there lately in the rainy season", pp.8,88; *Spitfire Report*, pp. 9,14,21 and 29. Dalrymple gave evidence of these fishing parties at Upstart Bay: "Large old camps of Blacks were found close to the beach ... In one, the skeleton of a large Dugong was lying. ...Turtle and fish bones were also strewn about - evidence of the good feeding the inhabitants of this locality enjoy." *Ibid.*, p.21.

13 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p. 15.

> country. Their increased numbers there make the obtaining of provisions more difficult, and with all to fear, and nothing to hope for, from the whites, would it be strange if, in their aggravated condition ... another tragedy should transpire.[14]

The shift in the Aboriginal population to what seemed strategically "safe" areas, such as Mount Elliott, hampered purposeful movement patterns severely. The crowding of Aborigines into the Mount Elliott - Cape Bowling Green area now placed greater demands on diminishing food supplies for a longer period of time. There can be little doubt that this fact contributed in no small measure to their "aggravated condition".[15] As psychiatrist, J.E. Cawte, has recently concluded from data concerning Aboriginal psychological adjustment to ecological changes elsewhere:

> The role of the natural environment, especially the fluctuating abundance should not be neglected. Comparative studies that match one Aboriginal group with another reveal how human adjustment is influenced by ecology.[16]

Aboriginal behaviour further seemed to indicate acute mental anxiety. Murrells explained that "with the wars, fights, destruction by the settlers and black police, and the natural deterioration in the people themselves, they are fast disappearing."[17] While there is no measure of the validity of mental anxiety present among Aborigines in the years 1861-1863, Murrells' reference to the increase in the "inter-tribal fights"[18] and wars is somewhat analogous to other studies which reveal a high degree of anxiety and mental disturbance in

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14 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863.

15 *Ibid.*

16 J.E. Cawte, "Psychological Adjustment to Cultural Change: The Case of the Australian Aborigines", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 3 (1969), 344-5. Cawte gives the example of the Kaiadilt people of Bentinck Island. See also John Cawte, *Cruel, Poor and Brutal Nations* (Honolulu, 1972), especially Ch. 10. It is accepted that the Kaiadilt people had been suffering for a much longer period of time than the Aborigines under discussion.

17 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p. 24.

18 Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells*, p.45. Tribal fighting had not previously been a major concern. As Murrells explained: "They steal the wives of the old and weak men, and daughters from their parents, which leads to fighting, and often extends between two tribes, and then there is a war, which is not, however, of a very sanguinary nature"; *Ibid.* p.43.

situations of culture contact.[19] Clinical studies by Cawte also show sorcery and possession syndromes as "more prevalent in situations of culture contact". Complaints of sorcery were found to be more common among "multi-tribal aggregations rather than in single-tribe cohesive communities. This suggests that social fragmentation affects the complaints of sorcery."[20] Studies by psychiatrist, H.D. Eastwell, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, have also identified the use of projection - an ego defence mechanism whereby noxae such as sickness, injury, misfortune, or death are attributed to the malevolence of a rival clan - as a means of coping with the disorganisation of traditional society.[21] Conditions in the Mount Elliott-Cape Bowling Green area, with many different clans being present for greater periods of times, would seem conducive to the growth of those behavioural expressions contained in the clinical studies.

There was every indication that Aboriginal tolerance of the white invaders had passed its zenith by the time Murrells returned to white society on 25 January 1863. When Murrells surrendered to the two shepherds inland from Cape Bowling Green, he returned to the blacks that very night to tell them of his decision to rejoin white civilisation as well as to prevent possible bloodshed. Murrells took the liberty of "very considerably overstating the force of the whites" as

> ... had the blacks there known the true force of the whites at the sheep station, enraged, as they were by the recent unprovoked massacre of from fifteen to twenty of their number, they would have rushed the hut that very night, and killed every man there.[22]

It is possible that Murrells' re-entry into white society on the eve of open conflict between Aborigines and Europeans reflected something of the intolerable pressures which finally forced him to make his move. Seething resentment against the whites found expression in stories

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19 Cawte, "Psychological Adjustment", p.345; *Cruel, Poor and Brutal Nations*; "Social and Cultural Influences on Mental Health in Aboriginal Australia: A Summary of Ten Years' Research ", *Transcultural Psychiatric Research*, held by John Taylor, James Cook University of North Queensland; Harry D. Eastwell, "Projective and Identificatory Illnesses Among Ex-Hunter-Gatherers: A Seven-Year Survey of a Remote Australian Aboriginal Community", *Psychiatry*, 40, No. 3 (November 1 977), 330-43.

20 Cawte, "Psychological Adjustment", p.345.

21 Eastwell, "Projective and Identificatory Illnesses" pp. 337-8; Cawte, "Social and Cultural Influences", p.30.

22 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863.

predicting a natural disaster. When Murrells told his Aboriginal companions that he was leaving them forever, some of them were angry and told him to

> go and be drowned with the rest of the white men (years ago a great flood had destroyed many of them, and for some time it had been a favourite idea with them that this rainy season a great flood would drown all their white troublers, with their horses, cattle and sheep.[23]

The frightening "realization" of what was about to overwhelm them drew from Murrells' companions a spirit of compromise with which they hoped to stave off the inevitable. His companions, he said, "begged of him to induce the whites to let them have at least the swamps and the salt water creeks undisturbed, and they would give the upper rivers to the whites."[24] The answer, as one newspaper correspondent explained, "was sent from the rifle, and those who had protected and fed one of our fellow-beings for so long a time were shot."[25] The first attempt at Aboriginal-European compromise in North Queensland had been lost.

By 1863 the Aboriginal language had begun to assimilate the experience of invasion in a uniquely Aboriginal way. Murrells explained that the invaders' domestic animals were "classified according to the size of their feet; hence sheep have the same name as wallabys (cargoon). The cattle were called "cockool" after the large kangaroos while horses were called "oombal" after their dogs. All types of sailing vessels (woolgoora) were given the same name as their canoes as they floated on the water.[26]

Aboriginal material culture similarly reflected a dynamic response to European influence. Iron, for example, was valued and adapted to their own technology. Murrells explained that "latterly they have got a good deal of iron (bingulburra) among them, with which they make a

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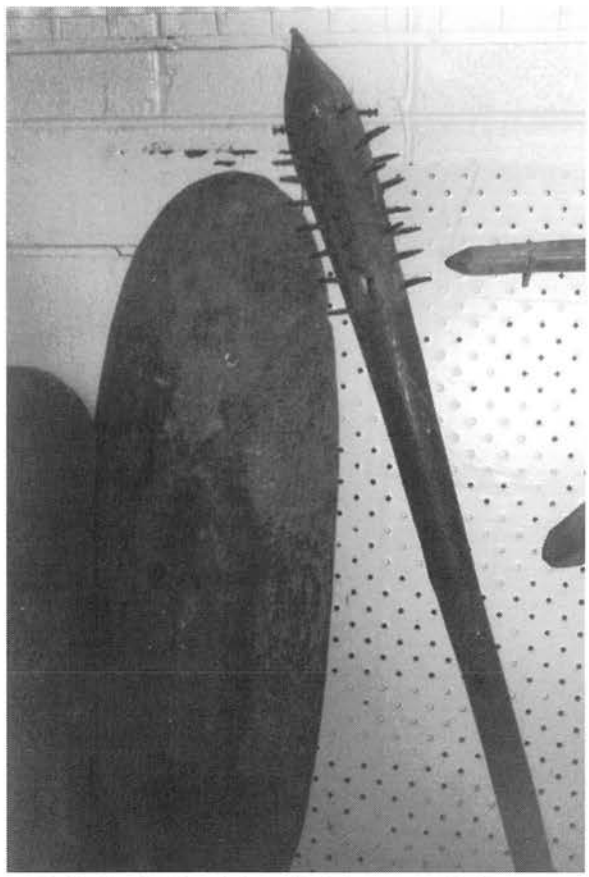
23 *Ibid.*; Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence,* p. 21 tells of a previous flood. In 1864 the township of Wickham at the mouth of the Burdekin was washed away by a flood; *PDT*, 4 June 1864. In the 1960s the Dyirbal people in North Queensland still had "a solid hope that one day the white man would be driven out, and the tribe would once more be able to resume peaceful occupation of its traditional lands". See R.M.W. Dixon, *The Dyirbal Language of North Queensland* (Cambridge, 1972), p.35.

24 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863; Morrill, *Sketch of Residence*, p.16.

25 "Australia", *PDT*, 4 October 1865.

26 Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells*, p.41,88.



3. Nulla Nulla with nails: European influence
(Bowen Historical Museum)

kind of chisel, by fastening a piece between two pieces of wood at the end, with which they make their spears, boomerangs ..." When Murrells called attention to the Aboriginal plight in 1863, he suggested that the government give them "some small tomahawks, knives, old iron hoops and fishing hooks".[27] He brought back from Brisbane those articles which he felt would be of use - fish-hooks, tomahawks and even blankets.[28] Three months after Murrells had returned to white society, one settler wrote from Inkermann Station on the Burdekin that Aboriginal theft of his stores was confined to "articles suitable for weapons." The settler complained:

> The sheep-shears they broke in two, and have carried away - thus giving them seventy-two steel knives - one of which I recovered and found the blade of the shear had been formed into a formidable weapon. The tools sent up by the survey party the blacks have carried away, together with a cross-cut saw of my own, and a large pair of blacksmith's bellows.[29]

Aboriginal theft was still revealing a limited interpretation of European society. If they seemed discriminating in what they took from the Europeans, it was probably because the Aborigines did not as yet fully understand the use of most European commodities. The settler from Inkermann Station noted that the blacks

> broke up every case and box in the place, ripped up all the flour sugar, and rice bags, with the sheep-shears, and emptied the contents in one vast heap, mixing the whole up together, with the contents of a tar drum - rice, flour, salt, tea, sugar, and tar, and water, all mixed up together, forming the remains of my five or six tons of goods, the whole being totally useless ... Even the sugar they destroyed - an article at least one would have fancied they would have carried off.[30]

Such discriminating behaviour occurred elsewhere when Aborigines did not comprehend the purpose and range of European goods. Dick Roughsey recorded a similar incident at Mornington Island when the Larumbanda, or South-Wind Lardil, made their first prolonged contact with white people:

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27 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p. 23,24

28 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 14 May 1863.

29 "The Blacks on the Burdekin", *Burnett Argus*, 18 May 1863. This same letter also appeared in the *Maryborough Chronicle*, 14 May 1864.

30 *Ibid.*

> The white people had left gifts of food ... But it was all wasted on these poor people; they did not understand the strange food. A bag of flour was thought to be white pipeclay and they rubbed it all over their bodies and in their hair and threw the rest away. A bag of rice was examined and thought to be a bag of hornet or wasp eggs, and no good to eat.[31]

Murrells' comments about Burdekin Aborigines in 1863 also reflected their limited understanding of the invaders' goods and domestic animals. Murrells said:

> It would be no good to send them flour, they would not eat it, not knowing anything about it; nor cattle or sheep, they would run away from them with fear, besides if they once understood the use of them as food it would make it more dangerous to the settlers.[32]

Yet, Murells had already told them of the cattle that "they were what we ate".[33] It is relevant to note also that after Murrells had spent his last night with the blacks, he said: "I returned to the station the following day, after telling the blacks to go towards the coast, and not to touch the cattle."[34] But only three months after Murrells had returned to the whites, the settler from Inkermann Station was complaining that his horses had been speared.

The shooting of Aborigines by both the white settlers and the Native Mounted Police frustrated any prospect of social harmony. According to Murrells it "frightened the blacks, whenever they found themselves in the neighbourhood of the strangers, and besides rendered the approach to the whites dangerous."[35] Such a policy would have prevented Aborigines from attempting to define a working relationship with the settlers in terms of their own cultural perspectives. The abundance of European animals, stores and property was attractive to Aborigines, but the lack of a relationship between black and white prevented Aborigines from legitimately obtaining what they wanted from the Europeans. In Aboriginal society, as John Taylor explained, "material goods were borrowed and exchanged in ways that helped to define and maintain the character of sex, age, and kinship roles and in ways that cemented the ties between people into webs of

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31 Roughsey, *Moon and Rainbow*, p.14.

32 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.24.

33 *Ibid.*, p.14.

34 *Queensland Guardian*, 12 March 1863.

35 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863.

reciprocal actions".[36] In the absence of any formal interaction with the whites, Aborigines were forced to steal whatever they could in the face of such abundance.

An analysis of Aboriginal "theft" in the vicinity of the Burdekin Delta one year later (1864) confirms both a growing familiarity with and perhaps a need for European goods. From the *Diamantina's* cargo still lying at the Bluff (three miles below the settlement at the Burdekin), the Aborigines now took flour - an item they had previously ignored - rice, sugar, trousers, shirts, socks and sheepshears.[37] Boats were also being acquired and it is possible that these were used in the planning of robberies. The shipwrecked crew of the *Nightingale* noticed a "clinker-built boat" in the possession of Aborigines on the banks of what seems to be the Burdekin River in March 1864.[38] The *Port Denison Times*, commenting on the amount of flour stolen from the *Diamantina's* cargo, suggested

> they must have had a boat near, as there were no traces of the flour for any distance ... The natives are known to have had two boats in their possession for some time past.[39]

Captain Pym, the harbour master at Bowen, had three pistol shots fired at him, presumably by Aborigines, when he went to retrieve a missing dinghy near the mouth of the Don River in 1865.[40] In this area, this was a rare instance of Aborigines using firearms.

Although Murrells had offered explanations about the white invaders, it would seem that some Aborigines were still trying to come to terms with the nature of the white people. In 1863, Murrells told how there was still the idea among them that after death they would "jump up white fellows".[41] The shipwrecked crew of the *Nightingale*

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36 John C. Taylor, Race Relations in South-East Queensland, (Honours Thesis, University of Queensland, 1967), p.136.

37 *PDT*, 9 July 1864.

38 *Ibid.*, 2 April 1864.

39 *Ibid.*, 9 July 1864.

40 *Ibid.*, 18 March 1865.

41 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p.21. Thomas Petrie confirmed in 1861 that the blacks of South-East Queensland also believed they would "jump up whitefellows". Said Petrie: "but they don't believe that so generally now." *Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force*, p.112. It is interesting to speculate how long it took some clans to realise that Europeans were not reincarnated spirits of the Aboriginal dead. Alinta's people, in *Women of the Sun*, had heard about such white *men* from the Yarra Yarra tribe. See *Women of the*

received mixed reactions from different parties of Aborigines they encountered in 1864. Finally, the crew fell in with a group of Aborigines who harboured them. The curiosity shown towards the *Nightingale's* crew by this group of Aborigines was strikingly similar to that shown towards Murrells' shipwrecked party eighteen years beforehand:

> ... we were each seized by two powerful men, and instantly stripped entirely naked. We expected nothing but instant death, and as they led us towards our own fire and commenced to replenish it, the most horrible thoughts suggested themselves ... they did not seem to be inclined to do us any bodily harm, and seeing how the sun was raising blisters ... they returned us a shirt and pair of trousers ... after which they cooked some fish and gave us a small share.[42]

In the same way that the survivors from the *Peruvian* had been exhibited to visiting clans, so it was with the crew members of the *Nightingale*: "Some strange natives frequently came to our camp, when we were exhibited our tribe holding a sort of corrobory over us, dressing themselves in our clothes, dancing around us, blacking our faces ...".[43]

If the Aborigines were struggling to accommodate the invasion, then so was James Murrells whose stated aim upon return to white society was "to use his best influence to benefit and protect the aboriginal blacks ... and at the same time to make the white settlers feel secure."[44] Given the prevailing attitudes of Europeans in the Bowen area towards the blacks, Murrells stood little chance of seeing his aim realized. It would be too uncomfortable for the pastoralists to have constant and constructive questioning by a man of goodwill so near to their own private killing fields. Queensland pastoralists had

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Sun Ep.1. Alinta the Flame. (National Library of Australia, Ref: A10672206). This film gives faithful impressions of early contact.

42 *PDT*, 2 April 1864. The Captain of the *Nightingale* had earlier, through a misunderstanding, received a blow on the head from one Aborigine. He later died at Bowen.

43 *Ibid.* James B. Stevenson, who wrote about his experience in the Australian bush, mentioned another case of two crew members of an unidentified shipwrecked schooner being located at the Burdekin River. Initially, the captain had been speared when he tried to run away; afterwards, "they had not been further molested, but had been taken about by the blacks in their wanderings." James B. Stevenson, *Seven Years in the Australian Bush* (Liverpool, 1880), pp.22-23.

44 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 19 March 1863.

already shown how they felt about Aboriginal hunting, fishing and legal rights when presenting evidence to the Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly in May 1861.[45] Murrells' stated intentions were destined to raise their ire and they lost no time in launching an attack on him. The settler from Inkermann Station who had lost his stores to the Aborigines in April 1863, published his misfortune widely in several Queensland newspapers "to prove how very incorrect is the statement made of the innocent character of the natives, by the man Morrill - as I believe these Blacks belonged to the tribe he lived amongst."[46] James Bonwick also wrote of Murrells mission in 1863:

> By the last accounts he has failed in his mission. The blacks mistrust the deserted of their camp fires; and the whites threaten him already with deadly hostility for supposed confederation with the natives, to the injury of the flocks.[47]

By the end of 1863, the man who had spoken of his return to white society as that "short struggle between the feeling of love 1 had

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45 Report from the Select Committee on the Native Police Force, especially Dr. Challinor's evidence on pp. 4-5 *et passim*; C.D. Rowley, too, made this point when he said: "Challinor objected not only to illegal killings but to the molestation of those fishing or camped on station properties ...The point was an important one, since Queensland did not safeguard hunting and fishing rights on pastoral leaseholds." Rowley, *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, p. 165. In 1867 one pastoralist in the Bowen area, A.L. McDougall, was prepared to expose the injustice in the system when he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:"and the present system adopted in the Kennedy District of refusing to let the blacks come in to the rivers to fish is opposed to all principles of justice and humanity, as well as to one of the conditions of our leases, viz, 'and we do further reserve to the Aboriginal inhabitants ... such free access to the said run, and to the trees and waters thereon, as will enable them to procure the animals, birds, fish and other food on which they subsist', "quoted in *PDT*, 13 April 1867. In 1899, Richard Semon described the treatment of the Aborigines by the settlers: "... the whites arrive and settle in the hunting-grounds of the blacks, who have frequented them since the remotest time. They raise paddocks, which the blacks are forbidden to enter. They breed cattle and sheep, which the blacks are not allowed to approach." When the blacks spear a calf or cow, the white man, said Semon, "takes revenge... by systematically killing all the blacks that come before his gun." Richard Semon, *In the Australian Bush and on the Coast of the Coral Sea. Being the Experience and Observations of a Naturalist in Australia, New Guinea and the Moluccas* (London, 1899), p. 266.

46 *Burnett Argus*, 18 May 1863; *Maryborough Chronicle*, 14 May 1863.

47 James Bonwick, *The Wild White Man and the Blacks of Victoria* (Melbourne, 1863), p.17.

for my old friends and companions and the desire once more to live a civilized life"[48] now faced a crisis of personal integrity. Just eleven months after his return, Murrells seems to have grasped the essential principle that this was an era of conflict, not compromise. His decision to act as interpreter for George Elphinstone Dalrymple's expedition to found the settlement of Cardwell in 1864, became the last act in a sad misadventure. Murrells' diary explained his role in the communications which took place between black and white at Cardwell:

> ... on nearing the beach the natives stood in the water beckoning us to come on shore. I had a conversation with them ... They wanted to know whether we came to have a corroboree with them, or whether we came as enemies; to which I answered that we came as friends, but as we were going inland we wished them to keep away, or if they did not we would make war ... I then said that they must clear out and tell others to do so, as we wished to occupy the land, and would shoot any who approached ... They told us to leave and not to return, and then they went away.[49]

Dalrymple explained that he used Murrells as interpreter to explain to the Aborigines "... what the white men require of them - 'Thou shalt not steal', and 'Thou shalt do no murder', having always required heretofore to be taught them by the rifle and revolver."[50] Three days later the blacks, who were allegedly "lying in wait", were "set upon suddenly by Mr. Dalrymple's men and rather cut up."[51] According to Farnfield, "Dalrymple must be credited ... with a sincere effort to try to introduce a more intelligent and humane approach to the Aborigines at a time when most settlers regarded them as dangerous wild animals."[52]

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48 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p. 17. Carrington explained that after Murrells spoke to the shepherds when he came in, "he wished to rejoin his companions, but his new friends prevented him, and he was sent down to Port Denison." Carrington, *Colonial Adventures*, p. 165.

49 "Journal of an Expedition to Rockingham Bay By Mr. James Morrill", in *Maryborough Chronicle*, 25 April 1864; The *Maryborough Chronicle*, 14 April 1864, also contained a summary of events at the new settlement.

50 "Report of Mr. George Elphinstone Dalrymple, on his Journey from Rockingham Bay to the Valley of Lagoons", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 35 (1865), p.202.

51 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 25 April 1864.

52 Farnfield, *Frontiersman*, p.69.

It is possible that the Aborigines became aware of Murrells' association with Dalrymple, especially as Murrells himself explained that amongst the Aborigines "the news soon spreads from tribe to tribe."[53] The man whom the Aborigines had trusted as an emissary for their cause had now seemingly turned advocate for the whites. It is also possible that Murrells could have been easily identified by some Aborigines at Cardwell, as it was reported as early as May 1863, that "Of the Rockingham Bay country ... Morrill is well acquainted."[54] There were also native troopers who deserted from Rockingham Bay and made their way back to the Burdekin. Two of these troopers were located on a Burdekin property in 1865 where they had been engaged as station hands and exploited by death threats. Aborigines from Rockingham Bay also visited the Burdekin for ceremonies. In mid-January 1865, Aborigines from Rockingham Bay attended a "grand boora" at Jarvisfield Station along with Aborigines from Cleveland Bay and Cape Upstart.[55] The opportunities for exchange of impressions about what had occurred at Cardwell were numerous.

It would be too easy to say that Murrells had turned his back on his black companions. Even so, the apparent contradiction between stated aims and public actions was highlighted by a correspondent to the *Maryborough Chronicle* soon after Murrells' return from Cardwell:

> ... but such conduct scarcely seems grateful for a man like Morrill, who was supported so long and so kindly by them, for him to be the first to present them with a bullet instead of a blanket.[56]

Yet, Murrells spoke favourably of the Aborigines when his opinion was sought in 1865 on Leichhardt's possible fate. He was certain that the Aborigines would have done "everything to preserve him even going without food themselves to supply him".[57] George Carrington, who had conversations with Murrells, sensed something of the inner turmoil Murrells faced:

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53 *Rockhampton Bulletin*, 1 July 1865.

54 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 14 May 1864.

55 *PDT*, 17 February 1865.

56 *Maryborough Chronicle*, 12 May 1864.

57 *PDT*, 10 June 1865: This letter was also published in the *Rockhampton Bulletin*, 1 July 1865 .

> He did not live long, and would much have preferred going back to his wild life with the blacks, but one of his wives came to inform him that, should he return, the blacks would kill him.[58]

Murrells, it is said, died "from the effects of a wound received in the knee during his sojourn among the aborigines, which had been attacked by rheumatism, and ultimately brought on inflammation and fever, which resulted in his death."[59] But the man in conflict can also suffer psychological wounds; these leave scars which sometimes nobody can see and which do not always appear on paper as evidence. Wounds from both black and white society do not easily heal; perhaps, for Murrells, death was an easy compromise.[60]

The period 1864-1868 was one of open conflict as the Aborigines had to fight for their very existence. Although legally British citizens, they were denied basic human rights by the authorities. Although legally given access to runs under the Land Act of 1860, they were denied access to food and water by the pastoralists: the clause in the act, like the Aboriginal person, became a mere fiction of law.[61] The official policy between 1861 and 1868 was "keeping them out", which meant that Aborigines were excluded from both runs and towns. To recognise the Aborigines as British citizens and at the same time not to recognise their rights of citizenship presented no dilemma for the British. The economic drive of the invaders transcended the law itself.

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58 Carrington, *Colonial Adventures*, p. 165; It is interesting to note that in Murrells' original version (1863) no reference is made to taking an Aboriginal wife. A somewhat ambiguous comment appeared in the 1896 version: "From the first I made them believe I had a wife and two children ... because I could better excuse myself from being too closely linked in with them by taking a wife, which I knew would be dangerous in many ways." Gregory, *Narrative of James Murrells*, p. 26. This version was published after Murrells had married Eliza Ross, a European servant girl, in Bowen.

59 *Bowen Independent*, The Story of James Morrill (Bowen, n.d.), n.pag.

60 *The Bowen Independent*, 7 February 1964, described Morrill as a man who worked unceasingly to bring about better relations between the settlers and the Aboriginals, unfortunately without great success." rpt. in *The Story of James Morrill*. That view seems to be the one which has persisted to this day. As the Bowen Historical Society's publication said: "An earlier historian commenting on Morrill's promise when he left the natives, to seek protection for them from the white man, wrote: To his everlasting credit be it said that Morrill kept his word ... He afterwards did all he could to vindicate their cause... James Morrill proved that he was much more than an accidental hero." n.pag. It remains to be seen if black Australia will also include him on its honour roll.

61 Letter from A.L. McDougall to Col. Sec. quoted in *PDT*, 13 April 1867.

Because the Aborigines posed a threat to economic expansion, they could be explained away as not quite human and, therefore, described as pests. As one correspondent, "Tasmania", said to a bushman who quibbled about Aborigines being shot:

> Blacks may be British subjects liable to be punished by British law, but ... charge a kangaroo rat with the wanton destruction of vegetables.[62]

Priorities were clear on the frontier: it was the land, not the law, that really mattered, and technologically the whites had the capacity to exterminate the black pestilence. Culpability was still a luxury the pastoralist could not yet afford.

The scrubs and ranges to which the Aborigines had retreated became relatively safe bases from which to launch attacks on the settlers' flocks and herds. Even in a good environment the life of the hunting and foraging nomad could be difficult and the pastoralists' stock, as John Taylor showed in South East Queensland, "offered a tempting change of diet and ludicrously easy target. To steal them required no more than that of a kangaroo drive."[63] At Woodstock Station the Aborigines demonstrated an ability to kill a large number of cattle and return to "their fastnesses in the ranges and scrubs before the police [could] arrive." The station of John Yeates, 15 miles from Bowen, which suffered heavy stock raids and serious losses before eventually being abandoned, was situated between Mount Dryander and Ben Lomond "two of the greatest strongholds of the blacks in the district." At one stage Lieutenant Marlow found that even his native troopers could not penetrate the mangrove scrub; he applied for, but was refused, a pilot boat to dislodge the blacks from Ben Lomond, which was but a short distance from Yeates' station.[64]

Both sheep and cattle were adapted to Aboriginal needs. The dilly bags "filled with mutton fat" and left in haste at Yeates' station served as a reminder that the Aborigines would exploit the invaders' animals.[65] Mutton fat, according to Taylor, "was highly prized by men, since a daily covering of grease and charcoal was *de riguer* for a

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62 *PDT*, 10 January 1866.

63 Taylor, *Race Relations in South-East Queensland*, p.77.

64 *PDT*, "The Poor Blacks", 31 August 1867.

65 *PDT*, 8 June 1867.

properly attired Aboriginal warrior."[66] At Crystal Brook, 30 miles from Bowen, the blacks had also taken a wrinkle from the boiling down establishments and learnt how to use a boiling down pot to manufacture tallow with which to grease themselves.[67] By adopting European herding strategies, the Aborigines learnt to regulate the supply of grease, food or greenhide that they demanded. Firstly, they often drove off sheep and cattle in numbers which exceeded their immediate needs. Secondly, they took good care of these excess numbers until they were required for a particular purpose. At one unnamed station along the coast, the *Port Denison Times* reported a number of Aborigines "carefully shepherding a mob of cattle in a convenient pocket of land."[68] Even in surrounding areas there were reports of yarding. To the south the *Mackay Mercury* was also reporting sheep being driven away and put in a sheep yard by the blacks.[69] To the north west, Charles Eden also spoke of the blacks building a "proper yard" and regularly shepherding 400 sheep they had driven off. This, said Eden, showed "how closely and for what a length of time they must have watched the habits of Europeans'.[70]

Aboriginal attacks on property and people intensified from 1865 to 1868. In September 1865, large numbers of Aborigines were robbing huts and spearing cattle at Jarvisfield Station.[71] In December of the same year, Aborigines speared cattle and carried off or destroyed all the property at Wilbertree Station on the Upper Don.[72] By June, 1866, Aborigines made what seemed to be a simultaneous descent on seven stations from Strathdon to Jolimont and police reported having seen the tails of two to five head of cattle in every Aboriginal camp. It was claimed that Aborigines were in such large numbers that a large bullock lasted them about two days.[73] By 1866, pastoralists in general were reported as saying that the blacks had relinquished their old diet

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66 Taylor, *Race Relations in South-East Queensland*, p.77; Curr, *The Australian Race*, 2:471.

67 *PDT*, 9 June 1866.

68 *PDT*, 8 June 1867.

69 Quoted in *PDT*, 23 June 1866.

70 Charles H. Eden, *My Wife and I in Queensland: an Eight years' experience in the above colony, with some account of Polynesian labour* (London, 1872), p.221.

71 *PDT*, 30 September 1865.

72 *Ibid.*, 23 December 1865.

73 *Ibid.*, 16 June 1866.

in favour of beef.[74] John Yeates' station was attacked in May 1867, with the loss of one shepherd's life, upwards of 600 ewes and wethers killed, with 200 irrevocably scattered, and station property carried off and destroyed.[75] The owners of Salisbury Plains, about twenty miles from Bowen, complained in 1868 that if attacks on their stock were not stopped, the 1,000 head of cattle on the run would be lost.[76] The *Port Denison Times* also reported "ruinous losses to which the owners of coast runs are subjected" and claimed that the loss of shepherds, travellers and stockmen was of such frequent occurrence as "scarcely to call for any comment."[77] Robert Gray, a pioneer of the neighbouring Flinders District, estimated that during the 1860s "probably ten to fifteen per cent of the white population lost their lives at the hands of the blacks."[78] One police officer put the percentage "at from twenty to thirty".[79] Both black and white were inexorably drawn into lives of violence. The white settlers and Native Mounted Police did not always advertise their skirmishes which meant that much of the conflict has not been recorded. George Carrington, who travelled and worked across the Kennedy, saw at an unidentified location, "two large pits, covered with branches and brush, secured by a few stones, and the pits themselves were full of dead blackfellows, of all ages and both sexes." On another occasion Carrington explained that the air for more than a quarter of a mile was "tainted with the putrefaction of corpses, which lay all along the ridges, just as they had fallen.'[80] The *Port Denison Times* commented in 1867 that where Aborigines take one life, "we take say fifty, exacting not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but as many eyes or teeth as we can possibly get ..."[81] The

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74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*, 15 June 1867.

76 E. Joys to C.C.L., 7 June 1868, COL/A107, 1851 of 1868, QSA.

77 *PDT*, 2 May 1868.

78 Robert Gray, *Reminiscences of India and North Queensland*, 1857-1912 (London, 1913), p. 78.

79 *Ibid.*, p.78; Loos placed the European death toll from Aboriginal resistance at fifty six deaths "with indications that there may have been ten more." "Aboriginal-European Relations", p. 158. Both Reynolds and Loos estimated Aboriginal deaths in frontier violence as outnumbering those of the settlers "by at least ten to one." "Aboriginal Resistance in Queensland", p.226.

80 Carrington, *Colonial Adventures*, pp.152-53.

81 *PDT*, 2 March 1867.

clergyman, Frederick Richmond, later wrote: "In the waterholes in some parts of the North may be seen the ghastly remains of the dead blacks, skulls, ribs and thigh bones, strewn about."[82] As late as 1984, the skull of an Aboriginal with a 1.5 centimetre hole in its back was uncovered at low tide near Giru.[83]

Traditional Aboriginal practices, such as mutilation and skull smashing, were sometimes used by Aborignes to kill and dispose of the white invaders.[84] The remains of the two bushmen who were found murdered by the blacks about ten miles from Inkermann Station in February 1866, had been "shockingly mutilated"[85]and their skulls had been completely smashed in. Beside the bodies Lieutenant Marlow found "a great stone with brains still on it."[86] In the interior, Chatfield of Natal Downs described how a German hutkeeper from the

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82 Frederick Richmond, *Queensland in the "Seventies". Reminiscences of the Early Days of a Young Clergyman* (Privately published, 1927), p. 86.

83 *Advocate*, 15 June 1984; *Townsville Bulletin*, 13 June 1984. The remains were identified as an Aborigine as evidenced "by the worn teeth, which had not been consistent with the mastication of modernday food." The pathologist "had been unable to determine the sex or cause of death." *Townsville Bulletin*, 15 June 1984.

84 Murrells explained that in traditional Aboriginal society "They cut their enemies up in stripes [sic], dry them, and distribute the pieces through the tribe, by which means they think they have their enemies' strength added to their own, and that they will be lucky in hunting and fishing." Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p. 18; Archaeological evidence in the Herbert-Burdekin district also provides strong evidence of skull smashing and bone breaking in relation to what seems to have been both homicidal and mortuary cannibalism. See Brayshaw, *Aboriginal Material Culture*, pp. 300-10. William Clark wrote to the *PDT* that from his personal experience he felt that the bodies of white victims were in such a position that it was "impossible to come to any other conclusion than that they had sported with them after death." *PDT*, 15 June 1867. It would be too easy to write off such evidence as typical of the white myths about the "inhuman savagery" of Aborigines that were reported in the newspapers of the day. A number of Aborigines have readily admitted to the practice of skull smashing in North Queensland. See the film *We Stop Here* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, A1000176X, 1978?) In the film old men from the Dyirbal Tribe told stories of the massacres and poisoning of their people when they first came into contact with the white settlers. One story related how two of the native police had their skulls smashed in retaliation. In general, scant respect is shown for the corpses of enemies or to those killed for breaking Aboriginal law. R.M. and C. H. Berndt, *The World of the First Australians* (Sydney, 1965), p.466.

85 *PDT*, 3 February 1866.

86 *Ibid.*, 14 February 1866.

Cape River was found with his head covered with wounds, a gash across his throat and "a cut in the upper part of the stomach from which the intestines protruded". A shepherd too, had been "partially buried and dreadfully mutilated".[87] Two shepherds from Victoria Downs had also been murdered and their bodies mutilated for kidney fat.[88] A shepherd's body, found in the Broken River, was said to be impossible to identify "as the head had been cut off and removed and no clothing could be found." It was presumed to be that of Robert Whiteman.[89]The Melanesian shepherd, Lawie, of Strathbogie Station was found with "one dreadful gash above the right temple and other head wounds ..."[90] Kill Kill, another Melanesian shepherd from the same station, had a "tomahawk cut behind the ear another in the face and one arm cut off below the shoulder" as well as a spear through the thigh.[91]

It is possible that the Aborigines may have attempted to conceal the bodies of some of their victims to avoid reprisals by the settlers or Native Mounted Police. Some Aboriginal women reported that the body of a Chinaman had been concealed in three different waterholes at Jarvisfield Station as the Aborigines feared it might be discovered.[92] A similar pattern emerged elsewhere where remains had been burnt - a method sometimes used by Aborigines to dispose of their own dead.[93] Carrington told of a shepherd who was burnt alive (?) and only a "few bits of bone and ashes, his boots, and part of his belt" were all to be found.[94] Robert Gray related how at Mount McConnell the body of one shepherd was found lying "on his own campfire".[95] The *Mackay Mercury* described the fate of one man, forty miles from

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87 W. Chatfield to Col. Sec., 5 January 1865, COL/A64, 499 of 1865, QSA.

88 *PDT*, 19 November 1864.

89 Certificate of Particulars of Inquest, 4 April 1868, JUS/IN19, 119 of 1868, QSA.

90 Deposition of Robert Smith, sheep overseer, JUS/N19, 156,7 of 1868, QSA.

91 Deposition of William Richards, bullock driver, *Ibid.*

92 *PDT*, 17th October 1868.

93 Morrill, *Sketch of a Residence*, p. 12; Curr, *The Australian Race*, 2: 476; Brayshaw, Aboriginal Material Culture, pp 300-10.

94 Carrington, *Colonial Adventures*, p. 157.

95 Gray, *Reminiscences*, p.77.

Eaglefield: he was burned before being buried, only the sole of one boot appearing above the surface.[96]

Europeans were not only wary of Aboriginal reprisals, but also prepared themseives for them. As early as November 1863, John Fenwick, who drove cattle from Port Denison to Nulla Nulla, recounted how "an odd spear may at any unsuspecting moment be whizzed into one's vitals - or a Boomerang or stone tomahawk urged at one's head."[97] The surveyor, A.C. Macmillan, could not induce his blackboy, Johnny, to return and look for the lost guns for "fear of blacks".[98] When at Woodstock Station in 1865, John Ewen Davidson explained that he kept" a good lookout and my pistol handy as the blacks about here are very dangerous and have killed many men."[99] The *Port Denison Times* also pointed out that even if the Native Mounted Police were a much stronger force, "we do not think it would exonerate private individuals from the duty of taking what steps are possible for their own defence."[100] As W.R.O. Hill of Reedy Lake reflected: "I can safely say that life was never safe, and the only wise thing to do on seeing a black was to shoot, and shoot straight ..."[101]

The random violence of the frontier often sapped the psychological resilience of some Europeans. As early as 1864 the *Port Denison Times* warned that, after hearing of the killings and mutilations by the blacks, the new arrivals to the colony would prefer to "hang about the town" rather than "engage in such perilous work" in the interior.[102] Robert Gray related something of the impact of the violence when he told how he had to camp every night with a shepherd who "would not stop by himself on account of the blacks".[103] On another occasion he

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96 Reprinted in the *P.D.T.*, 23 June 1866.

97 W. Ross Johnston, "Droving in the Upper Burdekin, 1863; The Diary of John Fenwick", *Queensland Heritage,* 2, No. 3 (November 1976), 29.

98 Archibald Campbell MacMillan, Diary, 19 January 1866 - 22 September 1866, extracts held Bowen Historical Society; original held by Mr. A. MacMillan, Mile End, Warwick, Qld.

99 Summary of the journal of John Ewen Davidson, 1865-1868, typescript held at James Cook University, p.10.

100 *PDT*, 31 August 1867.

101 W.R.O. Hill; *Forty-Five Years' Experience in North Queensland, 1861-1905. With a few incidents in England* (Brisbane, 1907), p.31.

102 *PDT*, 19 November 1864.

103 Gray, *Reminiscences*, p.59.

explained that the murders committed by the blacks "had established such a scare amongst the shepherds that it was difficult to get men to undertake the work.[104]

The threat of violence penetrated deeply into town life.[105] The editor of the *Port Denison Times* commented in 1867 that the Aborigines were gaining in such courage that "Bowen itself may at some no distant date ... be stuck up and a few of the inhabitants living in the outskirts speared or tomahawked."[106] In the previous month the committee of the whole council at Bowen could not sit to consider wharfage charges because the Mayor "had been called away to his station by the news of the outrage which the blackfellows had committed there ..."[107] By August 1867, rumours of possible Aboriginal attack on the outskirts of Bowen seemed to have the potential for being both psychologically and physically ruinous for some residents. The *Port Denison Times* condemned the authors of two particularly virulent rumours and should be glad if "some means could be found of detecting and punishing the authors of them." The rumours, said the editor, seemed calculated to render the lives of the many unprotected women on the outskirts of the town "a misery and might even seriously affect their health." Yet, the *Port Denison Times* still considered attacks "possible - we do not say probable."[108] A year later, however, the editor explained that he should not be surprised to hear "that some of these huts have been plundered and their residents massacred."[109] When a pinched Treasury removed the Native Mounted Police detachment from the Don River to Dalrymple in 1868 to provide gold escort duty for the Cape River goldfields, Bowen residents mooted the idea of a volunteer cavalry corps to defend Bowen from the possibility of "an incursion of blackfellows into the town in force."[110]

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104 *Ibid.*, p.77.

105 Reynolds and Loos, "Aboriginal Resistance in Queensland", pp.214-226.

106 *PDT*, 8 June 1867.

107 *Ibid.*, 1 June 1867.

108 *Ibid.*, 17 August 1867.

109 *Ibid.*, 29 August 1868.

110 *Ibid.*, 5 September 1868. Such an incursion would have been most unlikely. Aboriginal society did not have the wide political affiliations necessary to mount such an attack.

Aboriginal resistance was so serious that by 1868 it threatened the economic viability of the pastoral runs between Townsville and Mackay. The cost of Aboriginal destruction of property was added to the problems of labour shortages and a slump in the pastoral industry generally. Commissioner Seymour's report from his recent tour of inspection of the district was to the point:

> The coast country from Townsville to Mackay is inhabited by blacks of the most hostile character. On some of the stations north of Bowen, such as Woodstock, Salisbury Plains, and some others, it is almost impossible to keep any cattle on the run; and south of Bowen some stations are or were about to be abandoned, in consequence of the destruction of property by the blacks ...[111]

The *Port Denison Times* explained that the "ravages" were so "formidable" that "unless checked they will render the coast country untenable."[112] The black resistance was a decisive factor in causing a European shift in strategy towards the Aborigines. The station holders and townspeople decided to let them in to both the stations and the towns. One patient and protracted struggle by the Aborigines had now ended, but a new stage - the era of adaptation - had begun. To the Aborigines, it was to be the twilight of their way of life.

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111 Quoted in *Ibid.*

112 *Ibid.*, 28 November 1868.

Chapter Five

TWILIGHT OF A WAY OF LIFE

Economically, the stationholders had reached a crisis point by the late 1860s and it was doubtful if they could have sustained the Aboriginal onslaught much longer. James Hall-Scott of Strathbogie Station summed up the situation when he wrote: "It would be much better for the Government to publish a proclamation recalling settlement south of Connors range as by this means much life and property would be saved ..."[1] Another pastoralist claimed that fifteen out of twenty cattle stations between Port Mackay and Cleveland Bay had "lost equivalent to their annual increase, and some much more ..." The estimated loss on one of the largest stations "was over one thousand last year". He went on to explain that because of "constant harassing the cattle were driven off their proper runs, and it was the work of months to collect them". Cattle not physically lost to Aboriginal raids "became poor, were neither fit for the butcher, the boiling pot, nor even for station use ..."[2] If the pastoralists between Bowen and Cape Cleveland were to survive their economic plight, it was in their own interests to grasp the initiative and reach an accord with the Aboriginal inhabitants.

Resolution of the conflict could no longer be found in escalating the violence. For years the pastoralists had advocated more expenditure on the Native Mounted Police as a remedy for Aboriginal retaliatory raids. Whenever the money was not forthcoming, property owners and managers resurrected their argument that the government was "losing a ship for the sake of a halfpenny worth of tar".[3] Rarely did any government response earn their praise. For some time, two special "flying detachments" of Native Mounted Police - each with a double supply of horses and having no fixed camp or barracks - constantly patrolled the coastal country between Townsville and Mackay.[4] However, when the government moved the Native Mounted

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1 J. Hall Scott, Strathbogie, to Col. Sec., 8 November 1868, COL/A117, 473 of 1869, QSA.

2 *PDT*, 5 June 1869.

3 *Ibid.*, 17 November 1866.

4 Commissioner Seymour's report of his recent tour of inspection; *PDT*, 5 September 1868.

Police headquarters from the Don River to Dalrymple, it seemed to the pastoralists that they had been finally deserted.[5] The new initiative now came from the frontier as pastoralists sought to protect profitability by peaceful means. During 1868, some stations began to admit Aborigines to their runs with a remarkable degree of success. William Chatfield of Natal Downs found that local Aborigines became "remarkably quiet and friendly" whereas between 1864 and 1867 his run had been "almost untenable oweing [sic] to the hostility of the Aboriginals ..."[6] He now experienced no injury either to his sheep or to the men in charge.[7] By February 1869, Bode of Strathdon had allowed over 100 Aborigines on to his run, and Aborigines had also been admitted to the Woodstock and Jarvisfield runs.[8] One pastoralist who called himself "Within 100 miles of the Burdekin" claimed that "All of the squatters in this part of the Kennedy are anxious to let in the blacks, and on most of the stations have so far succeeded that the blacks may now be seen hunting fearless of danger in their own immediate vicinity ..."[9] Frontier capitalism was beginning to reveal a remarkable capacity for compromise.

It was only when the economic condition of the pastoralist became ruinous that he was more inclined to comply with the legal provisions of his lease concerning Aborigines.[10] Although one of the clauses of the pastoral lease reserved for the Aborigines "such free access to the said run, and to the trees and waters thereon, as will enable them to

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5 *PDT*, 9 May 186. Although the *PDT* claimed that the coast squatters would be deprived of protection, the editor did note the following week: "Inspector Marlow tells us that we are incorrect in supposing that the proposed distribution of the police is inferior to the former, as in his opinion it is quite the contrary...Mr Marlow says that this arrangement will work far better than the other..." *PDT*, 16 May 1868.

6 W. Chatfield, Natal Downs, to P.M., Bowen, 14 January 1869, enclosed in P.M. Bowen to Police Commissioner, 30 March 1869, COL/A121, 1483 of 1869, QSA. See also the account of the Cape River Aborigines in Curr, *The Australian Race*, 2: 468.

7 *PDT*, 23 January 1869.

8 *PDT*, 20 February 1869; Mark W. Reid, Woodstock, to P.M., Townsville, 31 March 1869, enclosed in P.M. Townsville to Col. Sec., 13 April 1869, COL/A122, 1568 of 1869, QSA.

9 *PDT*, 15 May 1869.

10 This is not to deny that genuine humanitarian attempts to "let in" blacks had been made earlier. See *PDT*, 21 July 1866 and 13 April 1867.

procure the animals, birds, fish and other food on which they subsist," this had not previously been enforced.[11] As long as the settlers had the upper hand, the law could be disregarded with impunity; but changed visions produced new forms as the survivability of capitalism was brought sharply into focus. The Aborigines let into Woodstock and Jarvisfield runs were given "full permission to hunt over all the country"; consequently, no cattle or other property had since that time been destroyed.[12] The Aborigines told Bode that if they were allowed in, they would "not kill any more cattle". He then showed them on what part of his run they could hunt, and they "promised not to hunt on any other part when the cattle [were] running there".[13] If frontier capitalism were to prosper, it would be forced to accommodate the needs of local Aboriginal society.

To preserve the peace, some pastoralists were prepared to use private, public and government initiative. Frederick Bode gave his Aboriginal helpers nets for fishing and requested the *Port Denison Times* to inform the settlers near the mouth of the Don River not to interfere with the blacks when they went fishing. The editor complied with the request and added a suggestion of his own: that a subscription be started to supply the blacks with tomahawks "to enable them to get their sustenance".[14] Mark Reid, superintendent of Towns and Company's Woodstock and Jarvisfield runs, offered his own services to distribute government blankets to the blacks on these runs as, according to Reid, their behaviour "since they have been let in, has been without exception good".[15] Reid was asking for special treatment for these Aborigines as blankets could usually "only be distributed to the natives at the Police office and the usual time for distribution [was] on the Queen's birthday".[16] The nearest police office was in Townsville and the Queen's birthday was still some months away. A sympathetic police magistrate in Townsville sent his request to the Colonial Secretary with the comment that these Aborigines were "now

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11 Quoted by A.M. McDougall in his letter to the Colonial Secretary and published in *PDT*, 13 April 1867.

12 Reid, to P.M. Townsville, 31 March 1869, as above.

13 *PDT*, 20 February 1869.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Reid, to P.M. Townsville, 31 March 1869.

16 P.M. Townsville to Reid, 10 April 1869, enclosed in P.M. Townsville to Col. Sec., 13 April 1869, COL/A122, 1568 of 1869, QSA.

shewing a strong disposition to be friendly with the whites which I think it would be well for many reasons to encourage, and I hope, under these circumstances, that this application may be complied with".[17] James Hall-Scott, of Strathbogie, was also told by the Colonial Secretary that should the Bench in Bowen "feel disposed" to let him have a few blankets for distribution to the blacks on his station, the Colonial Secretary would offer no objection to their doing so".[18]

The *Port Denison Times*, which had for some years vigorously opposed the idea of "letting in" the blacks, performed an about-turn and openly encouraged the movement for economic reasons. Rayner, the editor, seemed to have understood the pastoralists' predicament and was pragmatic enough to espouse their cause: "If these gentlemen can show us any way in which we may extricate ourselves from the anomalous and miserable position which we now occupy in relation to the aboriginals, they will be entitled to public gratitude". Of Bode's experiment at Strathdon, the editor commented:

> The blackfellow [difficulty?] has been a serious one, and has done a great deal towards retarding the progress of the country. There seems now to be some hope of solving the question, and we congratulate Mr. Bode on the steps he has taken in that direction, and hope that everyone will do his utmost to co-operate with him.[19]

Claims by the historian J. W. McCarty, that "Australian Aborigines, New Zealand Maoris and American Indians were quickly reduced by warfare and disease and their indigenous economy and society had little permanent effect on the development of capitalism in the new regions", has to be questioned in North Queensland.[20] The capitalist redemption in 1869 was aided by sacrificing sacred beliefs - not blood. The idea that further violence was necessary to preserve property became increasingly untenable as the possibility of whites having to abandon the country became a reality. It was "letting in", not bloodletting, which helped to liberate a beleaguered capitalism.

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17 *Ibid.*

18 Col. Sec. to J.H. Scott, Strathbogie, 5 June 1869, COL/R6, 472 of 1869, QSA.

19 *PDT*, 20 February 1869.

20 J.W. McCarty, "Australia as a Region of Recent Settlement in the Nineteenth Century", *Australian Economic History Review*, 13, no.2 (September 1973), 149.

Although the Aborigines welcomed a cessation of hostilities, it is difficult to agree with Loos' contention that the "letting in" movement was aided by "a significant change in the balance of power". Loos claimed that although "the colonists on the stations were still outnumbered, in many areas, the number of Aborigines had declined as had their will and ability to overtly resist European intrusion".[21] While there can be little doubt that numerically the Aborigines had declined, there seems little evidence to suggest a similar decimation in the Aboriginal will and ability to overtly resist. Commissioner Seymour's 1868 report had confirmed that on stations "north of Bowen, such as Woodstock, Salisbury Plains, and some others," it was "almost impossible to keep any cattle on the runs".[22] His assessment cannot be taken lightly, especially as Loos himself admits that Seymour "was not one to exaggerate Aboriginal hostility". Loos also pointed out that Seymour had to take "extraordinary measures to pacify the Townsville to Mackay coast".[23] Indeed, Loos' own evidence argues against itself: it confirms the strength of the resistance, which was at its height, and fails to show that the ability of Aborigines to resist the European invasion had been broken.

Reports in the *Port Denison Times* continued to confirm that while the Aborigines appreciated being "let in" to the stations and towns in 1869 - some even showed "great anxiety to be let in"[24] - there was no indication of a decline in either will or ability to resist. It was only the form of resistance which changed. Near Bowen, J.G. MacDonald complained of "the sauciness of the blackfellows, who will, though repeatedly warned off, persist in coming into and through the paddocks ..." MacDonald bemoaned the fact that although the fences "have been repeatedly pointed out to them as the boundary which they are not to cross ... they persist in crossing them in defiance, intimating that they will come as often and stop as long as they please". The editor also complained that the blacks were "mustering in considerable

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21 Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, pp.390-391; Frontier Conflict in the Bowen District, pp.179, 184. As an indication of a numerical decline, the number of Aborigines about Mt Elliott in 1870 was estimated at about 400. Originally, the population was said "to muster 800 men, women, and children..." *Queenslander*, 26 March 1870.

22 *PDT*, 5 September 1868.

23 Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, p.149.

24 *PDT*, 6 February 1869.

force in our immediate vicinity, the Sergeant of Police having counted 200 of them, and they will not move on when told by the Police". Although it "had not lately been the custom for men to carry arms" in the neighbourhood of Bowen, many experienced bushmen had informed the editor that "owing to the increasing boldness of the blackfellows since they have been let in, they shall no longer venture to travel unarmed". Even after the peace was declared, the Aboriginal response proved multifaceted as it continued to reject white hegemony.

Resistance could also take a more aggressive form. When Wilmington of Salisbury Plains motioned an Aborigine, intent on taking hold of Wilmington's horse, to "stand on one side, a motion ... generally understood and taken without offence," the man became angry and raised a big stick with which he threatened Wilmington.[25] At Inkermann Station cattle were still being speared and, Rowlands, the line repairer in charge of the telegraph, passed his nights at the station where they all slept "with their arms by their sides".[26] This station was being threatened by Whistler, an ex-Brisbane black, who had been employed at Inkermann a long time, but who had recently left to join the local blacks. The Aboriginal women working about the kitchen had also been called into camp. It had been intimated to the boy, the only remaining Aborigine on the station, that it was the intention of the blacks "to storm the station, kill and mutilate all the white men, but to take possession of the horses and use them for cattle hunting". At Slaty Creek, about nine miles south of the Burdekin River, the Aborigines were "in the habit of bailing travellers up". The editor told how one German was "stripped of all that he possessed, clothes and all, and so strong are they in numbers that ... they hustled and very seriously annoyed a party of six men coming along the road". The mailman also found it "necessary to carry firearms to protect himself from them".[27]

The "letting in" process was not implemented uniformly as irrational fear of the Aborigines persisted on some stations and in the town. J. Kelsey of Bowen complained to the Colonial Governor in October 1869 that "at present one man allows them on his ground and his neighbour drives them off with menaces and threats". Kelsey explained how, when Aborigines cooked and ate the remains of a beast

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[25] *Ibid.*, 19 June 1869.

[26] *Ibid.*, 12 June 1869.

[27] *Ibid.*, 12 June 1869.

they had found, and which had been dead several days, a butcher and policeman rode out from Bowen "armed with revolvers" and, in his absence, "drove the Blacks off". When the blacks later returned to Kelsey's property, their presence coincided with a visit from the Native Mounted Police. The blacks disappeared and some days later "the body of a Gin was found in a waterhole". This had occurred after Kelsey had won the confidence of the blacks by pointing out to them the boundaries and impressing upon them "that no one should disturb them so long as they confined their attention to destroying only Possums, Wallaby and the like and getting 'sugar bags'".[28] Phillip Somer of Bowen also informed the Colonial Secretary that the Aborigines "are allowed into some of the stations, and not into others where it would perhaps still be unsafe to allow them too near". Somer described the unsatisfactory state of relations between the blacks and the whites:

> ... they are not allowed about the townships with any sort of freedom, and they are often driven back from even the town reserves; they will soon get tired of trying to please by leaving the stock alone while they are to a certain extent driven about from post to pillar ... this state of things cannot last long without a serious row between them and the Europeans.[29]

Such evidence reveals that while "letting in" was being successfully implemented by a large number of pastoralists in 1869, there were still some who refused admission to the Aborigines. Even sanctuary in the allegedly "safe" areas around the town was not always guaranteed. Conditions such as these demonstrate that the Aborigines faced a crisis of confidence in the new order. Figures produced by Loos asserting that "by June 1869, four months after they were let in, there were only about two hundred Aborigines in the vicinity of the town," do not prove, as Loos suggests, that the Aborigines were "clearly less of a threat". Nor does the corresponding increase in the white population of Bowen - from 120 in 1862 to about 1000 in 1869 - prove that the Europeans had less to fear.[30] As long as no consistent "letting in" policy existed, the Aboriginal population would have been mobile and would have fluctuated considerably. The uncertain and unpredictable

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28 J. Kelsey, Bowen, to Governor, 22 October 1869, COL/A139, 852 of 1870, QSA.

29 Phillip Somer, Bowen, to Col. Sec., 14 October 1869, COL/A134, 4272 of 1869, QSA.

30 Loos, Frontier Confict, pp.176-7; figures confirming about 200 Aborigines in the vicinity of Bowen were also produced in *PDT*, 19 May 1869.

circumstances in which many Aborigines found themselves were not conducive to their congregating too close to Bowen. Yet, when the Bowen bench applied for Aboriginal blankets in February 1870, the estimated Aboriginal population in the district was no longer 200, but 1500.[31] For black men and women this was the edge of darkness: the nightmarish reality of wandering in a no man's land called home.

When the Bowen magistrates decided they had no power to exclude the Aborigines from entering the town,[32] there was no indication that blacks would receive the benefits of British law. After one Aborigine cut down "a valuable peach tree" in Muller's garden and another, in unknown circumstances, broke a grindstone belonging to Muller, the editor of the *Port Denison Times* stressed that both ought to have been punished "chiefly to teach those Principles of submission which our position renders it so necessary for us to enforce". The editor reserved the "severer punishment" for one Aborigine who, when ordered out of the town for basking "in the primitive costume of his ancestors" on a grass-plot in Herbert Street, threw a stone at the constable in question. When Rayner, the editor, asserted that, as conquerors, the whites were "determined to enforce at all hazards and by any means submission to our laws," it was clear that he meant extra-judicial means. He pointed out, however, that the questions "as to how and by whom punishment is to be inflicted in these cases" were "not quite so easy to answer". Although Rayner claimed that it "would be by no means good policy as a general rule to entrust those injured with it," he did indicate that "many cases might arise where, especially under the present circumstances, it would be necessary to wink at their doing.[33]

Ironically, the white citizens placed themselves above the law to enforce Aboriginal submission to the law. When a girl's frock was stolen from a house in Leichhardt Street, the Sergeant of Police and several townsmen went to Muller's Lagoon where the alleged culprit, an Aboriginal woman, was found. It was then "decided by a self-constituted court that she was worthy of stripes and the judgment was no sooner pronounced than it was carried into effect".[34] Rayner, who was finding it just as difficult and distressing to adjust to the

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31 Bench, Bowen, to Col. Sec., 9 February 1870, COL/A139, 786 of 1870, QSA.

32 *PDT*, 17 April 1869.

33 *Ibid.*, 12 June 1869.

34 *Ibid.*, 5 June 1869.

changed circumstances, stressed that the action taken by the Sergeant of Police - "flogging the gin" - was "though perhaps not strictly legal, quite the right thing to do under the circumstances".[35] In addition, the Aborigines were "ordered to clear out on the following morning".[36] Perhaps the scene was depicted a little more precisely by Kelsey who wrote:

> The blacks were at first allowed to camp outside Bowen, until a citizen missed or lost a petticoat for which the blacks were hunted off, guns were fired over their heads, and their "gunyahs" burnt and destroyed ...[37]

Clearly, British "law" was used to subjugate, not regulate, the Aboriginal inhabitants. If the white settlers were prepared to cauterize their own consciences, they were left with no alternative but to sear the souls of their black companions. Rayner's newspaper would concretize this small town's contempt for a different people by engraving it on the pages of history.

Sexual exploitation often preceded economic. Correspondence in the *Port Denison Times*, for example, claimed that the "letting in" movement had been started by a station "not 100 miles from the Burdekin". At this unnamed station it was alleged the "gins were admitted, whilst the few surviving husbands had to stand afar off gazing ... at their white tormentors living promiscuously with their wives and ... little daughters". It was also claimed that "the revolver could silence all aboriginal grumblers" who might object to the "unrestrained intercourse between the sexes".[38] Other evidence seems to suggest that women may have been sometimes in the forefront of the "letting in" movement. Bode explained that there had been living on his station for twelve months "a gin, who ... during that time acquired a knowledge of English, and acted as interpreter with the blacks when they came in".[39] The editor of the *Port Denison Times* hinted at the problems inherent in the "letting in" process when he affirmed that "the greatest danger" was "likely to arise from the gins". It was, he said, "unnecessary to go into details on this matter".[40]

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35 *Ibid.*, 12 June 1869.

36 *Ibid.*, 5 June 1869.

37 Kelsey, to Governor, 22 October 1869, as above.

38 *PDT*, 1 May 1869.

39 *Ibid.*, 20 February 1869.

40 *Ibid.*, 6 February 1869.

When the Aborigines began to come about the settlement the editor again warned the public "not to meddle with the gins".[41] By April 1869, the *Port Denison Times* reiterated that one of the best ways of "preventing mischief" was "to enforce with the utmost rigour the provisions that the laws already contain against the cohabitation of white men with aboriginal women".[42] It was a fear of reprisals from the blacks rather than a concern for the degradation of Aboriginal women and their society which prompted the editor's pious rebukes. He also found it necessary to castigate "the practice of some in Bowen, holding positions that would entitle one to expect better things of them, to resort to the native camps for no other purpose than that of debauching the gins".[43] The "stereotyped proceedings"[44] which Tompson and Chatfield described in the taking up of a pastoral run, would have had similar application around the townships of North Queensland:

> ... the women, the remnant of the men, and such children as the Black troopers have not troubled themselves to shoot, are let in, or allowed to come to the settler's homestead, and the war is at an end. Finally, a shameful disease is introduced, and finishes what the rifle began.[45]

The ultimate indignity of European domination was its disease.

Aboriginal nudity offended the citizenry of Bowen - at least during the day time. Residents of Bowen complained that numbers of Aborigines entered the town unclothed and gave cause for "apprehension on breaches of public decency and morality".[46] The blanket was selected as the ideal defence against depravity. The Bench in Bowen applied to the government for Aboriginal blankets "to enable them to clothe themselves decently, and to remove at least one objection to their admission".[47] Indeed, the shroud of respectability in the form of a blanket did not cover the transparency of such motives: for those who were censured during the day were seduced at night.

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41 *Ibid.*, 27 March 1869.

42 *Ibid.*, 10 April 1869.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Curr, *The Australian Race*, 2: 469.

45 *Ibid.*, 2:470.

46 Henry Bramston, Bowen, to Col. Sec., 7 May 1869, COL/A122, 1662 of 1869. QSA.

47 *PDT*, 10 April 1869.

Capitalism replaced Christianity as the means by which the Aborigines would achieve salvation. "Labour", it was claimed, "should be made the medium of civilisation with the aboriginals of Northern Queensland ... as enforced religious teaching has been a decided failure in the colonies where it has been tried".[48] According to the Reverend J.K. Black, the Aborigines "ranked lowest in the scale of humanity" and had "forfeited their right to continue sole lords of the soil".[49] "Why should they be debarred," he asked, "from ... taking the place Providence designed for them as assistants to the pioneer settlers of this new country?"[50] Capitalism had become the preordained creed which would guide the Aborigines towards the light of "civilisation"; it did not matter that such a justification predestined the Aboriginal people to ignominious exploitation. Aborigines were as yet but images of their white counterparts, and their black humanity could only fully materialise through the pure light of white capitalist enterprise.

The new god who decreed that "there can be no civilisation without labour" condemned his black servants to the bondage of payment in kind rather than cash. One of the first schemes mooted by Bowen residents was the establishment of a reserve where the blacks could be induced to camp and "to do a few hours work every day in either clearing the land, fencing, or cultivating," in return for which they would be given "a certain amount of rations and tobacco".[51] Although the plan for the reserve was not implemented, the concept of the Aborigine as an exploitable commodity was adopted enthusiastically. J. Kelsey employed his blacks in picking cotton alongside his Melanesian labourers, and for their efforts, they received "food, tobacco, pipes [and] calico".[52] The very idea of setting the Aborigines to work in picking cotton had strong economic motives. It was, one settler claimed in the press, "the most useful branch of cultivation for them to learn, as they would have no inducement to pillage the crops as they would in the case of sugar or corn".[53] It was Kelsey who proposed to the government that in return for a government allowance of beef, and his own contribution of cheaply

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48 *Ibid.*, 12 June 1869.

49 *Ibid.*, 22 May 1869.

50 *Ibid.*, 17 April 1869.

51 *Ibid.*, 12 June 1869.

52 Kelsey to Governor, 22 October 1869.

53 *PDT*, 12 June 1869.

obtained damaged tobacco, he would "train the blacks into some habits of industry and regularity".[54]

Initially, the whites saw the economic possibilities of Aboriginal labour as limitless. One gentleman who, it was claimed, had "considerable experience in dealing with aboriginals in other parts of Australia," was optimistic that they would "learn to be useful to other settlers who might require them, and might in a short time be made in a great measure to replace the Kanakas, to whom in many things they are preferable".[55] The importation of Melanesian labourers had not achieved the degree of economic success that Europeans had hoped for in the Bowen area. As the local editor claimed in 1868: "At great expense we import Kanakas who gluttonise, get sick, run away, change their masters *ad libitum*, and in whose code of morality the word "gratitude" finds no place".[56] Those Melanesian labourers who became unemployed were a drain on Bowen hospital funds and the government had to arrange for their conveyance back to the islands.[57] The mood of optimism with a liberal sprinkling of sympathy was expressed by the editor of Bowen's newspaper at the beginning of 1869 when he discussed the "letting in" policy:

> It is also possible that their labour may be found for station work equal to that of the Polynesians. If so, they would be cheaper and besides these unhappy people certainly have a claim upon us for any employment that we can give them, in performance of but a very small portion of the duties towards them which the taking possession of their lands has devolved upon us.[58]

Aboriginal labour slowly began to be appreciated for its skill following the example of Strathdon. Frederick Bode, owner of that run, found his Aboriginal employees "of great use in the stockyard" and he was also impressed with their "trustworthiness".[59]

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54 Kelsey to Governor, 22 October 1869.

55 *PDT*, 12 June 1869.

56 *Ibid.*, 8 August 1868.

57 Col. Sec. to Secretary, Kennedy Hospital Committee, COL/R6, 437 of 1869, QSA.

58 *PDT*, 23 January 1869.

59 *Ibid.*, 6 March 1869; Enid Kerr, "Frederick Robert Bode of Bromby Park. He Rode with Dalrymple". (From a paper prepared for the Bowen Historical Society by Mrs Enid Kerr, a grand-daughter of F.R. Bode.) For a detailed analysis of Aboriginal labour in the pastoral industry, see Dawn May, *From Bush to Station: Aboriginal Labour in the North Queensland Pastoral Industry, 1861-1897* (Townsville, 1983).

The traffic in Aboriginal children as a source of cheap labour also reflected the fraying of the European social fabric in the Bowen district. The *Port Denison Times* quoted the case of a man going out to Queen's Beach, Bowen, with the avowed intention of "catching a young one";[60] Chatfield of Natal Downs complained to the Police Magistrate in Bowen of "an offence becoming common in this district viz kidnapping Aboriginal children". Chatfield explained that the blacks were "constantly complaining ... about this practice" and he feared that if it were allowed to continue, the blacks would "most probably become as troublesome as ever". In another letter to the Attorney-General Chatfield quoted the case of two boys who were stolen and taken "to the diggings where I believe I can prove they were offered for sale". Chatfield wrote on the advice of his solicitors "particularly as it pays so well stealing and selling boys that most probably the offence will be continued".[61] The feelings of black women and children were rarely considered in the quest for cheap labour. Something of the private anguish experienced by women was captured in an incident on the outskirts of Bowen:

> One of the gins had a young boy beside her, covered with a blanket, and when asked if she would part with him, she exhibited as much horror at the thought as a white woman would do.[62]

Even those professing humanitarian motives could not help but consider the economic advantages of young orphans. During 1868 it was claimed that some Aborigines "ventured in upon the stations and offered to sell their children for a few pounds of flour or sugar, or a few articles of clothing, with the double intention of disencumbering themselves and saving their children from slaughter".[63] The Rev. J.K. Black was interested in the welfare of Aboriginal children and "entered into arrangements with several gentlemen to send down to Bowen a number of children ... to be distributed amongst such heads of families as wish for and are likely to do their duty by them". The Bowen editor pointed out the advantages of such a policy as it rendered the children "useful not only to their guardians, but eventually to their own tribes".

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60 *PDT*, 3 April 1869.

61 W. Chatfield, Natal Downs, to P.M. Bowen, 14 January 1869, enclosed in P.M. Bowen to Police Commissioner, 30 March 1869, COL/A121, 1483 of 1869, QSA.

62 *PDT*, 5 June 1869.

63 *PDT*, 8 August 1868; Skinner, "Pastoral Frontiers of Queensland Colony", p.18.

In the long term there was the economic prospect that these young children might even replace the Melanesians. "We might," claimed the editor, "by a few years of training obtain lifelong servants nearer hand, attached by no mercenary motives and capable of the greatest usefulness".[64] By the end of 1869, North Queensland's first white community had accepted the Aborigines as property, but not as people. Integrity in human relationships was not a priority of the white conquerors.

* * * * *

If the Aborigines had not been physically exterminated, there was still the white "law", disease, attitudes and economic exploitation to help obliterate any prospect of a black humanity. Even at this late stage, there was no desire to use the experience of the past to guide the present. The experience of Jukes and Murrells may have confirmed that communication and compromise were possible, but that was no guarantee that it would be sought. The pastoralists, too, had struck a bargain for Aboriginal labour - not the quality of Aboriginal life. White society was not yet strong enough to combat the belief that Australian black men, women and children were scarcely human. The sacraments of "civilisation" did not bring light into Aboriginal lives. The townspeople of Bowen called for the exclusion of all blacks "between sunset and sunrise".[65] This was the ritual purification by which the town became white by night. The Aborigines were forced out on to the fringes of settlement where, in the perpetual twilight of internal exile, they stood as souvenirs of the white invasion. Outside the township the flame which had been ignited at the campfires of Jukes and Murrells now flickered deep within the darkness of the Aboriginal campsites. This was the same flame which late in the twentieth century burned the conscience of white Australia. It will continue to burn until the wounded from both sides are drawn to it to seek, with open hands, enough strength and warmth to embrace and nurture one another.

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64 *PDT*, 8 August 1868.

65 *Ibid.*, 6 February, 8 May 1869.

4. Aboriginies become a spectacle. A postcard inscribed: *Greetings from Bowen. Black Camp.*
(John Oxley Library)

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