

Negotiating Place in Colonial Darwin
Interactions between Aborigines and whites, 1869-1911

Samantha Wells

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis draws on the documentary historical record to examine the interactions between the indigenous Larrakia people and the white settlers in the colonial township of Darwin between the years 1869 and 1911. The colonial recognition of the Larrakia as the traditional owners of lands in the Darwin region and the historical question of their land rights is discussed in some detail.

Rather than seeing interactions between the Larrakia and the colonisers as polarised into either accommodation or resistance, this thesis looks at various interactions to highlight the complexities of the encounter. One of the more complex of their interactions was the negotiation of what is best described as an abstruse alliance which benefited both the Larrakia and the colonisers in various ways.

The colonisation of the Darwin region had a considerable impact on the Larrakia people's ability to live on their country as they had done prior to the invasion. This thesis seeks to understand the negotiations, compromises and decisions the Larrakia made to survive in their changing landscape.

Another complexity that is highlighted in this thesis is the tension within the white settler population about how to deal with what was presented as the 'Aboriginal problem'. This thesis shows that the ideology of compensating Aboriginal people for having invaded their land and undermining their means of subsistence was understood and condoned by the colonisers. The distribution of government rations, the allocation of reserves and the ongoing recognition of the Larrakia's right to be within the township were all ways that some colonisers attempted to compensate Aborigines for invading their land.

This thesis shows that while the Larrakia people were recognised as the prior occupants of Darwin and, as such, accorded a distinct status within the township in the whole period under study, the colonisers ultimately failed to give tangible expression to the Larrakia's land rights.

Introduction

In 1997 the Independent Member for Nelson, Noel Padgham-Purich, told the Northern Territory parliament that she could think of a ‘good way of disposing’ of the recent Aboriginal native title claim over the Micket Creek rifle range, however it would not be legal.¹ The rifle range and other lands in and around Darwin, the capital city of the Northern Territory, had recently become the subject of native title applications by the Larrakia people. Padgham-Purich was not the only person alluding to violent recourse as a solution to the claim. The administrative body responsible for lodging the native title applications received hate-mail in regard to the Larrakia claims. One letter included a newspaper photograph of the Larrakia claimants signing the native title application – modified by the drawing of bullet holes in their foreheads.² The Northern Territory’s then Chief Minister, Shane Stone, described the Larrakia claim as the largest in Australia and the ‘first over a capital city’ and warned that it ‘could cost taxpayers millions of dollars of compensation’ and result in delays to development. Also, the Government ‘elected by Territorians’ would no longer be the ‘protector’ of the beaches, parks and reserves that were included in the claim. Stone declared that these public areas belonged to ‘all Territorians’ and should not be ‘held to ransom by a few’.³ While purporting not to be talking specifically about the Larrakia claim the Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, voiced his concern that claims ‘having an apparent ambit character, particularly when they are made over areas which are part of large cities and large population concentrations’ were in danger of ‘undermining, rather than enforcing, the reconciliation process’ as well as ‘encouraging those in the community who would denigrate and destroy the native title process’.⁴ To which the then Aboriginal Social

¹ Northern Territory Parliamentary Debates, 24 April 1997.

² Personal Communication with Ben Scambray, Native Title Unit, Northern Land Council.

³ *Northern Territory News* (hereafter *NT News*), 16 December 1996. This was despite assurances by the Larrakia that the public would continue to have access to parks, beaches and reserves and that houses and businesses were ‘safe’. While the Larrakia ‘reserved the right to look after our sacred sites, hunting areas and the environment’ they were not anti-development and supported development agreements where negotiations were ‘approached in good faith, with everyone’s rights respected’ (*NT News*, 4 December 1996). It was also in spite of the NT Government’s own passage of the *Validation of Titles and Actions Act, 1994* which contained a section confirming the ‘existing public access to and enjoyment of the following places: waterways; beds and banks of foreshores; coastal waters; beaches; and areas that were public places at the end of 31 December 1993’. In addition, the Native Title Act stipulates that the Commonwealth, a State or Territory can confirm any existing public access to and enjoyment of such areas.

⁴ Howard was responding to a question from the Member for the Northern Territory, Nick Dondas, regarding the Commonwealth government’s view on the Larrakia claim and its impact on the

Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, responded, ‘How dare a Prime Minister of Australia say Aboriginal people are hurting reconciliation simply by exercising their rights?’⁵ Land in Darwin at the turn of the twentieth century is obviously contested space.

This thesis is interested in the historical context of this contested space in the colonial township of Palmerston (now known as Darwin) during the period between 1869 and 1911.⁶ The earlier date marks the surveying and settlement of lands on the Darwin peninsular and hinterland by the South Australian government which had acquired the Northern Territory in 1863. 1911 is the year that the South Australian Government relinquished control of the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth Government. It also marks the first year of the implementation of the first piece of legislation enacted specifically for Aborigines in the Northern Territory.⁷ This legislation was to have an enormous impact on nearly every aspect of Aboriginal people’s lives, particularly for those who lived in close proximity to the administrators of that legislation. The 1869 to 1911 time frame tracks a progression from the colonists’ ready inclusion of the Larrakia in the township to their exclusion and segregation with the establishment of the Kahlin Aboriginal Compound on the outskirts of town and the declaration of areas of land within the town which were prohibited to Aboriginal people.

Indigenous peoples belonging to the Larrakia language group promote themselves and are generally recognised by the wider public to be the traditional owners of lands in the Darwin region. The Darwin town area and surrounding suburbs are only a part of the Larrakia’s traditional estate. Larrakia people have traditional responsibility for lands incorporating the Darwin Peninsula, the Cox Peninsula and islands adjacent to it, and lands west of the Howard River (see Map). The Larrakia’s traditional estate is bounded by the estates of neighbouring Aboriginal groups - the Wulna, Limilngan, Waray, Awiyinmir and Kungarakany to the east and south-east, the Wadjigiyn, Kiyuk, Ami, Manda, Marriamu and Marridjabin (collectively referred to as the ‘Wagaitj’ (beach or

reconciliation process. Australian House of Representatives Questions Without Notice Hansard, 2 December 1996.

⁵ *NT News*, 14 December 1996.

⁶ To avoid confusion the colonial township of Palmerston is referred to as ‘Darwin’ or ‘Port Darwin’ throughout this thesis. The original name of Palmerston may still appear in some direct citations.

⁷ *An Act to make Provision for the Better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Northern Territory, and for other purposes* was enacted on 7 December 1910.

sand people)) to the west and south-west, and the Tiwi to the north on Bathurst and Melville Islands.⁸ Darwin today has a population of about 90,000 people with around ten per cent identifying as Aboriginal. However, not all Aboriginal people who live in Darwin are Larrakia people. Many non-Larrakia Aborigines now live in Darwin through varied historical circumstance ranging from forced removal from family and country to personal choice.

One of the motivations for this study is to provide historical context to present day discussions of Indigenous peoples in Darwin. However, of far greater concern is to provide a historical narrative about the complexities of the interactions between Larrakia people and whites in the colonial settlement of Darwin. It is arguable that the interactions between Aborigines and people with Asian ancestry in Darwin in this time period were just as or more complex than encounters between Aborigines and whites. However this thesis is about the various negotiations that occurred between the whites as colonisers and the Larrakia as the original occupants of the land on which Darwin was built. As this thesis shows, people of Asian ancestry may have provided much of the motivation for the colonisers trying to control the lives of Aborigines but they were not responsible for forming or implementing policy in respect of Aborigines. This thesis focuses on Larrakia Aboriginal people but recognises that many Aboriginal people whose traditional country lies outside the Darwin region moved in to Darwin during the early days of colonial settlement. This thesis includes discussion of the way that non-Larrakia Aboriginal groups were positioned by the colonisers as outsiders or visitors to the town area and how this confirmed the notion that the Larrakia were the rightful occupants of the town area.

To date there is no comprehensive study of relations between Larrakia people and whites in the colonial township of Darwin. However, there are many well researched contributions to varying aspects of Northern Territory Aboriginal history which have provided context or comparative points to this study. Of particular use has been the work of historians CD Rowley, DJ Mulvaney, Lenore Coltheart, Tony Austin, Barbara Cummings, Tim Rowse, Russell McGregor and David Ritchie. The diverse range of

⁸ Michael Walsh, 1995. “‘Tainted Evidence’: Literacy and Traditional Knowledge in an Aboriginal Land Claim”, in Diana Eades (ed) *Language in Evidence: Issues confronting Aboriginal and Multi-cultural*

recent research into Northern Territory Aboriginal history is reflected in the collection of papers in, *Connection and Disconnection: Encounters between settlers and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory*.⁹ Of particular use to this thesis have been the papers from Jim Cameron, David Carment and Tim Rowse.¹⁰ Andrew Markus, Julie Wells, Mickey Dewar and Suzanne Parry have written on aspects of Aboriginal history which fall outside the time frame of this thesis but whose ideas and analysis have been useful to this thesis. The work of historians researching aspects of Aboriginal history elsewhere in Australia – in particular Henry Reynolds, Heather Goodall, Bain Attwood, Tom Griffiths and Mark McKenna – has been drawn on throughout the thesis.

Tony Austin and Gordon Reid have both looked at relations between Aborigines and whites in the Northern Territory for the same period examined in this thesis. Austin's, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest: Aboriginal Administration in South Australia's Northern Territory 1863-1910* provides detailed and careful narrative and analysis of white settler and government attitudes and reactions to Aborigines in the first forty years of colonisation across the whole of the Northern Territory.¹¹ This thesis differs from Austin's work in that it concentrates solely on relations between one group of Aborigines, the Larrakia, and the colonisers within the colonial township of Darwin and provides detailed analysis of those interactions. Austin acknowledges the difficulties of representing an Aboriginal voice for this time period using a written historical record that was created by the colonisers. Nonetheless, this thesis tries to understand Larrakia agency in the colonial process and how they negotiated their varied futures in the changing landscape.

A primary concern of Gordon Reid in his, *A Picnic with the Natives*, is the violence of the interactions between Aborigines and whites in the colonisation of the Northern

Australia, University of New South Wales Press, page 102; Povinelli EA, 1993. *Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

⁹ Tony Austin and Suzanne Parry (eds), 1998. *Connection and Disconnection: Encounters between settlers and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory University Press, Darwin.

¹⁰ Jim Cameron, 1998. 'The British meet the Tiwi: Melville Island, 1824'; Tim Rowse, 1998. 'Rationing's Moral Economy'; and David Carment, 1998. 'The Dispossession of the Warumungu: Encounters on a North Australian Mining Frontier' in Austin and Parry 1998.

¹¹ Tony Austin, 1992. *Simply the Survival of the Fittest: Aboriginal Administration in South Australia's Northern Territory 1863-1910*, Historical Society of the NT, Darwin. See also Tony Austin, 1993. *I*

Territory and the role of the police in this conflict. In his detailed study of these conflicts, Reid refers to many of the same incidents between the Larrakia and the whites that are discussed in this thesis. Reid argues that relations between the Larrakia and whites were relatively peaceful and that the Larrakia were ‘never any trouble to the Europeans’.¹² He stresses the friendliness of the Larrakia and reaches the overall conclusion that they (and some other Aboriginal groups) differed to other Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory in that they ‘welcomed the Europeans’ and ‘appear to have seen some benefit in the European presence’.¹³ Reid does not question this apparent friendliness or the motivations for it and so the Larrakia are represented as innately friendly and with little agency in the colonisation process. This characterisation of the Larrakia as friendly is firmly entrenched in the historical accounts of the settlement of Darwin and is one of the themes that is explored later in this thesis.

This thesis differs from those studies cited above in that it is more concerned with the historical question of Aboriginal land ownership in Darwin and the position of land in the interactions and negotiations between the Larrakia and whites in the colonial settlement of Darwin. While I do not deal explicitly with the issue of contemporary Aboriginal land tenure in Darwin within this thesis, the public discourse around Larrakia claims to land in the Darwin area and the use of history within that discourse is of particular interest to this thesis. Before moving to an examination of the way that the Larrakia have been represented in colonial historical texts, I first discuss the public discourse around the Larrakia’s attempts to regain ownership of their lands in the late twentieth century. Within this discussion I highlight the questions and issues that are relevant to the period discussed in this thesis.

With the passage of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act, 1976*, Aboriginal people have been able to lodge claims to areas of inalienable Crown land in the Northern Territory and an Aboriginal Land Commissioner is required to determine whether the Aboriginal claimants satisfy the requirements of traditional Aboriginal owners as defined by the

Can Picture the Old Home So Clearly: The Commonwealth and 'Half-Caste' Youth in the Northern Territory 1911-1939, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

¹² Gordon Reid, 1990. *A Picnic with the Natives: Aboriginal-European Relations in the Northern Territory to 1910*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton Victoria, p38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p198.

Act and therefore have an entitlement to that land.¹⁴ According to the Land Rights Act, ‘traditional Aboriginal owners’, are defined as a local descent group of Aborigines who:

- (a) have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land, being affiliations that place the group under a primary spiritual responsibility for that site and for the land and;
- (b) are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage over that land.¹⁵

However, the expression ‘traditional owner’ also has a more general application and refers to Aborigines belonging to and being responsible for specific tracts of land, commonly known as their ‘country’. It is this more general application of the term ‘traditional owner’ that is used in this thesis.

In recent years, there has been increased public recognition of Larrakia people being the traditional owners of lands in the Darwin region. The success with which the Larrakia are making their traditional ownership known and the readiness with which sections of the Darwin public accept this status is reflected in many ways. Larrakia representatives are often called upon to open significant events in Darwin with welcoming speeches and cultural performances. For example, in 2001 the Larrakia Elder, Joan Kurnoth Fejo, provided the welcoming speech at the Centenary of Federation’s commemoration of the bombing of Darwin and the theme of the 2001 NAIDOC week in Darwin was ‘Larrakia Country: Treat it with Respect’.¹⁶ Non-Larrakia presenters, speakers or performers frequently acknowledge the Larrakia as the owners of the land on which a particular event is being held. Indeed, it is rare to be at a major event in Darwin where this is not some kind of observation that the event is taking place on Larrakia country. These things constitute a public recognition and growing public awareness of Larrakia traditional ownership of lands in the Darwin region. However, it is also true that Larrakia land interests have not figured strongly in considerations of land use within the Darwin town boundaries. There is a marked inconsistency between the Larrakia people being frequently acknowledged as the original occupants of Darwin and any tangible recognition in non-Aboriginal law of this occupation. In the following discussion, I am

¹⁴ Walsh 1995, p98.

¹⁵ Cited in EA Povinelli, 1993. *Labor’s Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p29.

particularly interested in the way that ‘history’ was used in the public discourse to discredit the Larrakia people’s attempts to regain ownership of their lands at Kulaluk, in suburban Darwin, during the 1970s and their various native title applications to lands in and around Darwin in the 1990s.¹⁷

Andrew Markus argues that the 1992 High Court ruling which recognised that the indigenous people of the Murray Islands had and continued to hold native title over their lands, led to a time of ‘Mabo madness’. This madness was characterised by ‘irrational argument’, an ‘overstatement of the significance of the High Court decision, the re-appearance in the leading pages of the national press of arguments denigrating Aboriginal people and their culture’ and a ‘lack of proportion, balance, and reasoned leadership within the ranks of the critics of the Mabo decision’.¹⁸ Gillian Cowlshaw also contends that the Mabo decision provoked ‘emotional responses bordering on hysteria’ and believes that the kind of language used in the editorials of the major daily newspapers nationwide reflects a fundamental characteristic of the debate, that is, ‘the encompassing sense of disquiet and disbelief that Aborigines have rights in land which the rest of us must respect’.¹⁹ These observations are especially apparent in the public

¹⁶ NAIDOC - National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee.

¹⁷ The Larrakia were also the principal claimants in the Kenbi Claim to lands across the harbour from Darwin on the Cox Peninsula and the islands adjacent to it. In 2001 a small group of Larrakia people were found by the Aboriginal Land Commissioner to be the traditional Aboriginal owners of the majority of the land under claim. However, given the focus of this thesis on land within the town area, I have only discussed the Larrakia’s claims to their ‘town country’. For further information about the Kenbi land Claim see: Brandl Maria, Adrienne Haritos, and Michael Walsh, 1979. *The Kenbi Land Claim to vacant crown land in the Cox Peninsular, Bynoe Harbour and Port Patterson areas of the Northern Territory of Australia*, Northern Land Council, Darwin; Robert Blowes, 1991. ‘Kenbi (Cox Peninsula) Land Claim. Case Notes. Aboriginal Land Commissioner: Olney J. February 1991’, *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, June; Povinelli 1993; Michael Walsh with assistance from Frank McKeown and Elizabeth Povinelli, 1989. *Ten Years On. A supplement to the 1979 Kenbi Land Claim Book*, Northern Land Council, Darwin. For various histories of the Kulaluk claim and Aboriginal community see WB Day, 1994. *Bunji: A Story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra; C Buchanan, 1974. *We Have Bugger All: the Kulaluk story*, Race Relations Department, Australian Union of Students, Victoria; K Henderson, 1984. *History of the Kulaluk Lease*, Draft Report to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, Darwin; D Cooper, 1985. *The Recent History of Kulaluk*, Draft Report to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, Darwin; S Wells, 1995. *Town Camp or Homeland? A History of the Kulaluk Aboriginal Community*, Report to the Australian Heritage Commission.

¹⁸ Andrew Markus, 1996. ‘Between Mabo and a hard place: race and the contradictions of conservatism’, Bain Attwood (ed), *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*, Allen and Unwin, St. Leonards, p93.

¹⁹ Gillian Cowlshaw, 1995. ‘Did the earth move for you? The anti-Mabo Debate’, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 6 No.s 1&2, p45. See David Carment’s paper, ‘The Northern Territory Government and the Debate on Aboriginal Native Title 1992-1995’, *Journal of Northern Territory History*, for a discussion of the factors that made the Northern Territory debate different to that in the south.

and political opposition to the Larrakia people's attempts to regain ownership of their lands in the late twentieth century.

The two major themes which arise in the public opposition to the Larrakia's land claims concern the legitimacy of the Larrakia people as claimants and the legitimacy of the claims themselves. The major reason that the actual claims were deemed illegitimate was that they were to lands now incorporated in a capital city where everybody had equal rights. Henry Lee, whose agricultural lease was incorporated in the Kulaluk claim area, argued in 1975 that the land at Kulaluk should be for the recreational use of 'all black and white'.²⁰ Similarly, the Managing Director of 'Tropicus Nursery', also within the Kulaluk claim area, asserted that he had 'as much right to that land as anyone else that comes along and claims it ... Apart from that, to grant any minority group a fairly large tract of land - seems to be setting a precedent that - well, could go on and on'.²¹ In 1996, the editor of the *Northern Territory News* urged that the Larrakia's native title 'be annulled by the simple fact that Darwin is a city'.²² The Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment, Mike Reed, described the Larrakia's native title claims as 'outrageous ambit claims' and claimed that the 'whole community' had maintained 'traditional connections' with the areas under claim, 'not simply one part of it'.²³ The Larrakia claims were also challenged on the grounds that if they were successful, 'development would come to a halt'.²⁴ Within this contemporary discourse, the Larrakia are positioned as a minority group without any special or distinct rights to land based on their ancestor's prior occupation of Darwin. The colonial acknowledgment of the Larrakia as prior occupants of the land and according them any special or distinct rights within the township is one of the main themes of this thesis.

Another commentator argued in response to the Larrakia's native title claims, 'We are all Australian citizens, now here on equal terms - not to be exploited by a few

²⁰ Henry Lee, 1975. Oral submission to His Honour Mr Justice Ward re Kulaluk Land Claim, *An application by Larrakia and associated Aborigines to land commonly known as Kulaluk: Transcript of Proceedings*.

²¹ Dennis Hearn, 1975. Oral submission from the Managing Director Tropicus Nursery to His Honour Mr Justice Ward, 22 May, *An application by Larrakia and associated Aborigines to land commonly known as Kulaluk: Transcript of Proceedings*.

²² *NT News*, 24 October 1996.

²³ Mike Reed, Northern Territory Parliamentary Debates, 25 February 1997.

²⁴ *NT News*, 24 October 1996.

opportunists, even on the basis of ambit claims'.²⁵ During the Kulaluk claims, the Larrakia were also presented as opportunistic, 'jumping on the bandwagon of Aboriginal strikes and protests because they felt they were missing out'.²⁶ This thesis is interested in historical expressions of land rights by the Larrakia. Did the Larrakia assert their rights to land in the period under study or were these really opportunistic new demands, motivated purely by the passage of the Aboriginal land rights and native title legislation? The editor of the *Northern Territory News* who described the Larrakia's native title claims as 'mischievous', a 'cynical and unseemly money grab', a sign of 'guerilla warfare' and as 'debasing' 'more genuine' claims obviously thought so.²⁷

One of the reasons that the Larrakia were deemed illegitimate as claimants was because there were few 'full-blood' Larrakia people alive. In press reports regarding the Kulaluk claim, the Larrakia were described as the '*almost extinct* Larrakia tribe', 'the *surviving* Larrakia tribesmen, who number a dozen at the most', and the 'thirty *survivors* of the Larrakia tribe'.²⁸ In 1969, a question was asked in the Northern Territory Legislative Council regarding the number of 'full-blood members of the Larrakeyah tribe ... camped at Kulaluk'.²⁹ Thirty years later, the Independent Member for Nelson, Noel Padgham-Purich, argued that, prior to the passage of the Commonwealth's native title legislation, '[t]here should have been a new examination and a clear definition of who is and who is not an Aboriginal'. Padgham-Purich classified the majority of the Larrakia claimants as 'coloured people' and accused them of being the 'biggest racists of any in the community' because they did not acknowledge their 'genetic make-up'. Padgham-Purich demanded to know 'how many *real* Aboriginals have put their name to the Larrakia native title claim'.³⁰ The

²⁵ *NT News*, 31 December 1996.

²⁶ Kim Lockwood, *The West Australian*, 11 January 1972.

²⁷ *NT News*, 24 October 1996; *NT News*, 2 December 1996.

²⁸ *NT News*, 29 May 1971; *The West Australian*, 8 November 1971; *NT News*, 9 September 1971; *The Age*, 5 August 1971. Kim Lockwood wrote of the Larrakia's decline 'from 300 in 1874 to about 20' (*The West Australian*, 11 January 1972).

²⁹ The Legislative Council was told that in 1969 there were 'six classified members of the Larrakia tribe still existing'. In 1973 a question regarding whether this 'remnant had increased greatly or just become more vocal' was given the reply that the 'number of people of full Aboriginal descent who can be identified as stemming from the Larrakia language group is 29' (Northern Territory Legislative Council Debates, 2-11 October 1973).

³⁰ Emphasis added. Noel Padgham-Purich, Northern Territory Parliamentary Debates, 24 April 1997.

development of the belief that Aborigines of mixed descent or ‘town’ Aborigines were not ‘real’ Aborigines is examined in this thesis.

Another critic challenged the Larrakia’s ‘right to claim title to land upon which they have not contributed anything’. This critic argued that it was the ‘Larrakia who should compensate citizens of Darwin for the supply of water, food, education facilities, health services, beautification of landscape and trees, roads, street lights, public and private telephones, shopping complexes, cars, television and so on’.³¹ Another correspondent claimed that ‘White and Chinese settlers made Darwin what it is today’.³² The notion that the Larrakia had made little contribution to Darwin’s development was also reflected in suggestions that the Larrakia gain an economic foothold by working for it, ‘instead of simply taking it from those who have’ and that the Larrakia claims were ‘in the name of greed, of something for nothing’.³³ Another commentator described the Larrakia’s claims for compensation of their colonised lands as ‘pure arrogance’.³⁴ Given such comments, this thesis is particularly interested in exploring the various contributions the Larrakia may in fact have made to the economic and social development of the colonial township.

Linked with the argument that the Larrakia were undeserving of their land because they had not worked for it, was the notion that it was the Larrakia’s own fault that they had ‘lost’ their land. A correspondent to the *Northern Territory News* dismissed the Larrakia’s claims by evoking social Darwinism and arguing that ‘real life’ was ‘about the survival of the strongest’. Those who were ‘weak and can’t cut it are brushed aside for those who are stronger’. According to this correspondent, the ‘Larrakia had enough time and opportunity to fight for their land, but they were not strong enough’.³⁵ Suggestions that the Larrakia were not strong enough to defend their country against the colonisers raises questions regarding the very nature of colonisation in Darwin. Was the settlement of Darwin really about might and the survival of the strongest or was there some negotiation over the land? If the colonisation of Darwin was actually a

³¹ *NT News*, 31 December 1996.

³² *NT News*, 12 December 1996.

³³ *NT News*, 4 December 1996; *NT News*, 7 December 1996; *NT News*, 31 January 1997.

³⁴ *NT News*, 12 December 1996.

³⁵ *NT News*, 12 December 1996.

negotiated settlement, what was the basis of these negotiations and what form did they take? Did the Larrakia ever really believe that they had 'lost' their land?

The journalist, Glennys Bell, described the Kulaluk claim as the 'claim of a group, in essence the relics of a tribe destroyed by the white man, living in an urban area where there is conflict between their past rights and the present rights of white Australians'.³⁶ This thesis is interested in the historical conflict between the Larrakia as traditional owners and the colonisers as invaders over the changing space of the town. However, it also asks whether there was always a contest over land in colonial Darwin. The intensity of the emotions expressed during the native title debate polarises the positions involved and makes it difficult to see interactions other than conflict and hostility. But were there any interactions between Aborigines and whites in colonial Darwin that are not apparent in the divisiveness of the politics discussed above?

The public debate about the Larrakia land claims highlight contemporary tensions within white Australia over the issue of Aboriginal land rights. The views of those who would discredit the Larrakia claims have been discussed above. However, many commentators supported the Larrakia claims. One correspondent to the *Northern Territory News* argued, '[e]verybody knows that all of Darwin really belongs to the Larrakia people and it is a moot point that there are few full-blood Larrakia still alive. The descendants of all the Larrakia people should be entitled to claim what is rightfully theirs'.³⁷ In response to a comment from the Chief Minister about the Larrakia wanting everything and contributing nothing, another correspondent asked, 'after 200 years of illegal squats, isn't the rent due. Isn't having the Europeans run amok on their land for all these years contribution enough?'³⁸ This thesis is interested in whether there was tension between the white settlers regarding their treatment of Aborigines in the colonial settlement of Darwin. It examines the extent to which the colonisers acknowledged and accepted responsibility for the impact of their invasion on Aborigines and the means by which they tried to atone for their invasion. The thesis questions whether the early colonists showed any more understanding of the impact of their invasion on Aboriginal people's ability to continue to survive on their land than

³⁶ Glennys Bell, *National Times*, 6 August 1973.

³⁷ *NT News*, 7 December 1996.

³⁸ *NT News*, 7 December 1996.

was expressed in the argument advanced during the native title debate that, the Larrakia ‘would have accepted the way of nature and moved on, keeping their tribe and knowledge unadulterated by the outside world’.³⁹

Chief Minister Shane Stone’s warning that the Larrakia ‘may not be after your backyard but they’re certainly after *around* your backyard and they’re after your lifestyle whether they mean it or not’ represents the determination of white Australians to protect the sanctity of urban space in Darwin.⁴⁰ This thesis is interested in the way the colonisers’ appropriated land in the Darwin region and began to define what was appropriate action by Aborigines within that newly claimed space.

The journalist, Kim Lockwood, highlighted the difficulty white Australians had in understanding that Aborigines could have an ongoing cultural connection to what was now a suburban landscape, ‘They called the place Kulaluk and said that it was of religious and ceremonial significance to the tribe. Whether that is true, nobody else knows’.⁴¹ The way that the land changed following the initial invasion of Darwin and the impact of this on representations of the Larrakia is also discussed in this thesis.

Visible to Invisible: representations of the Larrakia in ‘history’

The public discourse about the Larrakia’s claims to land highlights not only the contested nature of land in Darwin, but also the contested nature of history. Those opposing the Larrakia native title claims and references to the legitimacy of the Larrakia as claimants raise important questions in relation to the visibility of the Larrakia in Darwin’s history and the way in which past and present historical narratives have positioned the Larrakia in Darwin’s cultural, economic and physical landscape.

In the discussion below, I look at the way that the Larrakia have been written about in various historical texts. The period encompassed in this thesis has most often been the subject of study by popular historians writing embellished memoirs of colonial life, by visitors to Darwin who published travelogues of their journeys and by public servants

³⁹ *NT News*, 12 December 1996.

⁴⁰ Emphasis added. *NT News*, 2 December 1996.

⁴¹ Kim Lockwood, *The West Australian*, 11 January 1972.

practicing ethnography as a side interest. Many of these accounts include vivid depictions of the colonial township of Port Darwin and a striking similarity in them is the visibility and inclusion of Aboriginal people in the colonial settlement and the identification of those Aboriginal people as Larrakia.⁴² These popular historical accounts continue to hold authority and popularity as is shown by their reprinting and the citing of these works in more recent histories of Darwin and the Northern Territory.

One of the best known popular historical accounts is Harriet Daly's *Digging, Squatting and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia*, which was published in 1887 after her short residency in the Northern Territory during the early 1870s. Daly was the elder daughter of the Northern Territory's first Government Resident, Bloomfield Douglas. As their ship sailed into Darwin harbour, Daly recalled the way the shores were 'clothed with masses of rich green vegetation', the smooth, white beaches and the beauty of the water falling from the overhanging cliffs which shed 'glittering streams of crystal, dancing and shimmering in the sunlight'. However, for Daly, this tropical paradise was marred:

Oh! so lonely and desolate, not a sign of human habitation could we yet discern; no living creature, not even a solitary blackfellow walked these lovely beaches. It was all just as nature had made it, just as it had remained from the beginning of time - untouched and untrodden by the foot of man; a region known only to the degraded tribes of savages, who had hitherto been the sole occupiers of this magnificent piece of country ... the opposite hill ... literally swarmed with black men and women. These unclothed spectators were the 'oldest inhabitants' of this part of the world - members of the Larrakiah tribe.⁴³

Daly un-peoples then peoples the landscape in one paragraph. She first presents the land as 'lonely and desolate', 'untouched and untrodden by the foot of man' and, in the next breath continues, 'a region known only to the degraded tribes of savages, who had hitherto been the sole occupiers of this magnificent piece of country'. Daly did not

⁴² See Mickey Dewar's thesis for a discussion of the way that a central theme of all Territory writers was the role played by Aboriginal people and their relationships to the European communities. Mickey Dewar, 1993. *In search of the 'Never-Never': the Northern Territory metaphor in Australian Writing 1837-1992*, PhD Thesis, History Discipline Faculty of Arts, NTU.

view the ‘prospect of having so large a tribe of natives for our immediate neighbours as by any means an unmixed joy’. She had known something of Aborigines in other parts of the colony, ‘as a tame appendage to some outlying sheep station, a tracker of horses, and a finder of kangaroo’. Daly had also ‘met him on the coast, supplying the wants of the civilised community with fish, ducks, or any wild fowl he could snare or shoot’. Here in Darwin, the Aborigines presented themselves ‘in an entirely new aspect. We were the smaller number, they the greater, and moreover this crowd of savages was armed to the teeth’.⁴⁴

Daly’s initial trepidation at having these Aborigines as immediate ‘neighbours’ soon vanished and the Larrakia became the ‘tame appendages’ she was familiar with. Daly visited the ‘native camp’ and was formally introduced to ‘Nilunga - King of the Larrakiah tribe who had several wives’. In no time Daly ‘soon knew the tribe very well indeed, made friends with the lubras, and remembered each piccaninny’s name’.⁴⁵ DE Kelsey arrived in Darwin from Adelaide in 1873 as a young boy and remembers his family’s initial fear at ‘seeing these dusky warriors’ and their ‘relie[f] when they moved on’ but how, like Daly, ‘it was not very long afterwards that we all became quite accustomed to the natives’.⁴⁶ In Harriet Daly’s history of glee parties, boat trips around the harbour, balls and musical evenings the Larrakia were often included. The Larrakia were ‘astonished’ by the sound of a piano yet liked the music and ‘often asked us to play to them’. On picnics to Fannie Bay the white settlers were ‘followed of course by a specially chosen escort of Larrakiahs, who never failed to include themselves in what was going on’.⁴⁷

William Brackley Wildey toured Australia in the early 1870s and later published a book of his journey. In a chapter called ‘Natives and Their Habits’, Wildey was impressed by Northern Territory Aborigines describing them as ‘far superior’ to those in southern Australia being ‘tall, well-formed’ and having ‘well-developed and muscular legs and arms’. Even so, Wildey warned that ‘like most savages they are warlike and

⁴³ Mrs Dominic D (nee Harriet Douglas) Daly, 1887. *Digging, Squatting, and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia*, London, pp45-6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp45-6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p66.

⁴⁶ DE Kelsey (edited by Ira Nesdale), 1975. *The Shackle. A Story of the Far North Australian Bush*, Lynton, Blackwood, South Australia, p11.

⁴⁷ Daly 1887, p63.

treacherous; thus rendering it absolutely necessary that every man in the Territory be armed with a revolver which he carries in a leather pouch attached to his belt'. Wildey located the Larrakia about Port Darwin and as far east as the Adelaide River and numbered them at 'perhaps 300'. Unlike Daly who saw the Larrakia as afraid of their neighbours, the Wulna people, Wildey described the way that the Wulna made constant forays upon the Larrakia to steal Larrakia women but how both tribes were 'warlike' and carried out their attacks with much delight. Wildey recorded ethnographic information from a Larrakia man named 'Billy Muck' and identified the 'chief of the Port Darwin natives' as a man named 'Miranda'. He described Aboriginal women's fondness for their children, their fear of an evil spirit called 'browl', burial customs, their lack of circumcision, their 'dress' about town and their inclusion in the white economy. Every morning around one hundred Aboriginal people entered the town and visited the tents and huts of the settlers looking for work like 'fetching water, sweeping the yard, picking over potatoes and doing scullery work' and were 'rewarded with "Tom Tom" [flour], sugar and refuse tea'.⁴⁸

The journalist, WJ Sowden, toured the Northern Territory with the South Australian Parliamentary Party in 1882. Unlike Wildey, Sowden found nothing 'superior' in the Aborigines about Darwin. Elderly Aborigines were 'a people scarcely more intelligent than monkeys', 'naked, 'dirt encrusted' and 'syphilitic' and the children 'prattling but dull-eyed'. Sowden held some 'hope for the young blacks' who, while 'murderous in their tribal wars,' were 'tame enough in the presence of whites, and ... very useful, though fickle in their fancies, and as loath to do work as an average working man's strike-demagogue'.⁴⁹ For Sowden, the beauty of the main Larrakia living place at Lameroo Beach was spoilt by their kerosene tin, driftwood and bark huts, '[e]rections mocking civilisation at the back of a most beautiful groundwork of Nature's best construction'. Sowden chose to spare his readers the 'disagreeable details' of local Aborigines and only alluded to their 'mystic beliefs', their mourning and burial practices, their polygamous habits and tribal distinctions.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ WB Wildey, 1876. 'Natives and their habits', *Australasia and the Oceanic Region*, George Robertson, Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, pp 114-20.

⁴⁹ WJ Sowden, 1882. *The Northern Territory as it is*, WK Thomas and Co. Adelaide, pp144-6.

⁵⁰ Sowden 1882, *ibid*, pp144-6.

It was these ‘disagreeable details’ of Aboriginal people’s lives that were eagerly sought after by ethnographers in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Many of these ethnographies were recorded by people who were otherwise employed and they rarely provided details of how, who from, where or why the ethnographic information was recorded. Perhaps the most famous of these is Police Inspector Paul Foelsche, who not only recorded ethnographic information about the Larrakia and other Aborigines, but also photographed them extensively. The impact of his role as a policeman on his work as an ethnographer was subtly suggested by the ethnographer, Dr Stirling, who described Foelsche as ‘a most intelligent and accurate observer, knows the natives well, and has great influence’ and by colonial author, Alfred Searcy, who described Foelsche as having an ‘intimate knowledge of their ways. In fact among the niggers the name of Foelsche was a power in the land’.⁵¹ Two other ethnographers of note in regards to the Larrakia were TA Parkhouse and Herbert Basedow. Parkhouse was an accountant and paymaster with the South Australian Government Railways and was in Darwin during the 1890s. He had a Larrakia man named ‘Pickles’ as a servant who possibly provided him with much of the ethnographic and linguistic data he used to write his papers. Herbert Basedow was the assistant to the Government Geologist, HYL Brown, on geological explorations across the Northern Territory during 1905. The geologists were assisted by three Aboriginal men, the Larrakia man, Bubs Mananilla, and the Wagaitj men, Loman and Tobatchie.⁵²

There was unanimous agreement amongst the early ethnographers that the Darwin area was the domain of the Larrakia people, although some discrepancy did exist as to the extent of the Larrakia’s land boundaries and where these boundaries met neighbouring

⁵¹ Cited in Paul Foelsche, 1885. ‘On the manners, customs & c., of some tribes of the Aborigines in the neighbourhood of Port Darwin and the West Coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, North Australia’, *Royal Anthropological Institute Journal* Vol. 24; A Searcy, 1905. *In Northern Seas*. Being Mr Alfred Searcy’s Experiences on the North Coast of Australia, as recounted to E Whittington, reprinted from ‘The Register’ (South Australia) by Authority of the South Australian Government, WK Thomas & Co, Grenfell Street, p40.

⁵² See Foelsche 1885; P Foelsche, 1881-2. ‘Notes on the Aborigines of North Australia’, *Royal Society of South Australia Transactions*, Vol. 5; TA Parkhouse, 1895. *Native Tribes of Port Darwin and its Neighbourhood*, Australia and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. Report No. 6; TA Parkhouse, 1894-5. ‘Remarks on the Native Tongues in the Neighborhood of Port Darwin’, read November 6, 1894, *Royal Society of South Australia Transactions*, vol. 19; Herbert Basedow, 1907. ‘Anthropological Notes on the Western Coastal Tribes of the Northern Territory of South Australia’, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, Vol. 31.

groups' boundaries.⁵³ While these early ethnographers all acknowledged Darwin to be in Larrakia country they did not try to understand the complexities of Larrakia land ownership. Parkhouse contains vague references to Aboriginal land being 'subdivided among several families' and describes their 'territorial rights' and 'ownership' as a 'real one'. In discussing burial rites, William Wildey refers to each family having a 'sort of feudal tenure to a locality of the country claimed by the tribe' where deceased relatives were buried.⁵⁴ Paul Foelsche understood the way that each 'tribe has a recognised land boundary which is always sacredly respected, and each family or clan in the tribe have their particular portion of land within this boundary' but does not give specific details.⁵⁵

The anthropologist, Beth Povinelli, makes the point that while the ethnographers were intent on recreating a pristine Aboriginal past, 'most settlers wanted to know what Aborigines were likely to do when contacted, not what they had done before the arrival of Europeans' – and this was the brief that the popular historical accounts or travelogues tried to fulfil.⁵⁶ The value of this early ethnographical work therefore lies in the details of Larrakia life not usually recorded by the popular historians or travellers. Rather than seeing Aborigines as 'debased', 'dirt encrusted' or as 'tame appendages' to the settlement, it is possible to see aspects of Aboriginal culture existing apart from or in spite of white culture. These ethnographies inform us that there were about 500 Larrakia people about Port Darwin at the time of white invasion and that an awful disease called 'Goobimwah' had some years previously caused the death of many members of the tribe. These ethnographies tell us something of the laws by which Aboriginal people lived and died and the various ceremonies associated with initiation, marriage, birth and death. They tell of the Larrakia's predilection for fish, crab, crocodile, dugong, turtle and magpie goose and describe the implements, skill and

⁵³ TA Parkhouse described 'Lárraki'a' territory as encompassing Port Darwin, embracing the seaboard from Shoal Bay to Southport, and extending inland to the forty-sixth mile on the railway line. He acknowledged that Larrakia country also encompassed lands to the west of Southport but described the 'a neutral zone of some eight or ten miles' between the Larrakia and their neighbours 'upon which no habitations are erected, game remains unmolested, and none trespass without good reason' (Parkhouse 1895). Paul Foelsche described Larrakia territory as extending along the coast from the mouth of the Adelaide River, west to Port Patterson, and stretching about twenty-five miles inland (P Foelsche, 1886. 'Port Darwin: the Larrakia Tribe', Curr EM, *The Australian Race*, Melbourne). Herbert Basedow described the Larrakia's territory as including Port Darwin and occupying a territory extending southwards between the Howard River on the east and the Finnis on the west and having an inland southern boundary around the mouth of the Blackmore River (Basedow 1907).

⁵⁴ Wildey 1875.

⁵⁵ Foelsche 1885.

⁵⁶ Povinelli 1993, p80.

knowledge used by the Larrakia to hunt these foods. They describe the native vegetation found in the Darwin area and the uses that particular plants held for the Larrakia as food, medicine and shelter and for making hunting implements, weapons and utensils like spears, digging sticks, string bags and mats, fish nets, musical instruments and ceremonial ornaments. These ethnographies inform us that the Larrakia feared the evil spirit, 'Birrawulidda', that they used ochre, dogs' teeth, seeds and shells as hair and body ornaments and that they participated in neighbouring groups ceremonies and were excellent dancers easily replicating the movements of an emu, kangaroo and snake.⁵⁷

The ethnographers working in the late nineteenth century were motivated by different interests in respect to Aboriginal life than are ethnographers or anthropologists today. This is particularly evident in their lack of recognition of the political importance of land to distinct Aboriginal groups, their disinterest in genealogical and kinship information, their failure to record Larrakia place names or Larrakia language other than simple word lists, and their failure to recognise the deep significance of the landscape to Aboriginal cultural and economic wellbeing. Also, in the ethnographers' attempts to represent material aspects of pre-contact Aboriginal society, they do not try to understand how Aborigines were responding to colonisation. Indeed the very impact of colonisation upon these Aborigines caused the ethnographers to lose interest in the Larrakia as subjects worthy of the ethnographic enterprise. By the early twentieth century, ethnographers began turning their attention to Aboriginal groups further removed from the town. When Dr Klaatsch visited Melville Island, to the north of Darwin in 1906, the *Northern Territory Times* commented, 'he could hardly have hit upon a better spot in which to find the wild myall pure and undefiled by contact with civilisation'. Melville and Bathurst Islands were 'among the few spots in the known world which are practically unexplored, and whose inhabitants are probably still in much the same condition as when they were first "evolved" or created'.⁵⁸ In 1912, the

⁵⁷ See Foeslche 1885; Parkhouse 1895; and Basedow 1907.

⁵⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 21 September 1906. On a 1906 police expedition to Port Keats, some 150 kilometres south-west of Darwin, traversing 'virgin soil', 'some 300 different natives were seen, perfectly wild myalls, garbed as Adam and Eve before the advent of the serpent'. A camera was taken and photographs 'representing the pure unalloyed savage in his native wilds - are said to have been secured'. Mounted Constables Kelly and Toole, together with the Point Charles Lighthouse Keeper, HW Christie and a 'number of natives' were investigating the recent murder of Fred Bradshaw and his party in the vicinity of Port Keats (*Northern Territory Times*, 27 April 1906).

anthropologist, Walter Baldwin Spencer, complained of the way that the Larrakia were ‘much too civilised and know the value of money so that you have to pay them’ – presumably for information. According to Spencer, Aborigines in Darwin had ‘long since become degenerate’ and had ‘lost all their old customs and beliefs’. Spencer also lamented how he was ‘stuck’ in Darwin while other government officials were able to travel to further, more exotic locations.⁵⁹ The anthropologist, Beth Povinelli, writes how Spencer created a ‘cultural geography of the Darwin-Daly River coast in which Aboriginal cultural identity and practices become more coherent as one moves down the coast away from Darwin’.⁶⁰

This dwindling interest by the ethnographers in the Larrakia was mirrored by the popular historians. The last popular historical account to include much mention of local Larrakia people was Elsie Masson’s, *An Untamed Territory*, published in 1915. Masson came to the Northern Territory in 1912 as governess to the Northern Territory Administrator’s children.⁶¹ In her account of Darwin, Masson describes the stone buildings in the forty year old town, the houses made from wood and galvanised iron surrounded by plaited bamboo verandahs festooned with bright shrubs; the sampans, dug-out canoes and pearling luggers in the harbour; her walks along ‘golden beaches fringed with coconut palms’ and drives along red roads through a thick tangle of jungle to the sea; the glorious sunsets and the sensual tropical climate; the laundries and tailors of Chinatown and the incense filled shops; and the way in which the European population collected long awaited mail and ‘revell[ed] in the news of the distant world, revived by old interests, warmed by old battle cries’ until the ‘savage cadence of a corroboree brings back the sharp realisation that one is in Darwin - cut off by thousands of miles from the rest of civilisation’.⁶²

⁵⁹ At this time Spencer was the Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Northern Territory. Spencer writes ‘[NT Administrator] Gilruth came back this afternoon after having had a good time on the Adelaide River. He is much more lucky than I am as his work takes him away into the country while I can only sit down in the native camp’ (WB Spencer diaries, 21 June 1911, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4).

⁶⁰ Povinelli 1993, pp78-9. See all of Chapter Two for Povinelli’s discussion of the representation of Aborigines from the broader Darwin region in historical and ethnographical texts.

⁶¹ Self-government was not granted to the Northern Territory by the Commonwealth government until 1978. Prior to this the Northern Territory was administered by the Northern Territory Administration, headed by the Northern Territory Administrator, but controlled by the Commonwealth Government.

⁶² Elsie Masson, 1915. *An Untamed Territory*, MacMillan, London, pp29-67.

Masson is interested in the social hierarchy of the forty year old town and describes the way that 'life in Darwin' was 'made up of many little worlds, each continuing in its own way, impinging on, but *never mingling* with the others. There is the life of the white officialdom, the Eastern life of Chinatown, the life of the pearling fleets and, under all, the life of the native camps.⁶³ Masson is clearly intrigued by Aborigines in Darwin and writes of the way that the 'longer the visitor remains in the Territory, the more claims are made upon his attention by the blackfellow, the more interested does he become in that lowest of all the little worlds of Darwin - the world of native life'. Masson describes this world as flowing 'like an undercurrent, now rushing, now dwindling, but once its low note has struck the ear, it can never again be lost'. This interest is reflected in Masson's description of the Larrakia family working at Government House.⁶⁴

Following Masson's 1915 publication, the Larrakia leave the pages of local histories except as a melancholic footnote or the odd reference to their alleged demise. In his 1936 book, *North Australia*, CP Conigrave asks rhetorically, 'Is it not the unfortunate fact that in any country where a dominant white race is cheek by jowl with an inferior aboriginal one it seems to be merely a question of time before in the fierce struggle for existence the black man goes from the face of the earth'. If it was impossible to prevent this extinction, Conigrave urged that the 'blackfellow's passing' be rendered 'humane' by the people who, 'for right or wrong, have taken the land from its original and primitive owners by peaceful conquest, let us say, if we forget for the moment the shameful and deplorable incidents as outlined in early Australian history, of the use of the rifle, gun and poisoned flour that helped to exterminate the native from these southern lands'.⁶⁵ In a melancholic tone Conigrave described how he could hear from his residence on what was then the outskirts of Darwin:

the booming sound of the didgeridoo - a wind instrument made from a hollow tree-branch or a bamboo - which seemed to suggest something of the long, long story that lies at the back of the Larrakeah tribesmen. For centuries, maybe, they have foregathered in the scrub that fronts what the white man has called, with a black

⁶³ Emphasis added. Masson 1915, pp64-7.

⁶⁴ Masson 1915, pp29-67.

⁶⁵ CP Conigrave, 1936. *North Australia*, Jonathan Cape, London, p202.

man's name, Kahlin Beach. Thereabouts the didgeridoo has set the sombre tune for the dark doings of the tribe when the sacred ceremony of "making young men" was afoot.⁶⁶

In Charles Barrett's 1941 publication, he writes of his 'rambles' about Darwin searching for 'historic spots' and 'relics of early days; when the Larrakia tribe was strong in numbers and trials by the white man's law for tribal killings were unknown'.⁶⁷ After citing Harriet Daly's initial observations of the Larrakia, Barrett writes:

It's very different to-day. The Larrakia tribe has dwindled almost to vanishing point. No unclothed 'oldest inhabitants' gather in crowds on the hilltop, nor anywhere else near Darwin. There's a compound for aborigines, where indeed, you may often see groups of natives from Arnhem Land and the Daly River country, far to the west; they stand out from the local natives: boys who work in Darwin and their womenfolk - house lubras and girls.⁶⁸

In Ernestine Hill's 1951 popular historical account, *The Territory*, she chronicles this decline:

The settlers taught the blacks to fetch and carry, to hew wood and draw water, taught them the Lord's prayer in parrot repetition, and taught them contempt of their own myall brothers in the bush. For the wallaby hams, fish, geese, dugong steak, wild fowl and wild honey they brought in, they were paid in tea, sugar, flour, tobacco and rum, not so nourishing but more to their liking. When their small but rich hunting-grounds failed in this in-rush of population, when the game was scattered by the white men's guns, they dared not intrude on Woolna to the east nor on Wagait to the west, where strange devils haunted waterholes and enemies would kill them, so they gave up hunting, squatted in accumulated dirt on Stokes Hill, and lived on kicks and charity - the old story ... Never in seventy years have the peaceful Larrakia committed a serious crime against the white people in Darwin. I doubt whether there

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp108-9.

⁶⁷ C Barrett, 1941. *Coast of Adventure. Untamed North Australia*, Robertson and Mullens Ltd, Melbourne, pp157-8.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p159.

is one true descendant of a virile and interesting tribe alive today. There were about a thousand in twenty square miles in 1870.⁶⁹

Popular historian, Glenville Pike, also integrates the themes of friendliness and decline in his frontier history:

the white men had been welcomed by a crowd of Larrakeyah who lined the beach or hid in the scrub and long grass on Stokes Hill overlooking the harbour. They were friendly, and remained so throughout the early days of Darwin, to be eventually killed by the kindness of civilisation; a mere dozen or so of the once numerous tribe remain today.⁷⁰

The journalist and popular historian Douglas Lockwood arrived in Darwin in 1941 and admits to being, 'Australia's most one-eyed barracker for Darwin and the Territory. I am known as a mad Darwinophile'.⁷¹ On a map inside the front cover of his book, *Up The Track*, Lockwood designates ownership to each part of the country 'up the track' from Alice Springs to Darwin. For example, 'Aranda Country', 'Djingali Country', 'Alawa Country', 'Arnhem Land ... Godforsaken Country' and finally, when he reaches Darwin, 'MY COUNTRY'.⁷² However, in direct contrast to the popular historical works of the twentieth century is his recognition of a continuing Larrakia presence in Darwin and their sense of ownership. This is particularly striking given his passionate sense of belonging to or ownership of Darwin. Lockwood opened a chapter on Aboriginal people in his 1968 publication, *The Front Door: Darwin 1869-1969*, with the following statement:

If finders were keepers, Darwin would belong to Gwila-marinya, known as Bob Secretary, of the Larrakia tribe of Australian Aborigines ... Under the system by which particular sections of tribal land belong to individuals, Bob Secretary's ancestors had 'owned' Kuramalal - the Darwin peninsular - for thousands of years.

⁶⁹ Ernestine Hill, 1951. *The Territory*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, pp96-101.

⁷⁰ Glenville Pike, 1972. *Frontier Territory: the colourful story of the pioneering of North Australia*, Hong Kong, p18.

⁷¹ Douglas Lockwood, 1964. *Up the Track*, Rigby Limited, Adelaide, p191.

⁷² Ibid.

Lockwood recognised that the land had been ‘passed’ to Bob Secretary by ‘right of accession’, however Darwin was a ‘burgeoning city’ and ‘the tribe dispossessed’ and ‘[n]one but a fool would suggest that Bob Secretary would have any chance today of sustaining legal claim to it’. Lockwood believed that ‘[a]nnexation is as final as death. Indeed, much of his land supports the trappings of the government which took it from him - the vast headquarters of the Northern Territory Administration and the Supreme Court buildings’.⁷³

The notion that Aborigines could make claims to land in a heavily settled area was obviously untenable for writers like Lockwood. However, it is clear that one of the things these historical texts have in common is the ready identification of the Larrakia people being the original inhabitants of the Darwin region. The earlier accounts also signal that the Larrakia were an easily recognisable part of Darwin’s colonial history. However, what is also clear is that synchronous with these portrayals of friendly, welcoming Aborigines is the simplistic narrative of Aboriginal decline. By the early twentieth century the ‘destruction of Aboriginal society’ became a dominant metaphor in describing the impact of colonisation on the Larrakia as a ‘one way process of collapse to which the appropriate response is passive sorrow’.⁷⁴ With Conigrave and Lockwood as major exceptions, the popular historical accounts provide little reflection on how the Larrakia’s alleged demise came about. The Larrakia simply faded away, ‘killed by the kindness of civilisation’, with no specific details of how this actually occurred. In the absence of a close study of Larrakia-white relations in colonial Darwin, historians continue to draw on the popular historical accounts and travelogues and perpetuate this narrative of decline, loss and extinction in regard to Larrakia history. The historian, Alan Powell, synthesises the impact of colonisation on the Larrakia in one brief paragraph in his widely read history of the Northern Territory, *Far Country*:

Perhaps the saddest fate of all befell a people who were consistently friendly to Europeans and never suffered massacre at their hands; the Larrakia of Darwin. When William Wildey visited Darwin in 1873 he spoke of their happy nature, their temperance ... the ‘rigidly correct’ behaviour of the Larrakia women who

⁷³ Douglas Lockwood, 1969. *The Front Door: Darwin 1869-1969*, Rigby Limited, Adelaide, pp102-9.

helped in the houses of the whites and the ‘majestic’ carriage of the young girls. Nine years later WJ Sowden saw them receiving the white man’s largesse, ‘flour ... doled out in a grocer’s scoop in anything but grocer fashion ... ah, such degraded specimens of humanity ... ’Twas pitiful, though still amusing, to see these people as they came for flour - came with old tins, and bits of dirty paper, and rags, and leaves’. In 1928 Baldwin Spencer wrote that ‘it is now too late to study the Larrakia’ so far had their traditional society broken down because they were too close to too many whites.⁷⁵

In the midst of the native title debate described above, the historian, Peter Forrest, contributed a two-part historical feature to the *NT News* about the Larrakia.⁷⁶ Forrest drew on the popular histories and travelogues to describe the Larrakia’s ‘remarkable heritage’ which showed that early contact between Aborigines and white settlers was quite different to that elsewhere in Australia. The ‘Larrakia never suffered from bullets or poisoned flour, nor was their dispossession ever complete beyond the immediate town area’. In fact, the ‘first white settlers’ were ‘genuinely disposed to protect the Larrakia’ and did ‘their best to minimise the inevitable consequences of their settlement’. Even so the Larrakia’s ‘close contact with the whites gradually diminished and degraded them, so that within a few years the white people who had admired and respected them came eventually to describe the Larrakia as pitiful specimens of humanity’.⁷⁷ The following week Forrest told how the Larrakia learnt to ‘make themselves useful and amusing to the whites’ and that the ‘whites were fond of the Larrakia, and seemed to have developed a feeling of comradeship which arose out of the shared experience of being thrown together in a remote and difficult place’. Forrest concludes that the ‘Larrakia saw the whites as benefactors with an abundance of desirable goods, not as trespassers’.⁷⁸ If these articles had not appeared in the midst of a tense debate over the Larrakia’s native title claims, you could almost miss this last

⁷⁴ Gillian Cowlshaw, 1992. ‘Studying Aborigines: Changing Canons in Anthropology and History’, Attwood and Arnold (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines, Journal of Australian Studies*, Special Edition No 35, LaTrobe University Press, Melbourne, p25.

⁷⁵ Alan Powell, 1988. *Far Country. A Short History of the Northern Territory*, 2nd Edition, Melbourne University Press, Victoria, p135.

⁷⁶ Peter Forrest has lived and worked in the Northern Territory for over twenty years, provides regular history segments on the local ABC radio network, has published extensively on NT history and is self-described as the Territory’s ‘best known’ historian.

⁷⁷ *NT News*, 25 March 1997.

⁷⁸ *NT News*, 1 April 1997.

politically loaded comment. A strong implication of representing nineteenth century Larrakia people as friendly and welcoming is the notion that they somehow surrendered all rights to their land.

In relying solely on these early accounts of Northern Territory history, Forrest and other historians reduce the complexities of the colonial encounter between Aborigines and whites to simplistic and superficial characterisations of the Larrakia as 'friendly' and 'useful' but ultimately 'degraded' and 'destroyed' by colonisation. In such accounts, it becomes obvious that the Larrakia are 'important not so much for what they have done but for what has been done to them'.⁷⁹ This interpretation of colonial history creates and reinforces the provocative image of Aboriginal society irrevocably 'breaking down'; of Aboriginal people not having any powers of negotiation or exercising some agency in the colonising process; and denies Aboriginal people the ability to adapt and respond to the overwhelming changes taking place on their country in unique and distinct ways.

The narrative of destruction employed by past and present historians makes it difficult to 'see' Larrakia people in the present. In April 1986, a journalist reported the tragic death of a Larrakia woman under the title, 'Last of the Larrakias', and described the recently deceased woman as one of the 'few remaining members of the Larrakia tribe'. The Larrakia Association (an organisation representing and made up of Larrakia people) responded with a letter seeking to 'correct any misunderstandings which may have arisen' from this story. The Association asserted that there were many more people 'descended from Larrakia ancestors than is widely known', that they continued to hold responsibility for the land and that Larrakia people 'have survived and we are here to stay'.⁸⁰ There is an obvious contradiction in the portrayals of near Larrakia 'extinction' and these assertions of Larrakia survival. Jean O'Brien's research into nineteenth century New England in the United States found that recurrent stories within local histories about the 'last full-blooded Indian' gestured toward Indian disappearance by making precise claims about the end of Indian lineages. O'Brien argues that by writing about Indians in this voice 'local historians betrayed their assumptions about

⁷⁹ Bob Reece quoted in Bain Attwood, 1989. *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, p149.

⁸⁰ *The Midweek Territorian*, 16 April 1986; unpublished letter from the Larrakia Association to *The Australian*, 7 May 1986.

racial purity, their wishful thinking about Indian erasure, and their inability to grasp the complicated mosaic of Indian survival in New England'.⁸¹

The popular historical accounts and travelogues highlight similar questions to those raised in the land rights and native title debate. The early historical texts attest to the colonial recognition of Larrakia ownership of land in Darwin. How then did this impact on Larrakia-white interactions and what tangible expression was given to those land rights by the early colonisers? Was colonisation really as straightforward, peaceful and friendly as the historical accounts attest or was there some resistance? The historical accounts attest to the inclusion of the Larrakia in the life of the settlement but further questions need to be raised regarding the nature of this participation. How and why did the Larrakia participate and on whose terms was it? The Larrakia were an easily recognised and visible presence in the colonial township. Are there any clues in the early historical record as to why this depiction changed in the twentieth century?

The disappearance of the Larrakia from twentieth century popular historical texts mirrored the situation throughout the rest of Australia. The historian, Andrew Markus, writes how contact between Aborigines and white settlers was devoted much attention until late in the nineteenth century. From this time on 'the continued existence of Aboriginal communities faded from public attention. There was no place for Aborigines, regarded as "bygone people", in the twentieth century'.⁸² Ann Curthoys has also argued more recently that 'the great Australian silence' regarding Aborigines (see below) was primarily a twentieth century phenomenon which was encouraged by a flourishing white Australian nationalism.⁸³ Following this argument, Bain Attwood and SG Foster describe the way twentieth century historical narratives 'coalesced into a myth about Australia that celebrated British colonisation of the continent as a peaceful act of discovery and settlement, whereby a progressive people and their venerable institutions were successfully transplanted and the land was transformed, thus resulting in the new nation of Australia'.⁸⁴ As historians focused on the making of this 'newly

⁸¹ Jean M O'Brien, 1997. *Dispossession by degrees. Indian land and identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790*, Cambridge University Press, p3.

⁸² Andrew Markus, 1977. Review Article: 'Through a Glass darkly: Aspects of Contact History', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 1 No. 2, p170.

⁸³ Ann Curthoys, 2003. 'Constructing National Histories' in Bain Attwood and SG Foster (eds), 2003. *Frontier Conflict. The Australian Experience*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

⁸⁴ Attwood and Foster 2003, p11.

imagined Australian nation, they increasingly lost sight of the original owners'. This contrasted sharply with the nineteenth century historians who had 'chronicled bloodied conflicts between Aborigines and Europeans' and 'acknowledged the reality of Aboriginal dispossession'.⁸⁵

Following the anthropologist, WEH Stanner's, 1968 Boyer Lectures where he rebuked historians for perpetuating the 'great Australian silence' about the relationship between the colonisers and Aborigines in Australia's history, the dominant narrative of Australian history again changed 'from that of peaceful settlement of the colonial frontier to one of violent conflict between colonial settlers and Aborigines'.⁸⁶ Together with an increasingly politicised and vocal Aboriginal resistance, this new school of critical history presented a new history of Australia which 'now began tens of thousands of years ago and had as its first discoverers, explorers and colonists Aboriginal people rather than the British'. It was also a story that saw white settlement as an act of invasion which held grave consequences for the original owners of the land.⁸⁷

CD Rowley's pioneering historical research of the late 1960s resulted in the publication of a three volume series, *Aboriginal Policy and Practice*. In the first volume of this series, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Rowley 'attempted to provide a comprehensive survey' of relations between Aborigines and whites on 'the frontier'.⁸⁸ This inspired other historians during the 1970s to research frontier relations between Aborigines and whites. Of particular note was the work of RHW Reece in New South Wales, Henry Reynolds, Raymond Evans and Noel Loos in Queensland, Lyndall Ryan in Tasmania and Michael Christie in Victoria. These 'historians represented colonisation as a matter of invasion, depicted the frontier as a line between conflicting

⁸⁵ Attwood and Foster 2003, p2; Mark McKenna, 2002. *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, p30.

⁸⁶ Lyndall Ryan, 2003. 'Waterloo Creek, northern New South Wales, 1838' in Attwood and Foster 2003, p33 and Attwood and Foster 2003, p11. Attwood and Foster make the point that although historians were silent about Aborigines, anthropologists, journalists and campaigners for Aboriginal rights were not (Attwood and Foster 2003, p2).

⁸⁷ McKenna 2002, p30; Attwood and Foster 2003, p11. For useful critiques of Aboriginal historiography over the past thirty years see Bain Attwood, 1989. *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Chapter Six; Ann McGrath (ed), 1995. *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, Chapter Ten; and the introduction in Bain Attwood and SG Foster (ed), 2003. *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

⁸⁸ Attwood and Foster 2003, p4; CD Rowley, 1972. *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, Aboriginal Policy and Practice, Vol. One* ANUP, Canberra.

parties, regarded the conflict as war, treated the Aborigines' response as resistance, and explained the violence of frontiersmen in terms of racism as well as other factors'.⁸⁹ In short, these histories 'transformed understanding of relations between Aborigines and Europeans on the Australian frontier'.⁹⁰

In the decade following this first wave of historical research, historians began to question the uniformity of the frontier experience in Australia. For example, Andrew Markus argued that factors like the time and place of contact would have resulted in considerable differences in the encounters between Aborigines and whites across various frontiers.⁹¹ Consequently, historians began to undertake a more diverse approach to their research and sought to redress some of the 'weaknesses of the first wave of historical scholarship, such as the absence of Aboriginal perspectives and the denial of Aboriginal agency'.⁹² Henry Reynolds is perhaps the best known of Australia's historians for initially trying to explain Aboriginal responses to European settlement which were grounded in their existing cultural frameworks – or trying to represent this 'other side of the frontier'.⁹³ He does this through researching an extensive range of European historical sources, the use of some oral sources and by reading from different disciplines, particularly anthropology. However, while Reynolds played a prominent role in destroying the notion that the settlement of Australia was essentially peaceful with Aborigines simply fading away, RHW Reece warned that concentrating on the bloodiness of invasion typified violence as the major response to colonisation and denied the 'accommodation' of Aborigines and white settlers an 'important and vital place in contact history'.⁹⁴

This thesis borrows from these earlier generations of scholarly research but rather than looking at interactions between Aborigines and whites in the colonial settlement as marked by either accommodation or resistance, this thesis recognises that there were myriad responses to colonisation by both colonists and Aboriginal people which were influenced by the nature, time and place of individual encounters. In its focus on interactions between Aborigines and whites in the colonial settlement of Darwin, this

⁸⁹ Attwood and Foster 2003, p4.

⁹⁰ Attwood and Foster 2003, p6.

⁹¹ Markus 1977; Attwood and Foster 2003, p6.

⁹² Attwood and Foster 2003, p7.

⁹³ Attwood and Foster 2003, p7.

thesis differs to other areas of historical research in the late twentieth century which have tended to look at the ‘post-frontier era and to representations of race and Aboriginality’. It also differs to the histories which have looked at the frontier in recent times in that it is not making a case for or against the existence of genocide in Australia.⁹⁵

Tom Griffiths writes that some researchers have recently argued that the ‘frontier was more intimate and personal than we have allowed, that there was as much sharing and accommodation between black and white cultures as there was confrontation and violence’.⁹⁶ As Deborah Bird Rose and Darrell Lewis argue, it ‘may have been possible for European Australians to reject from their consciousness the fact that they were sharing their lives on this continent with Aboriginal people, but it has rarely been possible for Aboriginal people (since 1788 that is) to sustain an illusion of separateness’.⁹⁷ Anticipation, friendliness, accommodation, sharing, negotiation, resistance and violence are all important themes of this thesis.

Attwood and Foster suggest that historians ‘must also consider how the past has become the present and how the present relates to the past’. They remind us, ‘Nations rest on such historical consciousness – on a chain of connection between “them” and “us” – and so we need histories that create a sense of moral engagement with the past in the present’.⁹⁸ An implicit concern of this thesis is the recognition that history is a continuing process, that what happened then is of significance now and shapes many of the current interactions between Aborigines and whites in Darwin, not only in terms of the native title process but also in the continued attempts by the Larrakia to ensure that their people’s land interests and other needs are represented in the town area and that their history is understood.

In recent times there has been an emotive and disheartening debate between two diametrically opposed histories - ‘black armband history’ and ‘white blindfold

⁹⁴ RHW Reece, 1987. ‘Inventing Aborigines’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 11 No.s 1-2, p16-17.

⁹⁵ Attwood and Foster 2003, p9-10.

⁹⁶ Tom Griffiths, 1996. *Hunters and Collectors. The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p52.

⁹⁷ Deborah Bird Rose & Darrell Lewis, 1992. ‘A Bridge and a Pinch’, *Public History Review*, Vol. 1, pp35-6.

⁹⁸ Attwood and Foster 2003, p26.

history'.⁹⁹ In Mark McKenna's, *Looking for Blackfellas' Point*, he argues that when the history of the frontier has become so politicised – as in the Reynolds-Windschuttle debate over the nature of the violence on the frontier – it is helpful to look at a region about which little has been written. Indeed one of the recommendations of the 2001 Australian Frontier Conflict conference in regards to new directions and future historical research about the frontier was the call for 'more work on traditional archival sources, especially relating to parts of Australia where the frontier has not been the subject of historical study'.¹⁰⁰ In McKenna's study of south-eastern New South Wales, he finds that despite the practice of critical history over the past three decades, the culture of silence and forgetting about indigenous history had persisted. McKenna found that the questions asked by historians in the 1970s still needed to be asked today. In particular, 'What happened to Aboriginal people when the Europeans arrived? What was the nature of the relations between the settlers and Aboriginal people? How did Aboriginal people react to the invasion of their soil? How did dispossession occur?'¹⁰¹ This thesis also asks these basic questions in relation to the colonial settlement of Darwin. It seeks to undermine the simple notions of the Larrakia as friendly and peaceful but ultimately diminished by colonisation and present a more complex or layered view of indigenous-white history in the colonial township of Darwin. It endeavours to look at the Larrakia as other than tame appendages to the settlement and to recognise that they were not only a vital part of Darwin's history but had their own histories, motivations and experiences of colonisation.

The principal voice heard in this thesis is that of the white settlers, those responsible for creating the archival sources and colonial newspaper accounts on which this history is based. Occasionally an Aboriginal voice, often recreated by the colonisers, has found its way into print and, as shown throughout this thesis, provides enormous insight to the event or issue being discussed. Asking such questions of a historical record which has largely been created by non-Aboriginal people and rarely includes the perspective of Aboriginal people is obviously fraught with difficulties. The majority of the material about Aborigines in the historical record was created by non-Aboriginal people who had little understanding of or interest in Larrakia action and lifestyles and was often

⁹⁹ See Attwood and Foster 2003 for a discussion of these terms.

¹⁰⁰ Attwood and Foster 2003, p23.

¹⁰¹ McKenna 2002, p32.

recorded for reasons other than ethnographical interest. The material which does exist only represents a fraction of what the reality was for Aboriginal people in the early colonial times. After a lifetime of experience researching cross-culturally, Greg Dening notes:

Anyone engaged in cross-cultural research will know that it is not the mountains of texts of the encounter between indigenous peoples and intruding strangers that are the problem. It is the depth of the silences. Translating silences is the hardest thing in cross-cultural research. Anyone in cross-cultural research will have to have trust and imagination to hear what is said in that silence.¹⁰²

Another problem lies in interpreting the material which has been written about Aborigines and contains the dominant attitude of the time which held Aboriginal people as grossly inferior to whites and made no attempt to understand or represent the cultural, economic and political organisation of Aboriginal society. In order to reach a better understanding of Aboriginal people's varied responses to invasion it is important to both read from other disciplines and to try and understand from contemporary Aboriginal people what their relationships with their country are. The material compiled by Larrakia people for the *Larrakia Plant Identikit: Common useful plants around Darwin, north Australia* together with the evidence provided by the Larrakia in the course of the Kulaluk and Kenbi land claims has provided me with knowledge about Larrakia sites of significance, their meanings for and use of land in the Darwin region and their ongoing sense of responsibility towards their country.¹⁰³ The work of anthropologists Elizabeth Povinelli and Deborah Bird Rose and the cultural geographer, Richard Baker, have particularly influenced this thesis.¹⁰⁴ It is through this reading that I have reached a better awareness of the various meanings, uses and management systems Aboriginal people have for their country as well as a better understanding of the enormity of the impact of invasion on Aboriginal people's abilities to live about

¹⁰² Greg Dening, 1998. *Readings/Writings*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, p111.

¹⁰³ The information collated in the identikit comes from the research and knowledge of Topsy Juwayning Secretary, Lorraine Williams, Lena Uraki Henry, Felix Iyanuk Holmes, Prince Midpul Wales, Donna Jackson and Glenn Wightman.

¹⁰⁴ See Povinelli 1993; Deborah Bird Rose, 1991. *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations*, Aboriginal Studies Press Canberra; Deborah Bird Rose, 1996. *Nourishing Terrains. Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission; Richard Baker, 1999. *Land is Life: From Bush to Town. The Story of the Yanyuwa people*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards.

their country as they had done prior to colonisation and inspired me to ask questions about the strategies Larrakia people developed to survive these changes.

Bruce Trigger's suggestion that post-contact indigenous history could be a 'record of valiant struggle, transformations, and the continual reaffirmation of a will to survive in the face of indifference, hostility and paternalism from a seemingly ever more powerful adversary' rather than a 'bleak chronicle of decline and extinction' is certainly very admirable.¹⁰⁵ However, in adopting this narrative of survival 'amid the dominating paradigm of disappearance', there is a need for caution.¹⁰⁶ Seeing the Larrakia as positive historical actors can have the counter affect of belittling what was a devastating colonial experience for them. An overemphasis on Aboriginal agency and survival does not explain the sense of loss or aggrieved state that many Aborigines find themselves in today. While this thesis tries to understand Larrakia agency in Darwin's history it by no means suggests that the Larrakia were not subjected to a range of discriminatory and destructive policies and practices which held long term consequences for their people. However, as the Larrakia attest, 'we have survived and we are here to stay'.¹⁰⁷ This thesis tries to understand the various strategies the Larrakia adopted to ensure their survival in the period under study.

The thesis

Captain Wickham, John Lort Stokes and the crew of the *Beagle* explored the Darwin region by boat, some thirty years prior to colonial settlement. Chapter one first looks at Stokes' 1839 observations of the Aboriginal people he met in Darwin harbour as well as the way his exploration and [re]naming of the Port Darwin region heralded its future settlement. It then turns to an examination of the interactions between Aboriginal people and whites at the Escape Cliffs settlement, situated some one hundred kilometres to the east of Darwin and on the border of Larrakia country. There has been a certain amount of scholarship on the Escape Cliffs settlement which mainly seeks to understand why this attempt at surveying and settling the Northern Territory failed.

¹⁰⁵ Bruce Trigger, 1985. 'The past as power; Anthropology and the North American Indian' in Isabel McBryde (ed), 1985. *Who Owns the Past?: papers from the annual symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p25.

¹⁰⁶ O'Brien 1997, p11.

David Ritchie's thesis, *A Painful Wrench for a European Mind*, is a valuable exception to this. Ritchie argues that the interactions between Aborigines and the surveyors at Escape Cliffs had a significant influence on future relations between Aboriginal people and whites in the Darwin-Adelaide River region.¹⁰⁸ Chapter one concludes with the arrival of the second major Northern Territory surveying expedition in Darwin harbour on 6 February 1869. It shows briefly how the experience and knowledge gained by both Aborigines and whites during the encounters at the Escape Cliffs settlement influenced the initial interactions between Aborigines and whites in Port Darwin.

As discussed above, the characterisation of the Larrakia in the early days of colonisation as friendly has become entrenched in popular historical accounts. In chapters one and two I consider whether this alleged friendliness adequately represents the complexities of the initial encounters between the Larrakia and the colonisers. Given the recent Windschuttle-Reynolds debate over the nature of the violence on the frontier, I am wary of overstating conflict in the colonial settlement of Darwin. However, it is important to challenge the benign picture of friendly and peaceful settlement that has been perpetuated in the popular historical accounts. The Larrakia may well have been friendly but this was hardly an innate characteristic. If they were friendly, what were their possible motivations? If they were not, what form did their hostility take?

In chapter two I examine one form of interaction between the colonisers and Aborigines - the bartering of goods - to explore the complexities of the initial encounters. I then consider the political alliance which developed between the Larrakia and the white settlers in the colonial settlement. This alliance was based on the colonial acceptance of the Larrakia as prior occupants of the land on which Darwin was to be developed and therefore the appropriate group with whom to negotiate. This section looks at the motivations for this alliance from both the perspective of the Larrakia and the colonisers and examines how the alliance was given expression in the colonial settlement.

¹⁰⁷ *The Midweek Territorian*, 16 April 1986; unpublished letter from the Larrakia Association to *The Australian*, 7 May 1986.

Peter Forrest's suggestion that the Larrakia and the colonisers had developed a camaraderie in their 'shared experience of being thrown together in a remote and difficult place' indicates a limited understanding that the land the colonisers entered was already an intimately known and managed space and that the changes the whites brought with them required great negotiation and adjustment on the part of the Larrakia. Chapter three describes the Aboriginal landscape that the whites invaded in order to better understand the impact of colonisation on the Larrakia. In this chapter, I compare and contrast European landscape vision and use with indigenous land use. For example, the trees and native vegetation that were considered only useful as firewood by the colonisers were used by Aborigines to manufacture hunting implements and other tools, medicinally and as sources of food. This chapter continues the exploration of the way the land was colonised through a process of appropriation, renaming and physical transformation. It looks at some of the immediate changes that took place on the land and how they contrasted with Larrakia land meanings and use. For example, the mythical site of a water serpent is dug up in an effort to find a sustainable water supply for the emerging township.

Chapter four considers the way that Larrakia people negotiated the changes to their cultural and economic landscape through their participation in the European labour force and economy and by drawing on aspects of their traditional lives to participate in the social and cultural life of the settlement. The chapter then looks at the maintenance of autonomous Aboriginal lifestyles in the Darwin region and how certain practices and behaviour were defined by the colonisers as 'out of place' in their newly claimed space. Chapters four, five and six are interested in the politics and practice of inclusion and exclusion of Aborigines in the town space. As the town space is defined and developed, the colonisers increasingly try and control Aboriginal action within it. Any behaviour of Aborigines deemed inappropriate by the colonisers was met by threatening to or ordering Aboriginal people out of the township. As discussed in chapter five, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the police, without any legislative authority, began to evict Aboriginal people from the township by burning their camps and their belongings.

¹⁰⁸ David Ritchie, 1998. *A Painful Wrench for a European Mind: Land Claims and Representations of History and Aboriginal Tradition in the Darwin Hinterland*, PhD Thesis, La Trobe University.

Chapter Five looks further at the ongoing debate conducted in the pages of the local press over what was presented as the ‘Aboriginal problem’. However, unlike chapter four, this chapter is interested in the way in which Aboriginal people were seen as not necessarily bad for the town, but how the town began to be constructed as bad for Aborigines because of the ready accessibility of alcohol and opium and the practice of prostitution to obtain these substances. This chapter looks at the way that some colonists acknowledged the importance of land to Aboriginal people’s survival and accepted responsibility for destroying their livelihood. Many solutions were proffered as a means of atoning their invasion. These included the declaration of inviolable reserves for Aborigines and the distribution of government rations of food and blankets. Other colonists advocated the complete segregation of Aborigines from the European and Asian population in Darwin.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, looks at how the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the town area was legalised with the introduction in 1910 of *An Act to make Provision for the better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Northern Territory, and for other purposes*. Under this legislation, the Kahlin Aboriginal Compound was established on Myilly Point, then considered on the outskirts of town, and town Aborigines were forced to reside there. This legislation also provided the colonists with the legal right to dictate Aboriginal people’s movements about the town area through declaring particular parts of Darwin ‘prohibited areas’ and through a curfew which made the town out of bounds for Aboriginal people between sunset and sunrise.

A brief note on the use of the word Larrakia

In this thesis, the term 'Larrakia' is used to refer to all Aboriginal people identifying as belonging to the language group, Laragiya, although I recognise that today some ‘Larrakia’ people prefer to identify under a clan name. It is likely that there were many distinct Aboriginal clans in the Darwin region who were aligned through their use of the Larrakia language but who were responsible for distinct tracts of land. For example the ethnographer Herbert Basedow observed that the Larrakia were separated into coastal, inland and southern groups, the Binnimiginda, Gunmajerrumba and Marri

respectively.¹⁰⁹ However, not a great deal is known of these clan groupings today and Larrakia people generally identify under the language group name rather than a specific clan name and claim ownership of their entire estate rather than one part of it.¹¹⁰

The term ‘Larrakia’ is not unproblematic.¹¹¹ In the past, Northern Territory writers have cast doubt on the word Larrakia being Aboriginal in origin, suggesting that it was a ‘Malay’ word.¹¹² The early twentieth century anthropologist, WB Spencer, observed the difficulties in ‘ascertain[ing] the native name of the tribe’ and described how white’s mispronounced or mistakenly applied a ‘native word’ for a ‘tribal name’ and how Aborigines, for one reason or another, do not try and disabuse the whites of this.¹¹³ This is perhaps a more plausible explanation of the origin of the word Larrakia. The colonial surveyor, JWO Bennett, recorded that the Wulna word for ‘black’ (the colour rather than being used in the pejorative sense) was ‘Lo-ar-ke-eng-er’ a word not dissimilar to Larrakia.¹¹⁴ Whatever the origin of the word, this thesis shows that the use of the word ‘Larrakia’ to denote a specific group of people appeared often in the early written historical record. ‘Larrakia’ territory was also delineated on some of the earliest survey maps of the region and the ‘Larrakia’ language was recorded by many different ethnographers.

¹⁰⁹ Basedow 1907.

¹¹⁰ See Peter Sutton, 1998. *Native Title and the Descent of Rights: Kinship, Descent and Aboriginal Land Tenure and Families of Polity: Post-classical Aboriginal Society and Native Title*, National Native Title Tribunal.

¹¹¹ In Norman B Tindale’s survey of Aboriginal people and languages across Australia, he identifies many historical spellings of the word Larrakia, for example, Larrakia, Larrakiha, Larrakiya, Larreekeeyah, Larrekiya, Larrikia, Larrikiya, Larriquia. Today the favoured, as opposed to linguistically correct, spelling is Larrakia. The many variations of the spelling of the term ‘Larrakia’ which occur in this report are consistent with the way they appear in the original sources. Similarly, other Aboriginal words are either spelt according to the way they appear in original sources or follow the generally accepted spelling of the word rather than the linguistically correct spelling.

¹¹² Harney wrote that the language group ‘Tarrakea’ – which I consider a typographical error given that Harney’s name was also spelt wrongly in this report – were only ‘so called, really a Malay name meaning “let go”’ (Patrol Officer W Harney, ‘Report of activities from May 1942 to May 1943’, CRS F1 1944/275). In 1951 Douglas Lockwood responded to an article by Olaf Ruhen in the *Sunday Sun*, 18 February 1951, condemning the relocation of the Larrakia man, Fred Nadpur Waters to Haasts Bluff in Central Australia following his involvement in some local industrial action. Lockwood claimed that there was ‘no such tribe’ as the Larrakia and that ‘Larrakeyeh’ was a Malay word (CRS A431/1 50/3697).

¹¹³ WB Spencer, 1913. ‘Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory’, *Northern Territory Annual Report 1912*.

¹¹⁴ JWO Bennett, ‘Vocabulary of the Woolner District Dialect’, G Taplin (ed), 1879. *The Native Tribes of South Australia*, ES Wigg & Son, Adelaide.

Chapter One: Naming and Claiming

Chapter One is interested in the interactions between Larrakia people and whites prior to the arrival of Surveyor-General Goyder's survey expedition in Darwin harbour in 1869. This chapter first looks at John Lort Stokes' observations of the land and people he encountered in the Port Darwin region during his explorations of 1839. Particular attention is paid to Stokes' naming of significant geographical features in the Darwin area. This chapter then turns to a detailed account of interactions between Aboriginal people and the members of the survey expedition sent to the Northern Territory by the South Australian Government in 1864. The focus of their activities was the Escape Cliffs settlement which was at the mouth of the Adelaide River, about 100 kilometres to the east of Darwin. This was in the country of the Wulna people and bordered by the Larrakia who were also observed to be about the Escape Cliffs settlement. The surveying party remained in the Adelaide River region for more than two years before returning south. While it is difficult to discover the extent of the Larrakia's connection with the Escape Cliffs surveying party, it is clear that these interactions formed the first sustained encounters between the Larrakia and Europeans. The experience and knowledge gained from this prolonged encounter had a significant impact on future interactions between the Larrakia and the members of the 1869 Northern Territory survey expedition who were responsible for surveying the township of Darwin or Palmerston as it was then known. This chapter emphasises the prior knowledge and expectations held by the Larrakia about Europeans in order to address the notion, presented in historical texts, that the Larrakia were innately friendly in their initial meetings with strangers.

The initial interactions between Aborigines and whites were also influenced by Aboriginal people's traditional meeting rituals which governed different situations and had been developed over many thousands of years and involved exchanges of 'ceremonies, songs, dances, words and ideas'.¹ Sylvia Hallam argues that meetings between Aboriginal groups were 'highly structured affairs, with elements of ceremonial preparedness for conflict, formal peace-making, reciprocal exchange of gifts, and

¹ Henry Reynolds, 1981. *The Other Side of the Frontier: an interpretation of the Aboriginal response to the invasion and settlement of Australia*, James Cook University, Townsville, pp8-9. See also DJ Mulvaney, 1989. *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606-1985*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, p1.

sometimes actual conflict and resolution of conflict'. Formal patterns for these meetings were so ordered that Hallam describes them as 'pan-Aboriginal ... so that each party to an encounter knows what types of responses to expect, how to interpret them, and the appropriate modes of reaction'.² These meeting rituals were part of a broader network of cultural exchange that included inter-marriage, language familiarity and sharing of country which allowed Aboriginal people to access greater resources and to travel through country to participate in ceremony or to carry out trade and other exchanges.

Long before Europeans colonised the Darwin region this network of cultural exchange would have alerted Larrakia people to the existence and presence of strangers either within their country or on a neighbouring group's country. The Larrakia would have had some indirect knowledge of the hundreds of Macassan *trepang* (sea cucumber) fishers who annually sailed their proas to northern Australia on the winds of the north-west monsoon. Striking the coast near the Coburg Peninsula, the *trepangers* worked slowly eastward, collecting *trepang* and processing it with the assistance of local Aboriginal people before returning to Macassar some months later on the fresh south-easterly winds.³ Campbell Macknight's investigation of south-east Asian trade records combined with recent archaeological work indicates that a viable trepang industry operated in north Australia from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth century when it was curtailed by the introduction of Australian trade tariffs. In 1896 the remains of a nineteenth century pistol thought to have been dropped from a Macassan proa were found on a Darwin beach and in 1903 a *Northern Territory Times* editorial reasoned that the one hundred year old tamarind trees on the coast between Port Darwin and the Victoria River indicated that 'proas were probably visiting this coast long before Captain Cook "discovered" Australia'.⁴ However, archaeological remains of the trepang industry have not been found around Darwin and sailing routes indicate that Darwin was probably by-passed as a trepang site. However knowledge of the Macassans' seasonal voyages and their goods (like the dug-out canoe, ceramics, glass, metal and shovel nosed spears) are likely to have been disseminated through Aboriginal networks along the coast. As Henry Reynolds notes, Aboriginal people throughout

² Sylvia J Hallam, 1983. 'A view from the other side of the Western frontier: or 'I met a man who wasn't there...'', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 7 No. 2, p134.

³ CC Macknight, 1972. 'Macassans and Aborigines', *Oceania*, Vol. 42; CC Macknight, 1986. 'Macassans and the Aboriginal past', *Archaeology Oceania* 21, pp69-75.

Australia had been found using European commodities like steel axes and knives or manufacturing their tools and weapons from scraps of iron, nails and glass long before encounters with European settlers.⁵

Apart from the knowledge and materials gained by indirect association with the Macassans, it is also likely that Aboriginal people in the Darwin region had some knowledge of the Portuguese and Dutch vessels exploring the northern coastline in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – especially of the Portuguese who had occupied Timor and to whose slaving activities the Tiwi people from Bathurst and Melville Islands had been falling victim until at least the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁶ Further knowledge of Europeans may have been gained with the establishment of three British military settlements on the north Australian coast during the first half of the nineteenth century. These settlements were established in an effort to prevent Dutch or French annexation, to exploit an Asian trade potential, and to provide a base for survey vessels and a haven for shipwrecked sailors. The Fort Dundas settlement was on Melville Island between 1824 and 1829. Fort Wellington occupied a position on the east coast of the Coburg Peninsula between 1827 and 1829. Port Essington was the longest running of these military settlements and existed on the western coast of the Coburg Peninsula between 1838 and 1849. Mulvaney and Green contrast these settlements with the trading ports established by the British in Singapore and elsewhere, where treaties were entered into with ‘local rulers who provided much of the necessary order and commercial undertaking. In North Australia, nobody recognised Aboriginal title to land or negotiated treaties to protect their interests’.⁷ If the Larrakia did not actually encounter the members of these military settlements it is probable that they were given knowledge about European weapons, tools, living structures, clothing and food. They may also have had some knowledge or experience of the water buffalo, pig, banteng (Bali) cattle and Timor ponies which were introduced to the settlements

⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 28 August 1896 & 14 August 1903 respectively.

⁵ Henry Reynolds, 1978. ‘Before the Instant of Contact: Some evidence from nineteenth-century Queensland’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 2 No. 1, p63.

⁶ JMR Cameron, 1998. ‘The British Meet the Tiwi: Melville Island, 1824’ in T Austin and S Parry (eds) *Connection and Disconnection. Encounters between settlers and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory*.

⁷ DJ Mulvaney and Neville Green, 1992. *Commandant of Solitude. The Journals of Captain Collet Barker 1828-1831*, Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press, pp41-2.

and soon became feral, multiplying and having a devastating impact on the ecology and landscapes of the regions to which they spread.⁸

While we cannot know the extent and nature of indigenous knowledge of white existence prior to the actual encounters, the way in which knowledge, tools, weapons, clothing and other European commodities passed through indigenous networks to reach Aboriginal people in the Adelaide River - Darwin region is not pure speculation. Information given to the early Darwin settlers by local Aboriginal people regarding approaching ships when they were still some days distant provides an example of the way in which Aboriginal information networks disseminated knowledge along the northern coastline. From Phillip Parker King's journals we know that when he and his crew surveyed the coastline in 1819 they were watched by Aboriginal people fishing in the Port Patterson area, west of Darwin.⁹ When the 1864-66 Northern Territory survey expedition made their initial forays around the Adelaide River they met an Aboriginal man with a wounded foot bound in 'navy drill' and another in possession of a European knife.¹⁰ In a punitive raid by members of this expedition on an Aboriginal camp to the east of the Adelaide River, knives and axes of Dutch manufacture were found.¹¹ Shortly after the Darwin settlement was established the Northern Territory Government Resident administered a whipping to a young Aboriginal man accused of spearing a horse. Douglas did so because he believed that the 'prompt and summary punishment such as was adopted at Port Essington with such good effect and *is still remembered by the natives even at this distance* is the most effectual means of preventing crime'.¹² Therefore when Captain King and John Lort Stokes sailed into Darwin harbour in September 1839, met with local Aboriginal people and proclaimed that this was 'clearly' their first encounter with white men as they rubbed the skin of an especially fair man 'to see if it was painted' it is unlikely that this was completely true.¹³

⁸ Mulvaney 1989, p74.

⁹ Philip Parker King cited in EA Povinelli, 1993. *Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p68.

¹⁰ D D'A Webling (ed), 1995. *The Journals of Alfred Charles Webling, Narrating Experiences and descriptions of early South Australia, particularly the Port Augusta region of Spencer Gulf, and the Escape Cliffs Settlement, Adelaide River*, p15.

¹¹ Letter from FE Goldsmith to Honorable Commissioner for Crown Lands, 5 October 1864, *South Australian Parliamentary Paper* (hereafter SAPP) No. 35/1865.

¹² Emphasis added. Government Resident Douglas to Honorable Commissioner for Crown Lands, 29 August 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 245/1871.

¹³ John Lort Stokes, 1846 (facsimile ed. 1969). *Discoveries in Australia; with an account of the coasts and rivers explored and surveyed during the voyage of the HMS Beagle in the years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43, Volumes One and Two*, Adelaide, Libraries Board of South Australia. Vol. 2, p12.

Whatever the motive for the rub it is likely that Aboriginal people in this region had some knowledge of Europeans, their ships and their commodities prior to this encounter.

Claiming and naming Port Darwin

Sailing westward from the Port Essington settlement on a light wind, Wickham, Stokes and the crew of the *Beagle* passed through the Clarence Strait, explored and named 'Hope Inlet' and anchored in the shallow waters of a bay, named like so many others throughout Australia, 'Shoal Bay'. Almost immediately Stokes and a small party took a whale boat to explore an 'opening' sighted about fifteen miles to the west of this bay. Reaching the opening after dark, they landed with difficulty and scrambled up the clayey cliffs by the light of a lantern to take 'observations'. Signifying an awareness held by many explorers of the presence if not the actual visibility of Aboriginal people, Stokes remarked, 'if any of the watchful natives happened to be on the look out, they must have stood fixed with astonishment at beholding such strange persons, who at such a time of night, with no ostensible object were visiting their shores'.¹⁴ In making such comment, Stokes acknowledges the transience of the explorers, the likely presence of Aboriginal people about the area and attributes land ownership to the invisible Aboriginal hosts. Stokes decided to call this opening 'Port Darwin' in order to convince his 'old shipmate and friend', the naturalist Charles Darwin, 'that he still lived in our memory'. Stokes and party spent four days exploring around Port Darwin before deciding that its 'capabilities ... were sufficiently great to require the presence of the ship'. The *Beagle* was moved into Port Darwin where it was anchored within an 'eastern cliffy head' named after Lieutenant Emery who had located fresh water in this area.¹⁵

Wickham, Stokes and crew remained in Darwin harbour for eighteen days exploring the region and filling the ship with fresh water.¹⁶ The short time spent there is not reflected in the active naming and supplanting of pre-existing Aboriginal names for

¹⁴ Ibid., p5.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp6-13.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp17.

areas of geographical significance. For example Port Darwin, Point Emery, Talc Head, Shoal Bay, Wickham Point, King's Table, Bynoe Harbour and Quail Island. Following JB Harley's assertion that maps should be included alongside guns and warships as the 'weapons of imperialism', Stokes' insertion of these names on his surveying maps signalled the non-Aboriginal knowing, appropriation and eventual invasion of the area.¹⁷ Even so, Stokes records of the surveying of this region remain important not only because they heralded the beginnings of a sustained European 'knowing' of this area but because they comprise the earliest written depictions of Aborigines and their encounters with whites in this area.

When the *Beagle* was anchored in Shoal Bay twenty-seven Aboriginal people 'without any symptoms of hesitation' and displaying the 'most friendly disposition' approached the explorers who were collecting shells from a long beach.¹⁸ Such confidence was expressed in the Aborigines' friendliness that a thirsty officer 'allowed them to conduct him to a small well near the beach, but the water was too salt to be drunk'.¹⁹ This Aboriginal group, plus some others, later visited the surveying party at Point Emery and again Stokes noted that '[a]ll appeared actuated by the same friendly disposition, a very strong indication of which was their presenting themselves without spears'. Nevertheless, Stokes invokes the known and anticipated treachery of Aboriginal people by immediately qualifying his acclamations of friendliness with the warning that if Aboriginal people appeared without their spears, 'their arms were always near at hand. They even trail them sometimes between their toes, a fact which travellers should ever bear in mind'.²⁰

The friendliness of Aboriginal people during initial encounters with Europeans throughout Australia has often been remarked upon. For Stokes however, the friendliness of Aboriginal people in the Port Darwin region was especially remarkable given an earlier incident which occurred not far from Port Darwin, near the mouth of the Adelaide River, and earned the area the name of 'Escape Cliffs'. Stokes had made an unsuccessful attempt to induce some Aboriginal people to board his boat. Shortly

¹⁷ JB Harley, 1988. 'Maps, knowledge, and power', in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, Cambridge University Press, p282.

¹⁸ John Lort Stokes, 1846 (facsimile ed. 1969). *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol. 2, p9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p19.

afterwards two surveyors had gone ashore to compare compasses. As they began their readings a large group of Aboriginal people gathered on the cliff twenty feet above them, ‘stamping’ their feet and ‘shaking their heads to and fro ... with poised and quivering spears’. Believing them to be ‘in earnest’, Stokes was surprised to see ‘this paroxysm of rage evaporate before the happy presence of mind displayed’ by one of the surveyors who immediately began to ‘dance and shout, though in momentary expectation of being pierced by a dozen spears’. His colleague joined in the performance and together they succeeded in diverting the Aborigines ‘from their evident evil designs, until a boat landing in a bay near drew off their attention’.²¹ Stokes’ identification of the ‘friendliness’ of Darwin Aborigines compared to the aggression and ‘treachery’ of Aborigines from the Adelaide River region became accepted characterisations of these two groups and is explored further in this thesis.

While Aboriginal people in the Darwin region exhibited openness and curiosity, the initial encounters were not entirely free of caution or fear. This was evident in the way the Aborigines embarked then rapidly disembarked from the explorer’s boat as it was about to leave, interpreted by Stokes as ‘acting, in fact, exactly the part of noisy children’.²² Greater trepidation was shown by Aborigines during an encounter between a small party led by Captain Wickham and some Aboriginal people who were crossing Bynoe Harbour on a raft – the men were swimming and towing the raft which carried the women and children. On sighting the explorer’s boat the men left the women and children and began swimming for shore. The explorers continued towards the raft at which the women, ‘risking all to save their offspring’, jumped into the water and began to tow it towards the shore. Although Stokes was not actually present during this incident he noted that the ‘devotion on the part of the women to their little ones’ was ‘in strong contrast with the utter want of feeling shewn by the men towards both mothers and children’. The Aboriginal men were subsequently driven back to the raft, and by extension back to their responsibilities, by the explorers who then towed the raft across the harbour. Stokes acknowledges that the Aboriginal men ‘must have apprehended a fate at least as terrible as that of being eaten’ as they used ‘hideous grimaces’ and ‘ferocious grins’ in an attempt to ‘terrify the white men from approaching’.²³ Stokes’ cultural preconceptions do not allow him to consider that the men, far from abandoning

²¹ John Lort Stokes, 1846 (facsimile ed. 1969). *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol. 1, pp413-4.

²² John Lort Stokes, 1846 (facsimile ed. 1969). *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol. 2, pp19-20.

²³ *Ibid.*, p16.

the raft, may have been tactfully trying to draw the strangers away from the women and children and on to land more suited to this unplanned and potentially hostile encounter.

Stokes wrote of Aboriginal people's astonishment at the well dug by the exploring party and described how their excitement at seeing water culminated in 'an almost mad shout of delight'. This led him to conclude, '[n]othing perhaps could have more decisively shewn the superiority of the white men to these savages, than our being thus able to procure this necessary of life from so great a depth, there being moreover no outward appearance of any'.²⁴ Fresh water springs are for Larrakia people the physical manifestation of the mythical water serpent. The Aborigines 'mad shout of delight' may actually have been their surprise or horror that these newcomers could procure so easily or interfere so readily with, what to them, was an important sentient being. It is likely that Aborigines would have found all the things that Stokes chose to remark on about Darwin - the sandflies, crocodiles, irregular tides, presence or absence of fresh water, Aboriginal nudity, Aboriginal people's ability to climb trees and the piece of bamboo piercing the septum of their noses – incredibly unremarkable and commonplace. Whether they would have thought him inferior in his interest in these things is not clear.

Stokes' representations of Aboriginal people as childlike and inferior can be seen to be part of 'semiotic fields within which much of the labour necessary to construct "the native" had already been completed'.²⁵ His positioning of the superior white men over inferior 'savages' was based on an Enlightenment belief that Aborigines represented 'man in a state of nature', that is people who lived by hunting and fishing, naked and homeless, basically approximating the 'natural' condition of humanity.²⁶ Following Edward Said, Simon Ryan argues further that by the time explorers encountered Australia the 'black skin of the indigene' was 'already in existence in the European archive' and was already endowed with several meanings - 'treachery, laziness and mental inferiority'.²⁷ Stokes' representation of Aboriginal cowardice and their surprise at the 'superior' white man's ability to procure water are reflections of contemporary

²⁴ Ibid., pp19-20.

²⁵ Simon Ryan, 1996. *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia*, Cambridge University Press, p135.

²⁶ Russell McGregor, 1997. *Imagined Destinies. Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, p1.

²⁷ Ryan 1996, p135.

European racial preconceptions of indigenous people and shed little light on Larrakia peoples' cultural, economic or political organisation. However Stokes' records are important because they positioned Port Darwin as a good harbour with 'friendly natives' – two things which would almost certainly draw future explorers and settlers to the area. They are also important because of what he does actually record about Aborigines, regardless of his cultural prejudice. One of the more interesting of Stokes' observations was the Aboriginal word list he and his crew collected from Aboriginal people while in Darwin harbour. Stokes acknowledged the difficulty that transient visitors had in making such collections but it is notable that the words recorded by him bear a close similarity to those in the Larrakia vocabulary collected by the ethnographer, TA Parkhouse, some fifty-five years later. For example, Stokes recorded the word for dog as 'Melinga' and Parkhouse records it as 'billingga'; Stokes records ear as 'bangua' and Parkhouse 'banarro'; Stokes records eye as 'ummera' and Parkhouse 'lemura', Stokes records hair as 'brailma' and Parkhouse 'bu'uridwirra' [Parkhouse identifies 'wirra' as a suffix], Stokes records hand as 'guian' and Parkhouse 'gwiarrwirra'; and Stokes records water as 'kararback' and Parkhouse as 'kwaorowa'.²⁸ Stokes' observations therefore provide the first available written evidence that Aborigines were living in the Darwin region prior to permanent European occupation and that these people probably belonged to the Larrakia language group.

Less than five years after Stokes and Wickham surveyed the northern coastline, explorers began making expeditions into the Northern Territory by land. While none traversed the immediate Darwin area it is likely that local Aboriginal people had some knowledge of the people, tools and beasts accompanying the expeditions of Ludwig Leichhardt from the Gulf of Carpentaria, through the Alligator Rivers systems and into Port Essington in 1844-45; AC Gregory's 1855-6 expedition from the Victoria River to northern Queensland; and John McDouall Stuart's 1860-2 explorations through Central Australia and up to Chamber's Bay via the Mary and Adelaide Rivers. However it was the establishment of a settlement at Escape Cliffs, close to the mouth of the Adelaide River, that afforded Aboriginal people from this region the most prolonged interactions with Europeans.

²⁸ John Lort Stokes, 1846 (facsimile ed. 1969). *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol. 2, p23; TA Parkhouse, 1894-5. *Remarks on the Native Tongues in the Neighbourhood of Port Darwin*, Royal Society of South Australia Transactions, Vol. 19.

Escape Cliffs

In 1863, the British Colonial Government annexed the 1,376,325 square kilometres of land comprising the Northern Territory to the colony of South Australia which was intent on acquiring more lands for pastoral and agricultural purposes but also had an eye to the Northern Territory's close proximity to Asia's commercial markets. Almost immediately the South Australian government offered its newly acquired and completely unsurveyed lands for sale to local and overseas buyers. The proceeds from this land sale were then used to send the Northern Territory survey expedition, under the command of Captain BT Finnis, to the Northern Territory. The expedition was charged with the responsibility of locating a site for the future capital city of the Northern Territory. The site was to have a good harbour and port and be surrounded by lands suitable for agriculture. As ordered, Finnis directed his attention to lands in the Adelaide River - Darwin region.²⁹

It is likely that Stokes' observations made twenty-five years earlier influenced the instructions issued to Finnis's expedition regarding likely encounters with Aboriginal people - particularly in regards to the 'somewhat contradictory' information about Aboriginal people who were 'friendly and inoffensive' but also 'treacherous, and quite ready to attack any one who may visit their shores'. Cleve Manhood also notes that Finnis understood from Stuart's journal that Aboriginal people in this area were likely to be 'warlike, bloodthirsty savages'.³⁰ Even so, the South Australian government's desire to avoid violence in the colonisation of the Northern Territory is evident in the instructions issued to Finnis regarding his dealings with Aborigines. Finnis was to 'exercise the greatest caution and forbearance in communicating' with Aborigines and to warn his party to 'studiously avoid giving them the slightest offence'. 'Transactions' were to be carried out with 'scrupulous exactness' and while Aboriginal people were to be shown that the expedition was prepared to trust them, 'every precaution' was 'to be taken against them taking you by surprise'. Above all, Finnis was told that he must warn his party to 'abstain from anything like hostility towards them, and to avoid the

²⁹ see PF Donovan, 1981. *A Land Full of Possibilities: a History of South Australia's Northern Territory*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.; Alan Powell, 1988. *Far Country. A Short History of the Northern Territory*, 2nd Edition, Melbourne University Press, Carlton; R Reece, 1989. 'Four Expeditions in Search of a Capital', P Stathan (ed) *The Origins of Australia's Capital Cities*, Cambridge University Press, Sydney; C Doran, 1990. 'Colonising the Territory', *Northern Perspective*, Vol. 13 No. 2.

extremities of a conflict, which must only be had recourse to in self-defence, and only then from absolute necessity'. Finnis was to show the Aborigines that while he was 'anxious to gain their goodwill and confidence by kindness and judicious liberality' he was 'able to repel, and if necessary, punish aggression'.³¹

More explicit instructions were given to the Protector of Aborigines accompanying the expedition. The Protector was to foster a 'friendly feeling' with Aboriginal people by acquiring knowledge of local languages, treating illnesses or wounds, recognising and supporting the rank and social position of 'chiefs' and by making Aboriginal people 'comprehend' that they were British subjects, and therefore 'amendable to, and protected by' British law. Giving or selling alcohol to Aboriginal people was prohibited and the 'improper interference' with Aboriginal women was to be guarded against. Those Aborigines who were elderly or unwell could be provided with subsistence but able-bodied Aboriginal people were to be encouraged to work and their services 'properly rewarded'. Existing trade by Aborigines was not to be interfered with and any provisions supplied by Aboriginal people to the whites were to be 'fairly paid for by barter or otherwise'. Lands were to be reserved for Aboriginal use and occupation and the Protector was instructed to find out which lands best suited Aboriginal peoples' needs in terms of availability of fresh water, hunting sites, living places and supplies of wood.³²

With such warnings and instructions in mind the survey expedition sailed for the north in late April 1864. Captain Finnis drew on his former experience as a British Army officer and instructed his men in 'musketry drill' on the decks of the *Henry Ellis* along the way. The officers and men aboard the assistant surveying boat, the *Beatrice*, arrived in Adam Bay at the mouth of the Adelaide River at the end of May, several weeks before Finnis's party. The *Beatrice* anchored in Adam Bay and the Doctor and Assistant Surveyor landed to examine the immediate neighbourhood. The country was covered in a thick gum scrub, the grass dry and burnt. A bark canoe was found near the beach and a few 'native wurleys', hemispherical in shape, six feet in diameter and three in height, were seen on the beach about 100 yards west of Point Charles, on the western

³⁰ Cleve Charles Manhood, 1966. *The Life of Boyle Travers Finniss (1807-93)*, MA, University of Adelaide, p193.

³¹ Instructions to BT Finniss regarding Aborigines by Chief Secretary, cited in SAPP No. 17/1866.

tip of the bay.³³ No Aboriginal people were seen in this camp. If the Aboriginal residents were present but had hidden themselves after sighting the ship and the newcomer's landing, they would have heard or seen the surveying party dig a well within twenty yards of their wurleys and shoot several curlew plus a large white 'fish-hawk'. They would have seen the surveyors fell a small straight tree, attach a piece of canvas to it and hoist it above 'Flag Rock'. If they later investigated this marker the Aborigines would have found a hard transparent object attached to the tree containing a flimsy article wet with a substance which stained their fingers. Leaving this bottled message for Colonel Finnis, Captain Hutchison set the *Beatrice* on a course down the 'noble' Adelaide River and disturbed large quantities of ducks sitting in the thick mangroves lining the banks. Flocks of white cockatoos and pigeons took to the wing screaming and screeching and reminded tide-watcher Webling that the party were 'all very anxious to get a day's duck shooting'.³⁴

Three days later and thirty-two miles from the mouth of the river, 'a long moaning sound or low cooey' was heard and 'black shapes' seen moving through the mangroves fringing the river. Captain Hutchison wished to open friendly communication and dispatched a small boat with some water and biscuits in the Aborigines' direction. The boat was met by the Aborigines who waded into the water, holding their arms extended over their heads and casting their throwing sticks into the water which were picked up by the *Beatrice's* crew.³⁵ Their behaviour seemed 'friendly' but the known treachery of Aborigines led one of Hutchison's party to interpret this action as designed to entice the newcomers from their boats to the land where 'most likely their companions would have stripped the crew of everything and perhaps feared worse'.³⁶ In scenes reminiscent of Stokes' crew dancing in front of Aborigines from this region some twenty-five years previously, the party aboard the *Beatrice* took up the 'drum and fife' and began playing a 'lively' tune in an effort to demonstrate their friendliness and encourage the Aborigines on board. Apparently, the music 'so delighted' these Aborigines that 'three plunged into the river, and commenced striking out for us'.

³² Instructions to the Protector of Aborigines by Chief Secretary, Henry Ayers, 14 April 1864, SAPP No. 36/1864.

³³ Webling provides a detailed description of the canoes found in this area (Webling 1995, p21).

³⁴ Webling 1995, p14.

³⁵ John Hutchison and Frederick Howard, 1864. Surveying Schooner 'Beatrice'. Extract from the remark book of Her Majesty's Surveying Schooner 'Beatrice' whilst employed in the Northern Territory of South Australia, in 1864, SAPP No. 18/1865.

³⁶ Webling 1995, p15.

They were picked up by a smaller boat and brought on board the *Beatrice* where the addition of a fiddle and two or three concertinas attracted a dozen more Aboriginal people and resulted in the *Beatrice* having sixteen ‘natives’ on board ‘dancing jigs and polkas with the men, and joining in chorus to Negro songs’. Three women and two boys each with a ‘reed through the cartilage of their noses’ remained on shore – perhaps as amused by this spectacle as readers are today.³⁷

Like Stokes in the Darwin region, Captain Hutchison surmised that these Aborigines had never before seen a white man. Hutchison was impressed by their great powers of imitation for dance and the English language and he considered them a ‘much finer race in stature’ than those in South Australia. The Aborigines’ nudity except for their thin bark belts, reed necklaces, small net bags around their waists and duck’s beaks and kangaroo teeth woven into their hair as well as their ‘good behaviour, asking permission before picking anything up’ was especially remarked upon. Hutchison’s observations highlight obvious cultural differences. However, it is difficult to know how these Aboriginal people perceived the strangers. Were they impressed by the surveyor’s demonstration of the power and accuracy of their weapons through the shooting of a hawk. What did they think of the two pigs, made to squeal by having their tails pulled, aboard the *Beatrice*? And why did the Europeans hide their bodies under layers of clothing? We do know that the Aborigines showed their appreciation of the usefulness of certain European goods by rejecting the bread and water but readily accepting the clothing, bag and bucket offered to them.³⁸

Hutchison and his crew left these Aborigines and explored further down the Adelaide River, passing through a bush fire spanning 100 yards on either side of the river and seeing two ‘large native wurleys’. They then returned to Adam Bay to await the arrival of Finnis and his party of forty men who arrived on 20 June 20 1864. Unable to locate a good supply of fresh water, Finnis established a Depot Camp some sixty-five kilometres up the Adelaide River and on the border of Larrakia country. Many Aboriginal people visited and were ‘encouraged’ – in one instance two Aboriginal men were forcibly captured by men on horseback - to visit the Depot where they ‘fraternized with our men with much apparent friendliness and delight’.³⁹ At one stage Aboriginal

³⁷ Hutchison and Howard 1864, SAPP No. 18/1865.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Webling 1995, pp18-9; The Journal of BT Finnis, 3 July 1864, SAPP No. 89/1865.

people were said to have numbered seventy men, women and children and vastly outnumbered the expedition members at the Depot.

There were many exchanges between the surveyors and Aborigines at this Depot and at other locations on the river. A 'great Medicine Man or Doctor' (thought so because of the 'small bag of charms' around his neck) presented the surveyors with two snakes and some spears. An Aboriginal man had his foot wound washed and redressed and some Aboriginal men requested and had their beards 'barbered off in the latest fashion'. The Aborigines were presented with small gifts and other 'trifling things'. Aboriginal people bartered spears, 'woomerahs' and other goods with the survey party for old handkerchiefs or towels and they were encouraged to throw their spears at a target which had been erected for rifle practice. In a perhaps relieved observation of the inferiority of indigenous weaponry, it was noted that their 'spears fell fifty yards short of the mark'.⁴⁰

The large number of Aborigines at the Depot and the belief that Aboriginal people were being 'very troublesome', hindering the men in their work of erecting a store and 'pilfering everything they could lay their hands on' sparked caution amongst the surveyors. Sentries were posted outside the store tent and a 'good deal of time was spent keeping the fellows outside the boundary shown to them'. The guards were doubled, rifles issued to every 'man' in camp and a number of militarily precise precautions adopted 'in the event of the blacks evincing any decided hostility'.⁴¹ When a party of forty-eight Aboriginal men painted in red ochre, armed with spears and carrying more tied in bundles approached the Depot, Finnis's second-in-charge, JT Manton, assumed command of the situation. He fired one barrel of his revolver into the air as a warning before returning it to its holster and allegedly prevented the bloodshed and loss of life which one man feared Finnis's 'pseudo-military idiosyncrasies' would have excited.⁴² Manton then 'advanced alone' to negotiate with the Aborigines and after some time both parties laid down their weapons. The surveyors distributed biscuits, tea and sugar to the Aborigines who 'obviously cared very little for those articles of diet'. They did, however, barter their spears for pocket handkerchiefs and old clothing before leaving the Depot. The following day another 'mob' visited the

⁴⁰ Webling 1995, pp18-9; The Journal of BT Finnis, SAPP No. 89/1865.

⁴¹ The Journal of BT Finnis, July 1964, SAPP No. 89/1865.

⁴² Diary of Ebenezer Ward, Mortlock Library, PRG 1000/1 pp82-4.

Depot bringing with them ‘a quantity of spears and woomerahs expressly for barter’ valuing in particular any handkerchief, piece of cloth or blanket of a red colour.⁴³

Finniss believed that it was Aboriginal people’s inherent ‘thieving propensity’ which would lead to relations becoming less than ‘amicable’ and although he claimed to be using ‘every means of conciliation possible ... to prevent a collision’ the much anticipated violence occurred after the newcomers had been in the Adelaide River area for just over two months.⁴⁴ On August 8, about forty Aboriginal men entered the Depot and proved ‘troublesome’ - one older man in particular fell repeatedly to the ground indicating that something was wrong and attempting to take a quart pot. He was prevented from taking the pot and when he loaded his spear onto his womera in retaliation he was ‘turned out of the camp’.⁴⁵ Later that evening some Aboriginal people broke into the stores by the river which had been left unattended while the guards were on a tea break. They scattered the flour and took the flour bags but were chased off by the guards returning from their break. The labourer, FH Litchfield, was involved in this incident. He saw ‘about thirty natives destroying and stealing our rations. I ran up to them - they were trailing something white after them. I fired five shots of my revolver at them; they were within thirty yards of me at the time I fired; I think I must have wounded some of them’.⁴⁶ The following morning four horsemen were dispatched to recover the stolen goods. Within a short distance from the Depot the punitive party came across a group of Aboriginal people who allegedly threw their spears wounding two of the horsemen. The remaining two horsemen fired shots at the Aborigines which alerted the men remaining at the Depot. These men ‘entered the scrub to support their companions, and as several blackfellows were seen in the very act of throwing spears, for two or three minutes the firing became general’. The Aborigines then ‘beat a hurried retreat to the next scrub’. The surveyors deemed it ‘impossible to ascertain how many of the natives were hit, but the body of one of them, who was mortally wounded in the head, was found in the scrub’. This man died about four hours afterwards and was buried by the survey party.⁴⁷ He was recognised as

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ BT Finniss to Honorable Chief Secretary, Henry Ayers, SAPP No. 89/1865.

⁴⁵ The Journal of BT Finniss, August 1864, SAPP No. 89/1865; Diary of Ebenezer Ward, Mortlock Library, PRG 1000/1.

⁴⁶ Report of FH Litchfield, 16 September 1864, SAPP No. 89/1865.

⁴⁷ The Journal of BT Finniss, 9 August 1864, SAPP No. 89/1865.

being one of those who had previously been aboard the *Beatrice*.⁴⁸ A coronial inquest held into this man's death found that the fatal shot was fired by Alaric Ward but that it was justifiable homicide as the deceased was 'in the act of poisoning a spear at Ward when he was shot'. An 'old native Chief', Mira, later told the surveyors that the man's body was exhumed by his kin and placed in a tree 'according to their custom of disposing the dead'. Mira also said that two more Aboriginal men had been wounded, one mortally who swam across the river on a piece of bark but died amongst the mangroves on the other side. Another was badly wounded but recovered although he had been shot in the hip-joint.⁴⁹

This conflict, together with the susceptibility of the country to flood and the lack of fresh water encouraged Finniss to abandon the River Depot and remove all the stores to Escape Cliffs where interactions again were far from peaceful. When two horses came into the camp with spear wounds in early September 1864 Finniss determined to give the Aboriginal culprits 'a lesson, and to treat them as armed bushrangers acting against the laws and property of the men of the expedition'.⁵⁰ Under the leadership of his twenty-one year old son, Finniss dispatched a party of sixteen to 'retaliate on them some of the injuries inflicted on this occasion'.⁵¹ Finniss refused to let the Protector of Aborigines accompany this punitive party believing that his presence was 'likely to prove injurious to the success of the expedition'.⁵² Frederick Finniss's party found a 'large body of natives' at Chambers Bay, about seven miles from the camp. They were allegedly 'advancing in skirmishing order ... armed with light reed spears' and a 'fire was at once opened on those within reach'. One Aboriginal man, 'known to several of the party as a leader or chief seen continually at the River Camp directing the thieves', was shot dead.⁵³ Labourer James Gilbert was with the punitive party and reported that 'one native was killed and a lot wounded, there was about 60 or 70 of them'.⁵⁴ The punitive party then returned to the Aboriginal camp, secured all the *stolen* property which included hats, shirts, knives, forks, spoons and two *native dogs* and burnt the greater part of the camp.⁵⁵ Given that Aboriginal people had previously bartered

⁴⁸ Webling 1995, p23.

⁴⁹ Despatch from JT Manton, 3 December 1866, SAPP No. 16/1867.

⁵⁰ Report from BT Finniss, 5 October 1864, SAPP No. 35/1865.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² FE Goldsmith 5 October 1864, SAPP No. 35/1865.

⁵³ FR Finniss to BT Finniss, 9 September 1864, SAPP No. 35/1865.

⁵⁴ Emphasis in original. The Diary of James Gilbert, 8 September 1864, Mortlock Library, D6031.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added. Two 'native dogs' were hardly stolen property.

spears, weapons and other goods for European commodities it is unclear how the punitive party knew that they were recovering stolen goods. While Finniss believed that Aboriginal people had ‘thus been taught the value of property by the inconvenience which they must suffer from the destruction of theirs’ and that the newcomer’s cattle now remained unmolested, Chief Secretary Ayers wrote to Finniss that the South Australian government ‘deeply deplored’ the circumstances attending the death of the Aboriginal man and considered it ‘extremely unfortunate that the property of the natives should have been destroyed’. Furthermore, Ayers suggested that a more ‘conciliatory course in accordance with our sense of justice’ would have been to recover the stolen articles and leave the property of the Aborigines untouched.⁵⁶ Finniss’s actions were later condemned in a Commission of Inquiry which similarly found his actions to be ‘highly indiscreet and reprehensible’.⁵⁷

After the raid on the Chambers Bay camp Aboriginal people remained away from the Escape Cliffs settlement for many months. When encounters again took place Aboriginal people were treated with hostility and caution.⁵⁸ These hostilities reached a climax when the shepherd, Alaric Ward, was speared to death outside the settlement in early August 1865. Ward was responsible for killing the old man at the Adelaide River Depot and since that time had refused to carry arms, a move which, according to Coltheart, infuriated Finniss.⁵⁹ Punitive parties were immediately dispatched but were unable to catch the Aborigines. At a hastily vacated camp the Aborigines’ belongings were burnt and their dogs shot.⁶⁰ Following the murder of Ward, Finniss increased security at the settlement. No Aborigines were permitted to enter the settlement, Aborigines were to be ‘mistrusted whatever their professions’, a large stockade was built, extra night guards appointed, a police force formed and the grass burnt around the camp to safeguard the surveying party and their stores as well as to keep Aboriginal people away from the settlement area.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Report from BT Finniss 5 October 1864, SAPP No. 35/1865; Correspondence from Henry Ayers to BT Finniss, date not recorded, SAPP No. 64/1865.

⁵⁷ See Correspondence from BT Finniss to Chief Secretary Ayers, 1 May 1865, SAPP 15/1865 and the report from the Commission of Inquiry in SAPP No. 17 1866.

⁵⁸ See Webling 1995, pp42-5, for accounts of the way the members of the expedition threatened Aborigines with rifles during subsequent interactions.

⁵⁹ Lenore Coltheart, 1982. *Australian Misere: the Northern Territory in the nineteenth century*, PhD Thesis, Griffith University Queensland, p124.

⁶⁰ Correspondence from Stephen King Jnr to his mother and sister from Escape Cliffs written between 30 July and 7 August 1865, Mortlock Library, PRG 627/191.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; Memorandum from BT Finniss, 6 August 1865, SAPP No. 79/1868-69.

While Finnis typified Aborigines about the Adelaide River as ‘determined thieves, regular wreckers’, treacherous, ‘warlike and powerful’, at least one member of the expedition understood the complexities in the encounter between the expedition and local Aboriginal people. Ebenezer Ward wrote that ‘the treatment adopted towards the natives, in first encouraging their curiosity [for European goods] and then punishing them for it, was calculated to provoke the hostility they afterwards displayed’.⁶² Ward writes further:

I am sorry to be obliged to add that there does undoubtedly exist in the minds of some of our men a most brutal and blood-thirsty desire to butcher the comparatively helpless, ignorant, and for all we know well meaning inhabitants of this territory as if they were so many wild dogs and worse than all that our very fussy ex-military leader encourages this revolting propensity. When the natives first approached us they did so with every possible manifestation on their part of friendliness and confidence. It was certainly apparent from the first that they were what civilised people would call arrant thieves but how can it be expected that they should all at once appreciate the rights and property or be disposed to refrain from touching and if possible of appropriating everything about us that was strange to them, with our own example before their eyes of taking possession of country we must know they regard as their own, and of slaughtering for our own use game upon which they have been accustomed to subsist. I believe everyone who can boast a particle of humanity in his composition will endorse my feeling that except upon some very gross provocation we as the invaders of the land in which they had roamed at will all their lives should have been content to have protected our own property and to have taught these wild children of the bush one of principle and civilisation by respecting what actually belonged to them.⁶³

Ward’s comments highlight the tension within the expedition as to the appropriate treatment of Aborigines. However, he also identifies many other things of interest to this study. In particular, his statement that ‘we must know’ that Aboriginal people regarded the ‘country’ that the surveyors had ‘invaded’ as their own is important. This

⁶² BT Finnis to Honorable Chief Secretary, Henry Ayers, SAPP No. 89/1865; Ward’s comment cited in *Manhood* 1966, p213.

⁶³ *Diary of Ebenezer Ward, 1864-66*, Mortlock Library, PRG 1000/1 pp91-2.

‘knowing’ reflects an awareness gained from early observations of the devastating impact of European invasion on Aboriginal peoples in southern Australia.⁶⁴

Relations between Aboriginal people and the surveyors at the Escape Cliffs settlement changed dramatically following Finniss’s recall to South Australia to answer charges regarding the slow progress of the survey and the general management of the expedition. By December 1865, the Escape Cliffs settlement was under the command of JT Manton. Aboriginal people were regular visitors at the settlement and on Christmas Day were given bread, sugar and plum pudding. The number of Aboriginal people coming to the settlement and remaining overnight increased throughout the wet season and they were provided with an old outhouse and hen roost for a shelter. ‘Print frocks’ were made for the Aboriginal women at the camp by the non-Aboriginal women who had recently joined the survey party from south. Shirts and singlets were provided for the men. The doctor treated an Aboriginal man for a stingray wound, fireworks were let off for Aboriginal peoples’ amusement and at a ‘grand corroboree’ held one sundown ‘some members of our party sang a chorus song or two which seemed to please our sable brethren amazingly’.⁶⁵ ‘Our sable brethren’ about the settlement hunted and fished, supplying the settlement with large quantities of fish, crab, turtle and goose eggs. Aboriginal people accompanied members of the survey party on hunting and fishing trips, assisted the surveyors in obtaining bark for roofing a verandah and collected leeches for the doctor. The altered relations between the newcomers and locals is especially evident in Manton’s acknowledgement that Aboriginal people had kept the settlement so ‘well supplied with good wholesome fish’ that ‘we have seldom been a day for the past three months without one good meal for everybody in camp, which I have no doubt has been the means of keeping us all in such excellent health’.⁶⁶ Previously Finniss had travelled to Timor to collect supplies in an attempt to alleviate the ‘general feeling of depression’ at Escape Cliffs believed to have been caused ‘almost solely by the want of animal food, which had again failed’.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See Mark McKenna, 2002. *Looking for Blackfella’s Point: an Australian History of Place*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, p58.

⁶⁵ Journal of Clement Young, Clerk and Accountant, Escape Cliffs Settlement, November 1865 – July 1866, SAPP No. 80/1866.

⁶⁶ Correspondence from JT Manton to the Chief Secretary, 21 July 1866, SAPP No. 80/1866.

⁶⁷ Manhood 1966, p243.

In return for the supply of fish and contribution to the settlement's health, Aboriginal people were given bread and damaged flour. The inequality in this exchange is apparent in the observation that some Aboriginal people seemed 'very discontented because flour is not served out to each one daily whether they work or not, and we apprehend a row, as they are getting very bold and steal everything they can lay their hands on'.⁶⁸ Although relations had improved, the surveyors failed to perceive the disparity in the exchange. Aboriginal people supplied the *whole* settlement with fish but it was not to be expected that the surveyors should reciprocate by providing *all* the Aborigines present with flour. The anticipated row did not eventuate although precautions were taken to ensure the safety of the expedition against the two hundred or so Aboriginal men, women and children at the settlement.

Apart from the above-mentioned discontent, some bread being stolen from the bake-house and Aboriginal peoples' dogs attacking the settlement chickens, Manton believed that the 'behaviour' of the Aboriginal people had 'been as good as could be expected from savages'. Under his command, the expedition had experienced 'no disturbance with them of any account'. Manton blamed members of the expedition for any petty thefts which had occurred as they were 'responsible for leaving their tools and things out of their proper place'. Manton also wrote that Aboriginal people understood that the newcomers had 'no desire to injure them if they do not commit any depredation, and at the same time to fear us more, owing to their fully understanding the effects of the rifle from seeing the practice on the target'.⁶⁹ Another means of preventing hostile encounters was JWO Bennett learning to 'speak the native language pretty well, so much so that he can make the natives understand all our wishes, determinations, and displeasures, if they do anything wrong'.⁷⁰

Manton's willingness to open a dialogue with the Aboriginal people who moved to and from the Escape Cliffs settlement led to an appreciation of Aboriginal peoples' lifestyles not apparent during Finniss's command. With the settlement under Manton's command, we learn that Aboriginal people were skilled hunters and fishers, made canoes, spears, baskets and mats, held corroborees, burnt the country, and that they were comprised of distinct groups who had land laws which governed their behaviour

⁶⁸ Correspondence from JT Manton to the Chief Secretary, 21 July 1866, SAPP No. 80/1866.

⁶⁹ Despatches from JT Manton to the Chief Secretary, 11 January 1867, SAPP No. 16/1867.

⁷⁰ Despatches from JT Manton to the Chief Secretary, 3 December 1866, SAPP No. 16/1867.

when moving about the country.⁷¹ This was particularly evident in Manton's description of his disappointment in taking the Aboriginal man, Mira, exploring down the Adelaide River only to find that he knew little of the country outside his own territory and 'would not even cut a small bamboo from the river side, without first obtaining permission from the tribes whose country he said it was'.⁷² In July 1866, the Protector of Aborigines, JS Millner, wrote to the Chief Secretary that the Escape Cliffs survey party were 'visited by two tribes, the Adelaide River tribe called the Woolner and a tribe called the Larrakia which seems to be conquered and in tribute to the former'. These groups spoke distinct dialects although some younger members of the group were multi-lingual. Older men spoke only one dialect or the other.⁷³

Apart from the Larrakia's experience with the surveyors at Escape Cliffs, they also encountered the members of the survey expedition who made excursions to Port Darwin. Captain Howard's party saw 'four natives' on the beach across the harbour from the Darwin peninsula who were heading 'towards the vessel, making fires as they advanced'. The following morning these Aborigines approached the *Beatrice* by canoe. As they came on board they repeated 'whirra whirra', a sound not unlike the 'irru irru' recorded by Stokes some twenty-five years previously. A number of Aboriginal people were seen on the beaches of Darwin harbour as the *Beatrice* was worked around the coast towards Quail Island where some officers went on shore in search of turtle. They returned having seen 'one or two native wurleys on the island', a few quail but no turtle tracks.⁷⁴ Captain Howard and the crew of the *Beatrice* also explored the Darwin peninsula where they 're-discovered' the well sunk by Stokes' party at Point Emery. Howard's party located a swamp a short distance inland from this well where they obtained fresh water and where there was a 'native encampment'.⁷⁵ In the opening of the middle arm into the harbour, a canoe with an Aboriginal man and woman on board was seen close to the shore. As the surveyor's boat approached the occupants of the canoe 'jumped out and made for the bush carrying a spear with them'. A tomahawk and blanket were left by the surveyors in the canoe which already contained 'a spear, paddle, one large shell and two fish'. As the

⁷¹ See particularly the Journal of Clement Young, SAPP No. 80/1866.

⁷² Despatch JT Manton, 3 December 1866, SAPP No. 16/1867.

⁷³ Cited in D Ritchie, 1998. *A Painful Wrench for a European Mind: Land Claims and Representations of History and Aboriginal Tradition in the Darwin Hinterland*, PhD Thesis, La Trobe University.

⁷⁴ See Webling 1995, pp28-9 and Hutchison and Howard 1864, SAPP No. 18/1865.

surveyor's boat pulled away one of the Aborigines returned to the canoe and began examining these gifts.⁷⁶ Frederick Finnis led an overland expedition from Escape Cliffs to Port Darwin and although they saw 'no niggers', they came across many 'fresh tracks and one encampment which they could not have left more than a few hours'. Finnis described these beehive shaped 'worlies' as the 'best that I have seen in the country being about 4 feet high and six in diameter ... They were made of grass, very thickly laid on, with holes at the bottom just large enough to permit a man to squeeze himself in head first.'⁷⁷

Relations between Aboriginal people and the surveying party in the vicinity of Escape Cliffs may have improved under the leadership of Manton but the success in exploring and 'settling' the country did not. With the recall of Finnis to South Australia, the explorer John McKinlay was sent to Escape Cliffs to examine the country and report on the best site for a settlement. McKinlay's party left Escape Cliffs to explore the region during the first rains of the wet season in January 1866. They took six months to travel around 100 miles and were eventually forced to abandon travel by land. They constructed a raft from timber and horse hides and precariously made their way back to Escape Cliffs.⁷⁸ Stephen King Jnr's prophecy 'I do not think that the NT will come to anything and all the country round about the Adelaide River I think is worthless and good for nothing - I fear McKinlay will condemn the whole of it' came true.⁷⁹ McKinlay described the land seen so favourably at Escape Cliffs by Finnis as 'worthless' as a seaport and city. The huge tidal range at Escape Cliffs limited its future port facilities. The land intended for pastoralism would be seasonally flooded and the proposed agricultural land was 'entirely worthless ... the whole of it being

⁷⁵ Correspondence from BT Finnis, 2 May 1865, and Report from F Howard, May 1865 in SAPP No. 15/1865.

⁷⁶ Webling 1995, p39.

⁷⁷ Correspondence from FR Finnis to AE Martin, 28 April 1865, Mortlock Library, PRG 550/2. Finnis's description of these structures accords with the wet season shelters of the Larrakia described by Herbert Basedow in 1907. According to Basedow these dome like structures were called *albirrekin* and were made from flexible branches, joined at each section by strands of hibiscus bark and covered with paper-bark and grass with a side left open for access. The floor was similarly covered with bark and grass. If mosquitoes were bad the dome was completed by bending the rods down into the earth and covering the whole surface with bark leaving small openings in the base as an entrance and a hole in the top for the passage of smoke from the fire which was lit to keep insects out (Basedow H, 1907. 'Anthropological Notes on the Western Coastal Tribes of the Northern Territory of South Australia', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, Vol. 31).

⁷⁸ Powell 1988, p80.

⁷⁹ Correspondence from Stephen King Jnr to his parents, 21 April 1866, Mortlock Library, PRG 625/190.

composed of sand and ironstone gravel'.⁸⁰ McKinlay and the remainder of the Northern Territory survey expedition were recalled from the Northern Territory by the South Australian Government on 6 November 1866. The following year Captain Francis Cadell spent seven months exploring country around north-east Arnhemland and to the west between Adam Bay and the Victoria River. He subsequently recommended a settlement site near the Liverpool River but his report 'failed to arouse any enthusiasm' in a government beset by such local troubles as drought and recession.⁸¹ By late 1868, the five year time limit in which the South Australian government had undertaken to complete the survey of Northern Territory lands had nearly expired. After promising the land order holders that they would receive twice their original lands and another five years before they had to take it up, South Australia's Surveyor General, GW Goyder, was assigned the task of leading another expedition to the north with the urgent responsibility of finding a suitable site for the future capital city of the Northern Territory. After examining the reports from previous expeditions and explorers, Goyder set his sights on the harbour and land of Port Darwin.⁸²

The 1869 Northern Territory Surveying Expedition

When Goyder and the one hundred and twenty men comprising the second major Northern Territory survey expedition sailed into Darwin harbour and anchored opposite Fort Point on the afternoon of 5 February 1869, they were armed with expectations of the people they were about to encounter. Indeed, some of the members of the previous Escape Cliffs expedition were in Goyder's party. These men, together with information contained in the diaries, letters, newspaper accounts and official correspondence of previous explorers and surveyors would have informed Goyder's party that there were numerous Aboriginal groups located about the northern coast, that they spoke different languages and had distinct 'tribal domains'. They would have known something of Aboriginal peoples' lifestyles and were perhaps confused by the mixed representations of Aboriginal people as treacherous, bloodthirsty savages and incessant thieves and at other times as cheerful, willing workers and traders, able to supply the newcomers with

⁸⁰ Leith Barter, 1988. 'No Place for a City: Boyle Travers Finniss and the Establishment of the Escape Cliffs settlement', *Northern Perspective*, Vol. 11 No. 2 Wet Season, p8.

⁸¹ see Donovan 1981, p66; Powell 1988.

⁸² Powell 1988, p81.

large amounts of fish and crab, participating in the songs and dances of the Europeans and assisting them in their exploration of the region. Stephen King was with both the Escape Cliffs and Darwin expeditions. He described to his sister of the way Alaric Ward had been cut from 'the eyebrows to the jawbone' by Aborigines and how this killing was a 'warning to us all'.⁸³ JWO Bennett also accompanied both expeditions. He was interested in local Aboriginal people and sought to understand them further through learning their language. It is likely that both Bennett and King shared their mixed experiences and impressions of Aborigines with the members of Goyder's party.

The Aboriginal people who had perhaps been watching the *Moonta* sailing around the Northern Territory coastline, signalling to neighbouring Aboriginal groups of the stranger's impending arrival were also armed with expectations of these visitors. The settlement at Escape Cliffs provided the Wulna and the Larrakia with the opportunity of examining and travelling on European vessels, entering European tents and other living structures, tasting European food, wearing some of their clothing and obtaining such commodities as axes, knives, tomahawks, buckets and clothing as either gifts or through barter. They were also made aware of the European system of individual reward for labour performed. However, they were also exposed, especially during Finniss's period of command, to the white's propensity to punish alleged 'treacherous' acts by looting and burning Aboriginal people's living places, destroying their possessions and shooting their dogs. They were 'made to understand' the effect and accuracy of European weaponry through specific displays from the surveyors at target practice or when they shot ducks and geese and more directly through violence perpetrated against themselves. On a less tangible level, Aboriginal people were exposed to the rules which governed white society and to which they themselves were sometimes subjected. Aborigines may have observed the social hierarchy at Escape Cliffs settlement and understood that some of the expedition had the capacity to treat them humanely while others did not. They may have been perplexed by the colonisers' establishment of boundaries through which they were not allowed to pass and their appropriation of country that Aborigines regarded as their own. Aboriginal people would have observed the meeting rituals favoured by Europeans and begun incorporating them into subsequent exchanges. One of the questions that Aborigines

⁸³ Correspondence from Stephen King Jnr to his mother and sister from Escape Cliffs written between 30 July and 7 August 1865, Mortlock Library, PRG 627/191.

may have had of Goyder's expedition, was how long they intended visiting. Stokes and his crew had lasted three weeks. The Escape Cliffs settlement just over two years. It would be a fair enough question from locals who had experienced the colonisers as visitors in the past.

Given this prior knowledge and experience, it is not surprising that on the evening of the second day of the *Moonta*'s anchorage in Port Darwin, two Aboriginal men paddled their canoe abreast of the ship, spoke to members of the 'old NT party and seemed pleased to see us'.⁸⁴ The following day, two Aboriginal men took a 'very circuitous route' to show the newcomers to the fresh water that had been 'discovered' by the surveyors on the previous day.⁸⁵ Three days later, about thirty Aboriginal men, women and children were about the new landing place, they had gone fishing and had brought some very large crabs into the camp.⁸⁶ So great was the surveyor's initial confidence in the Aborigines that within a week of the survey party's arrival at Port Darwin and much to Goyder's displeasure, the men were sleeping aboard the ship with 'with no watch kept'.⁸⁷ Two weeks later, First Class Surveyor Woods complained to Goyder of the 'persistent encouragement and familiarity indulged in towards the natives by many of the men'. Woods had been obliged to order the Aborigines from the midst of the tents in the Fort Point camp where the expedition men had organised a 'concert and dance' for the Aborigines' 'special amusement'.⁸⁸ In what seems an over-reaction, Goyder ordered that Aborigines be prevented from entering the Fort Point camp and that the survey party carry loaded firearms while on watch and challenge those moving about outside the camp.⁸⁹ Twelve weeks after the expedition arrived at Darwin, Goyder reported that his party had 'carried on operations thus far without collision with the natives'. There were 'about sixty' Aborigines in the locality 'many of whom hang about the fence around the camp from daylight to dark'.⁹⁰ Aboriginal people were also present further about the region as indicated by Hoare's observation that after dark 'you

⁸⁴ Correspondence from Assistant Surgeon Hoare to his parents & sister, 7 February 1869. This letter is included in the diary of WW Hoare, titled '1869 Adventures. Port Darwin. My Diary. WW Hoare Pioneer. Landed February 5, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

⁸⁵ Diary kept by the Surveyor General, GW Goyder, 1 January – 28 September 1869, 7 February 1869.

⁸⁶ NT Surveying Expedition, Monthly Progress Report, AT Woods, February 1869, SA State Records, GRG 35/8.

⁸⁷ Diary kept by the Surveyor General, GW Goyder, 1 January – 28 September 1869.

⁸⁸ Correspondence from First Class Surveyor, AT Woods, to Surveyor General Goyder, 22 February 1869, SA State Records, GRG35/6 10/1869.

⁸⁹ GW Goyder, Memorandum to all officers and men, 3 March 1869, SA State Records, GRG 35/11 13/1869 Vol. 1 p16.

⁹⁰ GW Goyder, Northern Territory Survey Progress Report, 3 May 1869, SAPP No. 31/1869.

can see the native fires on all sides of the Port which look very much like the beacons of old'.⁹¹

While it is unclear who these 'sixty or so' Aborigines were, many of these early interactions suggest a continuation of the interactions between Aborigines and whites at the Escape Cliffs settlement.⁹² At the Fort Point settlement, Aboriginal people participated in songs, music and dance. They brought fish and crab into the camp for trade, provided bark for the roofing of the government store, caught an echidna for the expedition's doctor and supplied the expedition's naturalist, Alfred Shultze, with a canoe and paddle, spears, throwing sticks and grass armlets. Aborigines and members of the survey party readily engaged in a steady barter. Assistant Surgeon Hoare was an active trader and bartered old and unwanted articles for such things as string bags, bark and hair belts, spears, woomeras, reed and bead necklaces and bracelets, an emu feather ornament, woven baskets, shells, sea bird feathers, pea crabs and a headdress made from the bills of the spoonbill duck. Hoare illustrated many of these objects in his journal and described his fellow traders. The Aborigines painted themselves with 'red, yellow and white in different styles'. They 'thrust' pieces of bamboo into 'perforations' in their noses and wore 'girdles of twisted human hair'. Hoare was especially interested in the scars etched onto their bodies in which their 'flesh' was 'raised ... very much in relief nearly half an inch above their skins'.⁹³ While these interactions seemed amicable enough, Goyder warned his party that while Aborigines should be 'treated with forbearance and kindness but no familiarity [was] to be permitted'.⁹⁴ His instructions that the surveyors camp together while working away from the Fort Point camp suggest the hostility and the treachery he and others continued to expect from Aboriginal people. Although the 'blacks' had been 'extremely peaceable so far', Daniel Daly was warned by members of the Escape Cliffs expedition that the Aborigines were 'treacherous and will attack us when we least

⁹¹ The diary of WW Hoare, 29 April 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

⁹² Daniel Daly described the Aborigines camped near them in February as a 'tribe of miserable half starved blacks' but did not recognise them as the 'Mira or the Adelaide River tribe' (Correspondence from D Daniel Daly to his sister Harriet, 23 February 1869, Mortlock Library D6993 (L)). In late May Hoare transcribed a 'native vocabulary' for Dr Peel and the words used in his vocabulary bear a resemblance to those in Bennett's 'Vocabulary of the Woolner district dialect'. What is clear from later reports is that there were both Wulna and Larrakia people about the Fort Point settlement (The diary of WW Hoare, 29 April 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341; JWO Bennett, Vocabulary of the Woolner District Dialect' in George Taplin (ed), 1879. *The Native Tribes of South Australia*).

⁹³ The diary of WW Hoare, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

⁹⁴ Memorandum from GW Goyder re AJ Mitchell's survey party, 9 February 1869, SA State Records, GRS 1 NT9/1869.

expect them'. Consequently the surveyors slept out with 'loaded revolvers by our sides' and carried them in their belts while surveying.⁹⁵

Although Goyder asserted that there had been no 'collision with the natives' during the first few months of the surveyor's presence in Darwin, Hoare's diary for this period offers an alternate reading of these initial interactions. Hoare's diary includes fragments of information regarding the newcomer's anticipation or assumption of aggression or treachery by Aborigines and the means used by the surveyors to avert these supposed 'advances'. Seven weeks after the survey expedition arrived in Darwin, Hoare recorded, 'Natives required our attention. We moved our tent near to the store for protection against the natives'. The following day it was 'absolutely necessary to establish nightly guards for the security of our camp in case of the savages coming on us or our animals'. A week later, Hoare simply recorded, 'Natives troublesome'. On 6 May 1869, Hoare wrote ominously, 'we expected natives' and referred to an incident where a member of the survey party allegedly fired at an Aborigine.⁹⁶ Perhaps in retaliation to this alleged aggression Hoare recorded two days later, '200 (Natives on the warpath). A number of armed natives came and wanted to fight us. Old Mira tried to stop them, all the camp took up firearms'. No further mention was made of this altercation except that Dr Peel – who was in charge of the camp while Goyder was surveying further afield - organised an extra guard of four men to stand watch.⁹⁷ Dr Peel subsequently reported that the Fort Point camp had 'not been troubled much by the natives, for the last three days a few women, children and three men hang about the camp during the day and from what they say of the men the rest of the camp have gone a long way off'. Goyder was 'glad to hear that the natives had gone' but ordered there be no relaxation in the watches.⁹⁸ Goyder had already issued a warning that no person was to 'go out of sight of the camp unless accompanied by a second person, both of whom must be armed' and ordered that any person leaving or returning to the camp 'after dark on being challenged and not answering will run serious risk of being fired at'.⁹⁹ These brief entries challenge the representation of the friendliness and

⁹⁵ Letter from DD Daly East Arm Camp about twenty miles from Port Darwin camp to Harriet, 27 April 1869, Mortlock Library, D6993 (L).

⁹⁶ The diary of WW Hoare, 6-7 May 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

⁹⁷ The diary of WW Hoare, 8 May 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

⁹⁸ Correspondence between Goyder and Peel, 18 and 19 May, 1869, SA State Records, GRG 35/6 58/1869.

⁹⁹ Instructions from GW Goyder during his absence from camp, 8 May 1869, SA State Records, GRG 35/11 67/1869, p75.

peacefulness of the colonial encounter and allude to the fragile and tenuous negotiation that was taking place in this newly shared space.

By the last week of May these early signs of conflict came to a head with the spearing of expedition members, John Bennett and William Guy, who were camped at Fred's Pass, about forty miles from Port Darwin, near the Adelaide River. As noted previously, Bennett was with the Escape Cliffs expedition and had developed an interest in local Aborigines, recording their vocabulary, and had noted on a map their tribal districts, the Aboriginal names for 'localities' and the chiefs for these localities. While with Goyder's expedition Bennett maintained this interest – so much so that Goyder had 'personally remonstrated with him for his persistent familiarity with the natives'.¹⁰⁰ When a small group of Aboriginal people camped near the Fred's Pass surveying camp, Bennett recognised one of them as the 'old chief' who had tried to create a disturbance during the Escape Cliffs expedition. These Aborigines also recognised Bennett, calling out 'Bennettie' before they entered the surveying camp and respecting the boundary line surrounding the camp he showed to them. Bennett swam and hunted with these Aborigines, used his 'fowling piece' to shoot some ducks for them and allowed them to paint his face and breast. Bennett overheard the Aborigines plotting to attack the surveying camp and warned them against it. The following day some Aboriginal men carrying spears and womeras entered the surveying camp but were ordered to leave by Bennett. They returned shortly afterwards and speared Bennett and Guy before being driven off by gun fire and discord amongst themselves.¹⁰¹ Surveyor Knuckey returned to the Fred's Pass camp later that day and found Bennett and Guy badly wounded. He hurried towards Surveyor Mitchell's party camped four miles away on Acacia Creek and they soon notified the Fort Point camp.¹⁰² Dr Peel reached the wounded men a day after they were speared. He placed Guy under the influence of chloroform and extracted a piece of spear from his buttock. Bennett and Guy were then conveyed to the Fort Point camp. On reaching Fort Point, Dr Peel opened one of Bennett's wounds and discovered a nine inch spear head

¹⁰⁰ Surveyor-General's Report on Survey of Northern Territory, Fort Point, 27 September 1869, SAPP No. 157/1869.

¹⁰¹ Report from William Guy, 7 July 1869, SA State Records, GRS1 58/1869.

¹⁰² Monthly Progress Report, RR Knuckey, May 1869, SA State Records, GRG 35/8; RR Knuckey, 25 September 1869, SA State Records, GRS 35/6 114/1869.

embedded in one of his lungs which emitted a woosh of air once it had been removed. Bennett died half an hour later.¹⁰³

A number of 'Escape Cliffs' Aborigines were at the Fort Point camp after the spearing. Mira 'cried bitterly' while Guy's wounds were dressed and had the spear heads used in the attack shown to him.¹⁰⁴ He believed the murder to have been committed by a man named 'Mepinge, belonging to the Wodunger tribe, living about the head of the Adelaide'.¹⁰⁵ The surveyors generally blamed the 'Adelaide River blacks' for the spearing. However, Surveyor Knuckey provides some unintentional confusion by recounting that Bennett had told him before he died, that it was the 'old chief' who had speared him, that the names of two of the six Aboriginal people involved were Mee-pingee and Lor-me-quall and that they were 'Larrakeas and did belong to the Adelaide tribe'.¹⁰⁶

DJ Mulvaney notes that during initial encounters between Aborigines and Europeans, 'much confusion and some fatal disputes might have been avoided if Europeans had attempted to adapt to customary behaviour'.¹⁰⁷ The surveying party apparently knew that at least two of their members were to be killed by Adelaide River Aboriginal people as 'revenge on the part of those who had probably lost relatives in some previous contest with the whites'.¹⁰⁸ Bennett also allegedly knew that he was 'one of the marked victims of their tribe' having during the Escape Cliffs expedition 'excited the animosity of some of their tribe'.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, it appears that little attempt was made by the surveyors to negotiate with the Aborigines and try to allay this reprisal.

In Goyder's report to the South Australian government on the incident he claimed that the 'apparent friendliness' of the 'treacherous' Aborigines had 'so deceived' the

¹⁰³ Extract from the Journal of Dr Peel in correspondence re JWO Bennett's death, SA State Records, GRS1 58/1869.

¹⁰⁴ The diary of WW Hoare, 31 May 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

¹⁰⁵ Article written from Fort Point, 29 January 1870 and printed in the *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 March 1870.

¹⁰⁶ Report from Second Class Surveyor, RR Knuckey, 25 September 1869, SA State Records, GRS 35/6 114/1869.

¹⁰⁷ Mulvaney 1989, p4. Mulvaney argues further that a 'combination of ethnocentric contempt for an "inferior" race, fear of "savage" violence and a total lack of understanding of the social basis of Aboriginal law, resulted in many encounters [between Aborigines and whites] proving fatal' (Mulvaney 1989, p7).

¹⁰⁸ Surveyor-General's Report on Survey of Northern Territory, Fort Point, 27 September 1869, SAPP No. 157/1869.

surveying party that they went without arms and separated into smaller groups which were difficult to defend. Goyder wrote that he 'did not favour retaliative measures' believing that even if 'we could have identified the murderers' to retaliate 'would have been to secure to our successors, less able to defend themselves, a debt of lives to be paid for our own act of reprisal, unless we had annihilated the tribe, which was not to be thought of'. Goyder believed that it was futile to judge Aboriginal people under laws and language which they did not understand and, in a concession not often shown in assertions of Aboriginal 'treachery', recognised that the whites 'were in what to them appeared unauthorized and unwarrantable occupation of their country'. Goyder acknowledged the 'strict observance' of 'territorial rights' by distinct Aboriginal groups and believed it was 'scarcely to be wondered at if, when opportunity is allowed them, they should resent such acts by violence upon its perpetrators'. Although Goyder thought that there 'may be a few better inclined' he argued that they were 'over ruled by the general voice - which is for plunder and revenge for which the occupation of the country is to them ample cause'. He advised that people coming to the Northern Territory be 'constantly and vigilantly on guard and never without the means of defence'. Despite the fact that it was the would be linguist Bennett who had been killed, Goyder advocated the learning of Aboriginal languages so as to explain to Aboriginal people the 'object and motives of the whites' and 'satisfactorily convince' them of 'the futility and impolicy of opposition'. This, above all, would lead to the 'great object of a peaceful and useful intercourse with the numerous native tribes in this locality'.¹¹⁰

While Goyder did not favour 'retaliative' measures in response to this attack on two of his party, it is not clear that this did not indeed happen. Following the spearing of Bennett and Guy, the surveyors prevented potential attacks by Aborigines by having their revolvers ready and 'blazing away' at them before they could throw their spears. Daniel Daly confided to his sister that he was 'the officer of the guards to defend the camp against the natives, but there is no fear of an attack as we have frightened them away. *I have not shot any of the blacks myself, but several have been shot and the rest*

¹⁰⁹ *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 November 1869.

¹¹⁰ Surveyor-General's Report on Survey of Northern Territory, Fort Point, 27 September 1869, SAPP No. 157/1869.

keep away altogether now'.¹¹¹ A correspondent writing from Fort Point in January 1870 attests to this 'frightening away' of Aboriginal people by claiming that it had been 'repeatedly' stated in the Port Darwin camp that if any Aboriginal people had been shot following the spearing 'it would serve them right for Bennett's murder'. The correspondent did not agree arguing that nothing could 'justify the punishment of the innocent for the guilty'. This correspondent also questioned the Adelaide River chief, Mira, as to 'why the Larakeer blacks (those belonging to Port Darwin) kept away from us for so long?' Mira replied that shortly after Bennett's death some of the survey party had 'enticed them by offers of food and then shot them'. The correspondent concluded, '[t]his confirms a rumour current in the camp'.¹¹² While this story may have been 'rumour' it is obvious that the early months of the expedition's presence in Port Darwin was not the uncomplicated and peaceful encounter that has been described in popular historical accounts. Members of the survey party would have been aware of southern condemnation of punitive measures used against Aboriginal people as evidenced by the criticisms of Finnis's earlier acts of aggression against Aborigines. Other historians have also noted that particularly after the Myall Creek massacre of 1838 in which whites were hung for their murder of Aborigines, white settlers began to conceal information regarding violent actions against Aborigines.¹¹³ This would perhaps have made the expedition circumspect in divulging news regarding any retribution taken over Bennett's death.

Regardless of whether there was any retaliation, it is clear that relations between Aboriginal people and the survey expedition deteriorated rapidly after the spearing incident. When three Aboriginal men and a boy came into the camp to barter fish on the day of Bennett's funeral they were 'very fearful of approaching ... without first calling out for leave to do so'.¹¹⁴ Hoare continued to barter with local Aborigines but used an uncharacteristic hostility to depict those he bartered with. They were a 'lazy

¹¹¹ Emphasis added. Letter from DD Daly to Harriet Daly, Fort Point Main Depot, Port Darwin 27 September 1869 (Mortlock Library South Australia D6993 (L)). In her 1971 book, *The Surveyors: the story of the founding of Darwin*, Margaret Goyder Kerr reproduced much of this letter except the line stating that several Aboriginal people had been shot.

¹¹² Printed in the *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 March 1870.

¹¹³ McKenna 2002, p38; see also Jan Critchett 2003, 'Encounters in the Western District', Bain Attwood and SG Foster (eds), *Frontier Conflict. The Australian Experience*, National Museum of Australia, p60; Richard Baker, 1999. *Land is Life: From Bush to Town. The Story of the Yanyuwa people*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, p51.

¹¹⁴ Extract from the Journal of Dr Peel in correspondence re JWO Bennett's death, SA State Records, GRS1 58/1869.

lot' who 'required careful watching' because they had been 'grinding hoop iron for knives' with which to make spears.¹¹⁵ When Goyder was returning to Fort Point from surveying work about two weeks after the spearing incident, Aboriginal people had fired the long grass all around them and tried to suffocate his party as they neared Darwin. Recognising that these 'miserable specimens of humanity were only following their savage instincts in doing what they did', Goyder and his party 'abstained from injuring them' and through the 'coolness' of his men and 'our own knowledge of the country', made their way safely back to Fort Point. On their arrival Goyder was surprised to find the 'old native hangers on at the camp about as usual - tho' they knew of all that had transpired'. Goyder ordered them off at once and no longer 'permitted [them] to approach' the camp.¹¹⁶ Shortly after this incident a party of armed men stood ready to fire when some Aborigines were heard amongst the mangroves around Fort Point at night. The following day 'Blacks [were] prevented from visiting us'. The measures taken to ensure this were not detailed.¹¹⁷

On 22 June 1869 four canoes carrying Aboriginal people arrived at Fort Point and offered fish to the survey party. They were ordered away and the men warned not to 'give them any encouragement after their conduct'.¹¹⁸ When some of the survey party went to the Doctor's Gully well for water two days later 'they had to turn away the blacks', who numbered around thirty, were fully armed and offering resistance, before obtaining it. Under the threat of gunfire the Aborigines were eventually convinced to board their canoes and leave for Talc Head, on the opposite side of the harbour.¹¹⁹ Less than two weeks later Hoare writes, 'A native skirmish. We had to use firearms'. And on the following day, 'The natives came to the top of the hill but were driven back by firearms'.¹²⁰ When Aboriginal people 'suddenly appeared to men cutting timber' near the Fort Point Camp, a 'special guard' was appointed to escort the timber party and when Aboriginal people persisted in going towards this party 'a couple of shots were

¹¹⁵ The diary of WW Hoare, 1 June 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

¹¹⁶ Surveyor-General's Report on Survey of Northern Territory, Fort Point, 27 September 1869, SAPP No. 157/1869.

¹¹⁷ The diary of WW Hoare, 12 & 13 June 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341; GW Goyder Note Book No. 38, SA State Records, GRG 35/256/12.

¹¹⁸ The diary of WW Hoare, 22 June 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341; GW Goyder Note Book No. 38 SA State Records, GRG35/256/12.

¹¹⁹ Diary kept by the Surveyor General, GW Goyder, 1 January – 28 September 1869, 24 June 1869.

¹²⁰ The diary of WW Hoare, 5-6 July 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341. Goyder records this event as, 'Tuesday 6th July 1869 ... About a dozen blacks arrived at noon but were not allowed to come near the camp' (Diary kept by the Surveyor General, GW Goyder, 1 January – 28 September 1869).

fired which had the effect of sending them away'.¹²¹ Given such measures it is hardly surprising that when Hoare visited the Aboriginal camp on his way to Peel's Well in early July 1869 he found that it had been empty for some time.¹²²

On 30 July 1869, Goyder demanded that the armoury be manned at all times in preparation for giving out or receiving arms and issued further instructions that Aboriginal people be prevented from entering the Fort Point camp.¹²³ On the following day, the survey party at Fort Point saw 'some natives ... and about six canoes close to us on shore'. In the evening they saw a canoe with another inside it floating down by the current.¹²⁴ Goyder examined these canoes and discovered that two of his party had destroyed a number of canoes they found on the beach except for these two which had proved too strong so they set them adrift. Goyder was 'grieved and annoyed at this act of malicious folly' and, 'in strong language ... pointed out the probable consequence' of their actions as well as the injustice of the act, stating 'we now had given cause of aggression on their parts and this would probably follow. Our boats might be cut away, wells filled in and all possible damage done by them'. Goyder ordered that the canoes be retrieved and returned to their owners.¹²⁵

Goyder departed for Adelaide on 28 September 1869 with most of his survey party. He left strict instructions regarding further interactions with Aboriginal people, warning particularly that 'undue familiarity' would lead to 'difficulties' and 'impede the work on hand'. Aboriginal people were not 'allowed to approach within twenty yards of the camp unless engaged in work ordered to be done by the Senior Officer'. Nor were they to fetch wood or water for the expedition. No food was to be given them unless it was in payment for work done and the food bartered for 'fish or other natural products' had to be approved of and supervised by a Senior Officer. Aboriginal people were not allowed to enter the camp after sunset for any purpose and all officers and men were to 'avoid all intercourse with them after dark except such as may become imperatively necessary'.¹²⁶ Goyder need not have bothered. The scant mention of Aboriginal people in the surveyors' journals following the spearing of Bennett and Guy shows that

¹²¹ Diary kept by the Surveyor General, GW Goyder, 1 January – 28 September 1869, 23 July 1869.

¹²² The diary of WW Hoare, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

¹²³ Instruction from GW Goyder, 30 July 1869, SA State Records, GRG 35/11 130/1869, p156.

¹²⁴ The diary of WW Hoare, 31 July 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

¹²⁵ GW Goyder Note Book No. 38, SA State Records, GRG 35/256/12.

Aboriginal people remained away from the Fort Point settlement until December 1869. However, Aboriginal people remained about the region and were carefully monitored by the surveyors. While out looking for horses at Rapid Creek in September 1869, George Deane noted that he saw ‘Black tracks all about’ and later on an expedition to Jungle Creek – about eleven miles from Port Darwin – he saw ‘Nigger’s tracks on our track to jungle’.¹²⁷ Hoare also recorded that ‘natives tried to burn out’ a party who were searching for stock in mid-October 1869.¹²⁸

Conclusion

In 1870, the Northern Territory Protector of Aborigines was issued with instructions regarding Aborigines by the South Australian government on the understanding that they were intended as a guide only because of the ‘absence of any reliable information as to the numbers and condition of the aborigines of the Northern Territory’.¹²⁹ However, this chapter shows that the colonisers were not so bereft of knowledge about local Aborigines as they asserted. The interactions between Aborigines and the Northern Territory surveying expedition at the Escape Cliffs settlement allowed both parties to amass first hand knowledge and experience of each other. What is particularly important to this thesis is that the survey party at Escape Cliffs understood that the Aborigines they met with were comprised of numerous and distinct groups, who spoke distinct languages, were responsible for specific tracts of land and obeyed laws which governed their behaviour when moving about neighbouring groups’ country.

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed the way that ‘friendliness’ was presented in historical texts as the dominant characteristic of encounters between the Larrakia and the colonisers. This chapter shows that it was not innate friendliness that encouraged the Larrakia to ‘welcome’ the surveyors to Darwin, but a pragmatic response based on their prior experience and knowledge of Europeans. This was reflected in some of the early interactions between Aborigines and the members of Goyder’s survey expedition,

¹²⁶ Notice issued to the Senior and Junior Officers and men of the Expedition by GW Goyder, 23 September 1869, SA State Records, GRG35/11/Vol 1 2/69.

¹²⁷ Diary of GP Deane, 23 September 1869, Mortlock Library, D2875 (L).

¹²⁸ The diary of WW Hoare, October 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

¹²⁹ Instructions to the Government Resident of the Northern Territory, SA State Records, GRS1 NT194/1872.

such as Aborigines supplying crab and fish to the survey party, the exchange of gifts and bartering of other commodities and the joint participation in musical entertainment.¹³⁰ This chapter also makes it clear that the colonisation of Darwin was not the straight-forward, peaceful exercise that has been presented in historical texts. Despite the initial ease of relations between Aborigines and the colonisers, a close examination of the historical record shows that 'friendliness' was not the dominant characteristic of their encounters. Relations between Aborigines and whites became strained within seven weeks of the surveyor's arrival in Port Darwin and culminated, two months later, in the spearing of two members of the survey party at Fred's Pass. Following this incident, relations between the Aborigines and the survey party worsened and the Aborigines who had constantly been about the Fort Point settlement, withdrew for many months. The following chapter looks at the return of the Larrakia to their camp at Fort Point and their various interactions with the colonisers. While tension between the two groups continued to exist, it is also clear that an alliance developed between the Larrakia and the colonisers.

¹³⁰ For further exploration of these exchanges see Harris JW, 1984. "Killing Me Softly with His Song": Why did the Larrakia people sing to Goyder in 1869?', *Northern Perspective*, Vol. 6 No.s 1&2.

Chapter Two: Exchange and Alliance

Following Goyder's return to Adelaide he wrote a report detailing his 'experiences and opinions' of Aborigines, the 'prospect of our relations with them and the best means of coming to an understanding of the various tribes in the locality' of Darwin.¹ This chapter begins by looking at this report and the complete negation by Goyder of any hostilities between his survey party and Aboriginal people as discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter is also interested in Goyder's understanding of Aboriginal people's land rights, particularly in light of the attention paid to Aboriginal land rights by the Colonial Office during the colonisation of South Australia in the 1830s. The chapter then turns to the gradual return of Aboriginal people to Darwin and further challenges the simplistic notion of Larrakia friendliness being the overwhelming characteristic of the encounters between Aborigines and the colonisers. It looks at one interaction in particular, the bartering of goods, to show that such transactions and interactions were more complex than a shallow interpretation of them as 'friendly' implies. The chapter concludes by looking at the motivations and ramifications of the political alliance that developed between the Larrakia and the new settlers on their country.

Given Goyder's persistent warnings to the survey party against encouraging too much 'familiarity' with Aboriginal people, it is not likely that Goyder was able to gain - or Aboriginal people were willing to provide him with - an understanding of their culture. This is reflected in his report on Aborigines written on his return to Adelaide, particularly in his observations that Port Darwin Aborigines, that is coastal people, differed only 'slightly' to Aborigines in the 'interior' or the far north of South Australia, that is, desert people; that Aboriginal men about Darwin treated Aboriginal women better than their southern counterparts; and that Aborigines were devoid of religious feelings as they did not 'practice any observable religious ceremonies'.²

In spite of such incidents as the spearing of Bennett and Guy, Aborigines removing surveying pegs marking out the Fort Point township, Aborigines firing country around the surveyors, the dispute near the Doctor's Gully well and the many aggressive

¹ Report from Surveyor-General, GW Goyder, to the Secretary of Crown Lands and Immigration, 23 November 1869, SA State Records, GRG 35/12 27/1869.

measures used to prevent Aboriginal people from entering the Fort Point settlement, Goyder wrote of the ease with which the survey party 'were allowed to pass in every direction through the country and to encamp without molestation at the same waters, and in the midst of numbers of the natives'. He also believed that Aboriginal people 'appeared to have thoroughly realised' that they were 'as far from danger as they appeared to be free from fear', that they 'never deceived us as to the directions of localities, or waters, we wished to find and they respected the records we left on the ground'.³ Goyder attributed these good relations solely to the absence of sexual contact between the survey party and Aboriginal women. Although the survey party had spent the last four months that Goyder was with the expedition warning Aborigines away from the Fort Point settlement, Goyder confidently detailed the measures required to gain the 'successful cooperation' of Aboriginal people in the colonisation process. This involved convincing Aborigines that 'no harm or injury is any way intended to them'. Such conviction would inspire their confidence and enable the settlers to learn Aboriginal languages and consequently make Aboriginal people 'appreciate the conduct and motives of those seeking to develop the resources of the country - if not to aid them'.⁴

As discussed previously, Goyder acknowledged that the survey expedition was trespassing on land which Aboriginal people regarded as their own. This observation was substantiated in his original Northern Territory survey map on which he identified the portions of four native districts, the 'Woolner, Woolner-Larakeeyah, Larakeeyah and Warnunger'.⁵ However, the notion that Aboriginal people could continue to enjoy their lands as they had done prior to invasion was not entertained by Goyder. He believed that the 'progress of civilisation and settlement' would 'advance' and 'render it difficult if not impossible for their former mode of life to be continued, by the absence of game, which previous to settlement was their only means of sustenance'. Accordingly, Goyder advised that Aboriginal people should be taught English, 'undergo a certain amount of training to discipline their minds', 'weaned from their

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Surveyor-General's Report on Survey of Northern Territory, Fort Point, 27 September 1869, SAPP No. 157/1869.

wandering and irregular habits' and be provided with food and clothing.⁶ With these provisions in place, Goyder's conscience regarding the invasion of Aboriginal lands was clear. However, the notion of Aborigines having rights to land and the 'wickedness' of invading Aboriginal lands had been a significant feature of the British humanitarian debate during the 1830s and '40s and played a part in the colonisation of South Australia.

Aboriginal land rights and the colonisation of South Australia

Henry Reynolds shows that as early as 1834 the British humanitarian, Thomas Buxton, drew attention to the 'wickedness of our proceedings as a nation, towards the ignorant and barbarous natives of countries of which we seize'. Buxton asked, 'What have we Christians done for them? We have usurped their lands, kidnapped, enslaved and murdered themselves. The greatest of their crimes is that they sometimes trespass into the lands of their forefathers'.⁷ At an 1835-36 Select Committee chaired by Buxton, considerable attention was given to indigenous peoples' land rights. In his final report on the Committee Buxton argued:

the native inhabitants of any land have an incontrovertible right to their own soil; a plain and sacred right, however, which seems not to have been understood. Europeans have entered their borders, uninvited, and when there, have not only acted as if they were undoubted lords of the soil, but have punished the natives as aggressors if they have evinced a disposition to live in their own country.⁸

In any future land colonisation reformers like Buxton argued that certain provisions be recognised. Indigenous rights to land based on prior possession were to be recognised; colonisation to proceed on the basis of negotiation for the purchase of land; that Aborigines receive compensation for the land surrendered and disruption caused by the settlers; Aborigines be provided with reserves resting on secure title; and that colonial

⁶ Report from Surveyor-General, GW Goyder, to the Secretary of Crown Lands and Immigration, 23 November 1869, SA State Records, GRG 35/12 27/1869.

⁷ Henry Reynolds, 1992. *The Law of the Land*, Penguin, Ringwood, pp83-6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p86.

governments use money from land sales to provide for the education and welfare of Aboriginal people.⁹

The arguments of the humanitarians and the British Colonial Office's acknowledgement of the brutality and violence involved in the establishment of the other Australian colonies inspired the Office's attempts to have indigenous peoples' land rights recognised in the founding of the colony of South Australia in 1836. The Office made provisions for the appointment of a Protector of Aborigines who was to ensure that the land occupied and enjoyed by Aboriginal people was not appropriated without their consent. If consent was given, treaties were to be negotiated. The Colonial Office also tried to have the principles of indigenous land rights enshrined in a clause in the Letters Patent which read:

Provided always, that nothing in these our Letters Patent contained shall affect or be constrained to affect the rights of any Aboriginal natives of the said Province to the actual occupation or employment in their persons or in the persons of their descendants of any lands now actually occupied or enjoyed by such Natives.

Reynolds argues that these provisions were a 'clear definition of native title as understood in other parts of the Empire' and that this same clause, without any substantial change of wording, was used in the 'charter which established New Zealand as a separate colony in December 1840 and provided for Maori native title'.¹⁰ The Colonial Office recognised that Aboriginal people had property rights and that 'they should continue to enjoy those rights of possession which could and should be inherited by their descendants like any other forms of property'. However the South Australian Colonisation Commission, a private organisation formed to colonise South Australia on the premise that land would be distributed on a systematic basis to private, free citizens, did not share the Office's commitment to recognising indigenous rights in land. In Reynolds' opinion, while the Commission appeared to accept the provisions regarding Aboriginal land requirements, they had little intention of incorporating Indigenous land tenure into their colonisation plan and used a legal interpretation of the word 'occupy' to thwart the provisions laid out by the Colonial Office. While the Colonisation

⁹ Ibid., pp94-6.

¹⁰ Ibid., p110.

Commission finally resolved to reserve one-fifth of all saleable lands in an endowment fund for Aborigines, Charles Rowley notes that this promise was never fulfilled.¹¹ The Colonial Office was too distant to have any effective influence, while public opinion in the colony itself was strongly opposed to Exeter Hall humanitarians ‘interfering’ in colonial affairs. Thus, the Colonial Office could not force the Colonisation Commission to honour its demands respecting recognition of Aboriginal land rights.¹² While attempts were made to safeguard the interests of Aborigines, Rowley notes that colonisation followed the same violent course as in other states. Within four years of the foundation of the South Australian colony, the first officially sanctioned punitive expedition had been dispatched and two Aborigines in the Coorong were hung for their alleged massacre of the passengers off a wrecked ship. A few years later, a second expedition resulted in the shooting of thirty Aborigines.¹³

Reynolds dubs the 1830s pressure for recognition of Aboriginal rights to land as the ‘first land rights movement’ and suggests that although it was practically forgotten by 1860 its importance today lies in the knowledge that the ‘basic principles of native title were so clearly understood and so forcefully stated one hundred and fifty years ago’ and that the colonists of the time made an informed decision to reject this notion.¹⁴ Mark McKenna has recently argued that Reynolds ‘generous’ interpretation of the instructions from the Colonial Office is contentious on a number of grounds. One source of contention is that the law can be interpreted in different ways and that the concern of the Colonial Office for Aboriginal land rights ‘cannot be read at face value’.¹⁵ Heather Goodall shows this in her interpretation of the motivation behind the Colonial Office’s attempts to formulate a co-ordinated policy to recognise the property rights of Aborigines in New South Wales in the late 1840s. The British Secretary of State for Colonies, Earl Henry Grey, argued that although the ‘mutual rights’ of Aborigines and pastoralists on Crown leases were already recognised under existing legislation, a further policy needed to be formulated which would allowed for the allocation of ‘small tracts of land [to Aborigines]... to be cultivated either by them, or

¹¹ CD Rowley, 1970. *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, Aboriginal Policy and Practice - Volume 1*, ANU Press, Canberra, p75.

¹² Exeter Hall being the headquarters of missionary and humanitarian organisations in London.

¹³ Rowley 1970, pp76-8.

¹⁴ Reynolds 1992, p169.

¹⁵ Mark McKenna, 2002. *Looking for Blackfella’s Point: an Australian History of Place*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, pp56-9.

for their advantage'.¹⁶ Goodall argues that it was this proposal which showed the 'great distance between the British reformer's position and any recognition of the traditional meanings of land for Aboriginal people'. The small size of the reserves proposed would deliberately limit Aboriginal people's hunting abilities and compel them to either attempt cultivation or seek outside work to survive. These small reserves were the means by which Aboriginal landowners would be transformed into the 'mythologised agrarian ideal of yeoman farmers'.¹⁷

McKenna argues further that the political culture prevailing in London during the 1830s and '40s meant that the Colonial Office was 'acutely aware of the importance of maintaining a politically sensitive and humane legacy on the public record' and that it was the 'necessary rhetoric of colonial rule' to express concerns for the rights of Aborigines. McKenna does not believe that there is sufficient evidence to show that the colonisers understood they had a choice between either obeying the instructions of the Colonial office regarding Aboriginal land rights or ignoring them. For McKenna, this presentation of the recognition of Aboriginal land rights as a choice is too simple an interpretation of the complexity of interactions between Aborigines and settlers on the frontier.¹⁸

This and subsequent chapters look at the recognition of Larrakia people's land rights in the colonial settlement of Darwin. While there was no real recognition of Larrakia people's land rights, as could be expressed in the negotiation of a land deal or the signing of a land treaty with the Larrakia, this thesis argues that the colonisers continued to hold a moral anxiety about the invasion of Aboriginal lands. This was reflected in the various ways that the colonisers tried to atone for their invasion through the distribution of rations and the allocation of reserves (as discussed in chapter five). It was also shown in the continued recognition that the Larrakia people had ongoing rights to their land within the town area.

Reynolds may be right that the principles regarding the recognition of Aboriginal native title were forgotten by 1860. However, it is clear that by the time the South

¹⁶ Heather Goodall, 1996. *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, Allen & Unwin in association with Black Books, St Leonards, p49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp49-50.

¹⁸ McKenna 2002, pp56-9.

Australian government turned its attention to the Northern Territory, they were aware of the impact their invasion of Aboriginal lands had on Aboriginal people's survival. In 1860, a Select Committee was appointed by the South Australian government to consider the condition of Aboriginal people in South Australia. The Committee heard evidence as to the parlous conditions of Aborigines in South Australia and questioned the 'responsibilities of civilised nations in taking possession of territory previously occupied by nomadic and uncivilised tribes'.¹⁹ The Committee understood that Aborigines had lost a great deal but gained little through contact with Europeans and consequently asked, 'what is the best possible means of compensating them for injuries they have sustained, or of mitigating the evils to which, so far as they are concerned, our occupation of the country has led – or awarding compensation for injuries sustained by them consequent on the forced occupation of their country'.²⁰ The Committee made recommendations in keeping with the belief that they were dealing with people who were doomed to extinction.²¹ The Chief Protector's office, closed in 1856, was to be restored and Sub-Protectors appointed to attend to Aborigines' physical needs, particularly the distribution of blankets to the sick and elderly. Aborigines were to be trained in 'steady industrial habits and manners of civilised life'. Once this was achieved 'every exertion' was to be made to 'eradicate their vile superstitions and barbarous rites' which would leave their minds 'open for the reception of the simple truths of Christianity'.²² Any educational effort was to be based on the principle of separating Aboriginal children from their parents. Most of the small reserves that had been set aside for Aboriginal people in South Australia were being leased back to non-Aboriginal farmers. Even so, the Committee recommended that further reserves be granted, not for Aboriginal use but for leasing back to settlers in order to raise revenue to pay for Aboriginal sustenance and meet other costs. Given that the Aboriginal race was doomed it was only a question of time before the reserves would revert back to the Crown. Rowley concludes, '[a]s the Aborigines were "dying out", the expediency of allowing the process to continue, and of being as kind as possible in the meantime,

¹⁹ Those appearing before the Committee included clerics, missionaries, police officers, land owners, Protectors of Aborigines, the Superintendent of Convicts and, what Tony Austin believes to be 'an astonishing concession at that time', 'Certain Aboriginal Natives' (Tony Austin, 1992. *Simply the Survival of the Fittest: Aboriginal Administration in South Australia's Northern Territory 1863-1910*, Historical Society of the Northern Territory, p5.

²⁰ SAPP No. 165 of 1860. Cited in Austin 1992, pp5-6.

²¹ See Russell McGregor, 1997. *Imagined Destinies. Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, for a thorough examination of the application of the 'doomed race theory' to the settlement of the Northern Territory.

²² Cited in Austin 1992, p6.

became here (as in other colonies) the basis for practice'.²³ In line with this the churches established the Poonindie, Point McLeay, Killalpaninna and Kopperamanna missions in South Australia with the aim of segregating and protecting Aboriginal people in their supposedly declining years.²⁴

The South Australian government's desire to avoid the violence and bloodshed which occurred during the colonisation of other parts of Australia is evident in the instructions issued to the Northern Territory Government Resident and the Protector of Aborigines in 1870 (see Appendix One). The instructions issued were almost identical to those issued to Finniss's six years previously and again placed tremendous emphasis on the importance of establishing a 'friendly feeling' between the colonisers and local Aborigines. The Government Resident was to exercise the 'greatest caution and forbearance in communicating with them' and to 'studiously avoid giving them the slightest offence'. He was to encourage communication with Aborigines and be prepared to trust them, but at the same time 'take every precaution against them taking you by surprise'. 'Above all', the Government Resident must 'warn [his] party to abstain from anything like hostility towards them, and to avoid the extremities of a conflict, which must only be had recourse to in self-defence, and only then from absolute necessity'. However, the Government Resident was to show the Aborigines that while he was 'anxious to gain their good will and confidence by kindness and judicious liberality, you are able to repel, and, if necessary, to punish, aggression'. The Protector of Aborigines was also told that it was a 'matter of great importance, not only to the natives themselves, but to the expedition which you accompany, that a friendly feeling should exist between them and the Europeans; and you should therefore be careful to lose no opportunity which may present itself of bringing about and fostering such a desirable state of things'.²⁵ Points nine and ten of the instructions issued to the Protector are important to the discussion below. The Protector of Aborigines was to ensure that any 'provisions' supplied by Aborigines 'for the use of the settlers are fairly paid for by barter or otherwise'. The Protector was also instructed to offer Aborigines

²³ Rowley 1970, 204.

²⁴ Peggy Brock, 1995. 'South Australia' in Ann McGrath (ed), *Contested Ground. Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*, Allen & Unwin, p222.

²⁵ The Medical Officer was also instructed to provide medical aid to Aborigines as 'Kindness and humanity in the discharge of this part of your duty may be attended with the most beneficial results, not only as a means of reconciling the two races, but of affording you an opportunity of studying the diseases which may be found endemic in the Territory (Contained in the Instructions to the Government Resident of the Northern Territory, SA State Records, GRS1 NT194/1872).

‘every inducement ... to work for the settlers; and you should endeavour to make them feel perfect confidence that, in such cases, their services will be properly rewarded’.²⁶

A spear for a pocket handkerchief

Aboriginal people returned to their camp on Fort Hill during the second week of December, 1869, after an absence of nearly six months. However, when they attempted to visit the Fort Point settlement they were ‘driven’ away under instructions from Dr Peel who had been left in charge of the much reduced survey expedition.²⁷ The following day ‘half the [surveying] camp’ went to the ‘blacks camp’ on top of Fort Hill and carried out some bartering, pleading ignorance to any previous instructions regarding Aboriginal people when Dr Peel remonstrated with them.²⁸ Dr Peel posted a notice forbidding the survey party to hold ‘intercourse with the Aborigines for barter, or in any other way whatsoever’.²⁹ However, the bartering which had begun almost at once on the arrival of the expedition in Port Darwin but then ceased with the spearing of Bennett and Guy was resumed with vigour. On Boxing Day 1869 several men broke the official orders and visited the Aboriginal camp. The following day, Mira, and his brother, Timoury, approached the Fort Point settlement with a gift of live ducks but were ordered away by Doctor Peel. Mira retreated and was seen the following day camped at Peel’s Well ‘with about a dozen of his tribe’. Many of the survey party visited them and a ‘brisk barter was carried on’. Dr Peel consequently issued another order which prohibited barter and the men leaving the camp without permission. Peel was made more cautious and ‘suspicious’ by the addition of between twenty and thirty Aboriginal men to Mira’s camp and reminded the survey party that these Aborigines did ‘not belong to this district but to that in which Mr Bennett was murdered’.³⁰

²⁶ The Instructions were issued to JS Millner who became Protector of Aborigines when Douglas took his place as Government Resident (Instructions to the Government Resident, Northern Territory, SA State Records, GRS1 NT194/1872). These instructions were repeated with a slight variation in October 1873. The main difference being that there were no provisions in the latter instructions to recognise the chiefs of the tribes and confer a badge or medal upon him (Instructions to the Government Resident and Protector of Aborigines, Northern Territory, Crown Lands Office, Adelaide, 6 October 1873, SA State Records, GRS1 201/1874).

²⁷ Rough Journal of Dr Peel, 13 December 1869, SA State Records, GRS 1 4/1870.

²⁸ Rough Journal of Dr Peel, 12 December 1869, SA State Records, GRS 1 4/1870; Diary of GP Deane, 12-13 December 1869, Mortlock Library, D2875.

²⁹ By order Hugh MacCallum, Fort Point, Port Darwin, 12 December 1869, Stephen King Jnr Collection, Mortlock Library, PRG 627/185.

³⁰ Rough Journal of Dr Peel, 27 December 1869, SA State Records, GRS 1 4/1870.

Not all those remaining in the Fort Point settlement were interested in interacting with Aborigines. When some unarmed Aboriginal people came to the stockyard on top of the tableland in early January 1870 and Mira walked down towards the camp, one of the officers ‘pelted him with stones’. Mira stood his ground ‘until one of the guards went up to him and asked him in the native dialect to keep outside the camp and he walked back’. He remained by the stockyard fence talking with the guards who had been ordered to fire over their heads and send them away but refrained from doing so. Mira and his countrymen returned to their camp but shortly afterwards ‘several carbine and revolver shots’ were heard from the location of their camp. This report continues:

The guard rushed down and found the camp completely deserted by the natives, but more than half the things the poor creatures had received in barter were lying about, and there was every evidence of the place having been left in haste and confusion. We have not seen anything of the natives since. Whether they were fired upon or not it is difficult to say, but the shots were distinctly heard in the camp, and the firm belief is that they were fired at the natives. The sooner this system of dealing with the natives is put an end to the better, for it is one of the first principles of their savage nature to retaliate an injury, and more especially one inflicted without cause or reason.³¹

Relations between Aborigines and Europeans in Darwin changed following the arrival of the Acting Northern Territory Government Resident, J Stokes Millner, to take charge of the Fort Point settlement in February 1870. Millner tried to exert some control over the bartering that had been occurring by giving his newly arrived staff (of forty-four people) and the remaining expedition men ‘special permission’ to exchange damaged flour for turtle and to barter for shells.³² However, after visiting the Aboriginal camp on the tableland and discovering that some of the men had taken articles from the Aborigines ‘without anything being given in return’, Millner placed a notice ‘prohibiting barter with the natives except with his permission’.³³ Nine days later stock-keeper, George Deane, confessed in his journal, ‘Went down to Fannie Bay at 3

³¹ Report written from Fort Point, 29 January 1870 and printed in *The Adelaide Advertiser*, 14 March 1870.

³² Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 17 February 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 NT80/1870.

³³ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 8 March 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 NT80/1870.

... got a fine shell off Blacks broke orders by all'.³⁴ On learning that threats had been made to shoot the Aborigines to make them give up their shells and other goods, Millner was forced to issue another notice 'prohibiting barter with the natives except in the presence of the Protector or someone appointed by him'.³⁵ HC MacCallum was subsequently appointed as Sub-Protector of Aborigines and the 'stock yard fence' as the place for barter which was scheduled to take place every day between 11am and 12 noon, except Sunday. Aborigines subsequently exchanged shells and spears with the new settlers for 'scraps of bread and articles of clothing' and Mr MacCallum thought that the new arrangement was likely to work satisfactorily'.³⁶

By the time that Darwin was colonised, a scientific interest had developed in collecting natural specimens as well as artefacts from people indigenous to the regions that explorers travelled to.³⁷ The naturalist with Goyder's expedition, Alfred Shultze, collected natural specimens and was offered these and their own manufactured goods by local Aboriginal people. The specimens collected or obtained by Shultze included a native canoe, paddles, spears, throwing sticks and a 'few trifling curiosities', plant specimens, seeds, bird and animal skins, crustacea, insects, snakes, fish, air-plants, sponges, coral and live animals – in 'total of over eight thousand specimens'.³⁸ However, the above accounts show the way that many members of the survey party, not just the naturalist, engaged in bartering with local Aboriginal people. These accounts raise such questions as to why the colonists constantly defied orders and regulations to engage in barter with Aboriginal people? Why were they so anxious to obtain goods from Aboriginal people, goods they often had little direct use for, that they tried to secure them at gunpoint? With what expectations and meanings did both Aboriginal people and the new settlers enter into these transactions?

Nicholas Thomas highlights the way that 'non-scientific' members of expeditions engaged in the collection of 'curios' from indigenous people encountered in the Pacific

³⁴ Diary of GP Deane, 17 March 1870, Mortlock Library, D2875.

³⁵ The Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 20 May 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 NT80/1870.

³⁶ The Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 21 May 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 NT80/1870.

³⁷ See Philip G Jones, 1996. *'A Box of Native Things': Ethnographic Collections and the South Australian Museum, 1830-1930*, PhD, Department of History, University of Adelaide, for a thorough examination of ethnographic collecting over a hundred year period.

³⁸ Northern Territory Survey Progress Reports, 3 May 1869 and 27 September 1869, SAPP No. 31/1869 and SAPP No. 157/1869 respectively.

out of a curiosity which lasted either until the object was damaged or the next ‘curiosity’ was offered up. He also draws on the journals of Captain James Cook to show that in the eighteenth century there had developed such a ‘prevailing Passion for curiosities’ that these goods were readily traded between the Europeans who collected them or alternatively found their way onto markets ‘back home’ where they were sold at inflated prices.³⁹ Thomas describes the way that the Tongans parodied this intense desire of explorers for collecting ‘curiosities’ by offering up ‘sticks stones and whatnot’ for exchange and how one ‘waggish boy’ in particular took a ‘piece of human excrement on a stick’ and offered it to ‘every one of our people he met with’.⁴⁰

Assistant Surgeon Hoare did exhibit some discernment in the objects he obtained while in Port Darwin. On one occasion he, ‘got some curiosities from natives. I exchanged a *new* spear with an *old* one with C.’ Later he ‘obtained two large fishing spears and a basket ... I obtained another native basket only *better* than that got yesterday’.⁴¹ It is Hoare as the budding scientist who strives to collect better quality and a greater variety of objects. However, the way that Hoare openly admits that he was exchanging his old and unwanted articles for these artifacts raises the question of the value Hoare attached to the actual goods he acquired. The journals of the surveyors and the collection held in the South Australian Museum show that spears were the most traded item offered by Aboriginal people from Darwin. The willingness of the survey party to obtain spears is notable given their earlier observations of the inferiority of indigenous weaponry. These spears were ‘curios’ reflective of the ‘savage place’ and people from where they came rather than practical or admired objects.

Thomas argues that it was not necessarily the actual object obtained by the explorers that was important but the meaning or personal value attached to it. What was important about collecting was not what could be said about or done with the specimen collected ‘but the way that collected material attests to the fact of having visited remote places and observed novel phenomena’.⁴² It is perhaps no coincidence that the passion for bartering in Darwin increased following new arrivals to the town or with the projected return of the survey party to the south. As Thomas states, ‘indigenous

³⁹ Nicholas Thomas, 1991. *Entangled Objects. Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, Harvard University Press, p140.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p128.

⁴¹ The diary of WW Hoare, 3 May and 20 May 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

artifacts virtually became trophies which reflected the broader experience and mastery of a passage around the world on the part of the traveller'.⁴³

What was also important were the actual encounters between Aborigines and whites that the transactions necessitated. Bartering allowed the survey party to have more intimate or 'novel' interactions with Aboriginal people. This is particularly evident in Hoare's account of the 'delight' of a young Aboriginal woman to whom he had given a looking glass and his own delight in the way that she had 'looked at herself with such a contorting countenance as to cause convulsed laughter'.⁴⁴ Hoare also provided vivid descriptions of Aboriginal people and was able to record some of their vocabulary – both things which were perhaps made possible by the interactions occasioned during bartering.⁴⁵

Thomas has looked at the way historians have implied that Aboriginal people's loss of their own culture and political autonomy was the result of a fatal attraction for European goods.⁴⁶ This 'fatal' attraction was palpable in February 1872 when the Larrakia entered the Fort Point settlement 'in a frantic state, asking everyone to lend them spears, as a large number of the neighbouring tribe, the Woolnahs were about to attack their camp'.⁴⁷ One interpretation of this incident is that the Larrakia had naively engaged in so much trade that they had not kept enough spears to fight off a hostile neighbouring group. This raises the question as to whether the Larrakia exhibited the same intense desire as the surveyors to acquire European goods that they placed themselves in danger from attack. A simple interpretation would deduce so. However, I follow both Thomas and Philip Jones in arguing in favour of looking at the deeper meaning of bartering, of exploring the political dynamics of these early transactions between indigenous people and the colonisers with the aim to establish 'that the early

⁴² Thomas 1991, p141.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p143.

⁴⁴ The diary of WW Hoare, 30 April 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341.

⁴⁵ Hoare described Aboriginal women as 'smaller than their men but lanky with straight hips and sides'. He also provides a description *and illustration* of older and younger Aboriginal women's breasts. It is difficult to imagine Hoare describing his mother's, sister's or grandmother's breast in the same manner and is suggestive of the inferiority with which he considered Aborigines (The diary of WW Hoare, 9 April 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341).

⁴⁶ Thomas 1991, p85.

⁴⁷ *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 February 1872.

phases of their entanglement were grounded in local cultural and political agendas, rather than naivete'.⁴⁸

A positioning of Aboriginal people as naïve and innocent but greedy consumers implies that Aboriginal people recognised that their own goods were inferior and no match for western technology; that there was little discernment amongst Aboriginal people about what they were willing to trade and the values they attached to particular goods; and that Aboriginal people did not have an alternate agenda in this bartering. However, while Aboriginal people initially exchanged more complex objects like hair-belts, head dresses, woven baskets and mats it is obvious that as the bartering continued what was most often supplied by Aboriginal people were shells, spears and natural produce. This suggests that Aboriginal people were not willing to trade in items that perhaps had a higher value and meaning in their own society with objects like the damaged flour and old clothing that was offered to them and had a low value and meaning in European society. There are some recorded incidents which suggest that Aboriginal people modified their exchanges in line with the value of what they received. One explanation for the small supply of fish brought into the Fort Point settlement by Aboriginal people was that 'they are too lazy to go for it if they can get food without'.⁴⁹ However, it is possible that Aboriginal people carried the memory of the disparity in the exchange of fish and other seafoods for damaged flour at Escape Cliffs and the ill-feeling this engendered and chose not to enter into these kinds of transactions in Darwin. When Goyder wrote, 'Blacks brought in but three sheets of bark but profess themselves willing now to get more - agree to give them another trial', it is difficult to know what internal negotiations were going on within the local Aboriginal population about this supply of bark.⁵⁰ Were they calculating the return they were likely to receive from this labour; were they disputing whether they should assist the survey party in erecting their buildings; and were they concerned about damage to local trees that this stripping of bark would cause?

It is also apparent that while the surveyors were happy to acquire goods which superficially had little direct use in their own lives, Aboriginal people openly rejected trinkets and 'trifling' gifts in favour of goods that had greater meaning or use.

⁴⁸ Thomas 1991, p88; Jones 1996.

⁴⁹ Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, SA State Records, GRS1 256/1871.

⁵⁰ GW Goyder Note Book No. 38, SA State Records, GRG 35/256/12.

Aboriginal people favoured red fabric, buckets, knives and clothing over bread, biscuits and fresh water. That Aborigines did not just try and acquire any goods is also evident in the thefts that Aboriginal people committed about the settlement. The bread, axes, coconuts and other vegetable matter served a purpose, whether it was providing sustenance for themselves, thwarting the efforts of the new settlers to sustain themselves, or trying to prevent the domination of local fresh water supplies which the watering of gardens entailed.

Having said this it is also true that Aboriginal people did accept the damaged flour that was often offered to them in exchange for their own goods. This suggests the traditional responsibility felt by the Aborigines to engage in reciprocal exchange of objects. Philip Jones also suggests that bartering had the capability of ‘restoring the balance to particular situations in which the social order was threatened’.⁵¹ Given the violence between the Aborigines and the survey party discussed previously it is likely that bartering was a means of encouraging a more peaceful relationship. Acting Government Resident Millner’s willingness to encourage bartering was one means of facilitating the ‘friendly feeling’ between the new settlers and Aboriginal people deemed so important in the instructions issued to him as Protector of Aborigines. It is likely that Aboriginal people’s willingness to engage in barter for things like damaged flour suggests their desire to use such encounters to facilitate and expand these interactions. Another way in which the concept of exchange was used by the Larrakia to encourage interactions was through exchanging their names with members of the surveying party and early settlers. Sydney Wellington Herbert was in Port Darwin between August 1870 and November 1872 and spoke of the way in which the ‘Larakeah will exchange names with a white man to whom he takes a special fancy, an act which implies protection, assistance in obtaining food, and warning against danger’.⁵² This was perhaps the motive of the ‘Larrigeer’ people met by Edward Catchlove in June 1870 who were ‘very anxious to know my name and to make me acquainted with theirs’.⁵³ It was not unusual that in the early years of Darwin’s colonisation Aboriginal people adopted, and became known by, names like Solomon, Daly, Davey, Tom Cherry and Ned Larrakeyah. The expansion of these interactions

⁵¹ Jones 1996, p104.

⁵² ‘Reminiscences by Sydney Wellington Herbert of life in the Northern Territory during construction of the Overland Telegraph Line August 1870 to November 1872’.

into a political alliance between the Larrakia and colonisers is the subject of the following section. As Philip Jones has argued, in ethnographic collecting the ‘frontier was less a line that separated than a zone which unified’. With the varied exchanges that took place during bartering a ‘a history of negotiated relations between the two parties began’.⁵⁴

An unlikely alliance? ‘the safety and convenience of the settlement’

As discussed above the bartering re-established between Aborigines and the colonists encourage interactions on other levels. Aboriginal people brought oars lost from European boats and washed up on the shore into the Fort Point settlement and were ‘rewarded’ each time they did so with ‘a ration of biscuit’.⁵⁵ Aborigines exchanged turtle and fish with the colonisers for damaged flour.⁵⁶ The European women now in the settlement visited the Aboriginal camp with their husbands and children - and were severely reprimanded by Millner for having acted contrary to the Regulations.⁵⁷ An Aboriginal man accompanied one of Millner’s men to examine the buoys on the opposite side of the harbour. On finding that one mooring was ‘foul of a rock’ the Aboriginal man ‘dived in three fathoms of water and cleared it’.⁵⁸ In one of the first recordings of Aboriginal ceremonial life in Darwin, George Deane wrote on 7 June 1870, ‘Blacks had a corroboree, females all went up to see them’.⁵⁹

The new settlers also begin to note the direction that Aboriginal people were coming into Darwin. For example, George Deane noted, ‘Blacks canoes coming and going from here to South Arm, I expect they have more blacks there and they carry news from here’. Later he wrote, ‘Three canoes of niggers came across from Talc Head this morning’.⁶⁰ Acting Government Resident Millner similarly noted Aboriginal people

⁵³ The Diary of ENB Catchlove, 25 June 1870, Mortlock Library, PRG651 Series one & two. Catchlove also stated that the Larrakia ‘belong to this place’ and were ‘far more civilised than the other tribes’.

⁵⁴ Jones 1996, pp2, 102.

⁵⁵ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 22, 24 & 26 February 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 NT80/1870.

⁵⁶ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 3 March 1870 & 31 May 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁵⁷ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 6 March 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁵⁸ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 20 May 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁵⁹ The Diary of GP Deane, 7 June 1870, Mortlock Library, D2875 (L).

⁶⁰ The Diary of GP Deane, 7 & 11 March 1870, Mortlock Library, D2875 (L).

travelling in canoes between Talc Head and Point Emery, how they joined the ‘native’s camp outside the boundary’ and then left again for Shoal Bay or West Point.⁶¹ There is also more certainty in the identification of which Aboriginal groups are moving about the Darwin Peninsula. For example, Millner records that several people had ‘reported numerous tracks of natives at Fannie Bay, supposed to be Woolners, Larakeeyahs having crossed to the other side’.⁶²

While Goyder and Bennett both identified and located distinct Aboriginal ‘tribal districts’, the Aboriginal people communicated with about Darwin during 1869 are not generally recognised as being from a particular group. However by April 1870 two primary groups of Aboriginal people begin to be identified. Those associated with Mira or the Adelaide River and called the ‘Woolner’ and those positioned as the local Aboriginal population, the ‘Larakeeyahs’. It is also from this time that the Larrakia begin to be portrayed as enemies of the Woolna, allies of the newcomers and the rightful (as determined by the newcomers and asserted by the Larrakia) occupants of the Darwin peninsula. The earlier discussed characterisation of the Woolna as hostile and treacherous and the Larrakia as friendly and peaceful is also further ingrained.

In early April 1870, an unnamed Aboriginal woman informed the settlement that the ‘Woolner natives intended to spear the shepherds by crawling along in the grass and taking them by surprise’.⁶³ George Deane also acknowledged, ‘Blacks talked about Moira tribe coming in to spear us, so we will have to be very careful’. The following day he wrote, ‘Excitement about blacks. Woolnas coming in to spear all’.⁶⁴ This threat did not transpire and it was some weeks before Deane again showed concern, ‘Niggers beginning to muster again’.⁶⁵ In stark contrast the ‘Larakeeyah Blacks’ were described as being located ‘a quarter of a mile from the boundary fence’ and varying in number from between 30 to 150 men, women and children. They had been ‘peaceable and apparently well disposed and on several occasions have informed us that the Woolners

⁶¹ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 11 March & 8 April 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁶² Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 10 April 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁶³ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, April 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁶⁴ The Diary of GP Deane, 5-6 April 1870, Mortlock Library, D2875 (L).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1 May 1870.

were coming here to attack our camp'.⁶⁶ On 9 June 1870, George Deane, who on the previous day had complained that the camp was 'awful dull' recorded that 'about 200 natives' had 'collected' at Port Darwin from the Adelaide River and he 'expected they were up to mischief'.⁶⁷ Millner offered a more conservative estimate numbering the Wulna at between 100 to 120. They were camped outside the stockyard fence and were 'well armed with spears and many in their war paint'. They were 'very insolent and demanded white lubras and food'.⁶⁸ After a false alarm in which the whole camp turned out at the armoury to fight off the potential attackers, the Larrakia informed the government party that the Woolners intended attacking them in their Fort Point camp by creeping through the mangroves after dark.⁶⁹ The Fort Point settlement was placed on the alert, the men divided into three parties, horse drays placed strategically to provide cover and arms and ammunition distributed. The following day, just before dawn, the Larrakia approached the tableland fence and called out that the Wulna had attacked them and were about to attack the Fort Point settlement and 'requested assistance to drive them off'. Millner sent out a party of twelve mounted men to 'disperse the Woolners and send them back to their own district'. This party was accompanied by about twenty Larrakia 'all armed to kill' who 'followed their tracks to Knuckey's Lagoon' where they 'had a yabber and all returned to camp as they had too great a start for us'. George Deane's journal attests to the thrill this incident occasioned and also the mounted party's disappointment of the outcome. Deane admitted that the 'blacks affair was nearly as good as if the Gulnare had arrived for excitement, but expect all will die away again'.⁷⁰

One Larrakia woman and two Larrakia men were injured in this incident. Orunga was speared in the back with a barbed spear, Nurlunga in the thigh with a stone spear and an unnamed 'lubra' in the arm. Orunga was brought into the Fort Point settlement and examined by Dr Millner who found that the spear had entered his lung. Millner extracted the eleven and a half inch spear head and Orunga died a half hour later. His father and brother were present during the operation and they wrapped Orunga's body

⁶⁶ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 9 June 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁶⁷ The Diary of GP Deane, 8-9 June 1870, Mortlock Library, D2875 (L).

⁶⁸ Underlining in original. Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 9-10 June 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁶⁹ The Diary of GP Deane, 10 June 1870, Mortlock Library, D2875 (L); Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 8-10 June 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁷⁰ The Diary of GP Deane, 12 June 1870, Mortlock Library, D2875 (L)

in grass and paperbark and carried him back to their camp. Damaged flour and biscuits were immediately distributed to the women and children at the Larrakia camp. Nurlunga and the 'speared lubra' were visited at their camp, said to be at a beach north of the Fort Point settlement, and their wounds dressed by Millner. Nurlunga and the injured Aboriginal woman later returned to their main camp on the tableland above Fort Point where they continued to have their wounds dressed and were provided with damaged flour and biscuits.⁷¹ That the Larrakia allowed Millner to doctor them even though they would have had their own means of treating their wounds is suggestive of the alliance that was developing between the Larrakia and the colonisers.

The Larrakia argued that the Wulna attacked them because they had allegedly provided the new settlers with information regarding the Woolner's 'hostile intentions'. These 'hostile intentions' had allegedly arisen because the Wulna were jealous that the 'whites should have removed from Escape Cliffs and shown a preference for Port Darwin'.⁷² Whatever the reason for this dispute relations between the Larrakia and the colonisers changed markedly after this incident. The 'peaceable tribe', that is the Larrakia, were 'working about the camp and making themselves very useful' with 'rations' being served out to them in return.⁷³ The Larrakia were also employed 'cutting timber and brushwood inside the boundary fence' and jungle along the cliffs and in the government garden established at Doctor's Gully. They also informed the newcomers of the location of missing livestock and assisted in bringing the goats and horses back into the settlement. Edward Catchlove and two of his colleagues also spent a day fishing with some Aborigines.⁷⁴

Captain Bloomfield Douglas arrived in the Fort Point settlement to take over from Acting Government Resident Millner in June 1870, less than two weeks after the dispute in which Orunga was killed. On assuming command of the Fort Point settlement, Douglas praised Millner's governance, claiming that the settlement was in a 'very satisfactory condition, the party evidently under good discipline, and as far as the native tribe in whose district Palmerston is situated [written in the letter's margin is the

⁷¹ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, June 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.

⁷² *The Adelaide Observer*, 3 September 1870.

⁷³ *The Adelaide Observer*, 3 September 1870.

word ‘Larakeeyah’] the relations towards the Aborigines are encouraging’. Douglas believed Aboriginal people in Darwin were ‘decidedly peaceable’ and ‘disposed to do such work as they are fitted for’. After seeing them using axes and employed in the Government garden, Douglas hoped that Aboriginal people would ‘in course of time be made serviceable to the settlement’. After referring to the above conflict between the ‘Larakeeyah Port Darwin tribe’ and the ‘Woolner or Escape Cliffs tribe’, Douglas wrote that he:

regretted that this took place, but while it may be difficult for me to reconcile the enmities of these tribes I shall take the necessary steps to prevent a too near approach of the Woolner blacks to the camp if they manifest hostility to the Larakeeyahs or ourselves. I am well aware of the difficulties which surround the question of dealing with the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, but it will evidently be now the duty of the Government Resident to afford protection to the *peaceful* tribe living close to the camp as well as to the settlers who have arrived by the ‘Bengal’.⁷⁵

This was not the only measure to ensure the peaceful colonisation of Aboriginal lands. Three members of Goyder’s expedition - Daly, McKinlay and Davis - returned south in October 1870 and took three Larrakia men, Billimuc, Lirawa and Ungaba (the latter two also known as Tom Powell/Cherry and Harry) with them.⁷⁶ It could be suggested that the surveyors wanted to take some live ‘curios’ back to show off in Adelaide. However, the surveyor’s alleged motivation for taking the Larrakia with them was so that on their return to Darwin they could ‘inform their tribes how numerous, powerful yet kind the white races are and that by these means we may in some measure dis-arm the hostility evinced by a portion of their tribe to the white man settling upon their lands’.⁷⁷ If this was the surveyors’ motive, they did not accept responsibility for returning the Larrakia men to Darwin. In February 1871, an Adelaide settler by the

⁷⁴ Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident J Stokes Millner, 14-16 June 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870; The Diary of ENB Catchlove, 19 and 25 July 1871, Mortlock Library, PRG651 Series one & two.

⁷⁵ Emphasis added. Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, 1 July 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 81/70.

⁷⁶ ‘Native Words from Mr Buttfield’ in WP Auld’s papers, Mortlock Library, PRG140/6.

⁷⁷ Correspondence from McKinlay, Davis and DD Daly to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, 28 October 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 104/1870; see also correspondence from McKinlay, Davis and DD Daly to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, 17 September 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 100/1870.

name of Edwards, wrote to the Commissioner requesting that the Government supply the return passage of the Larrakia ‘simply on the grounds of humanity’.⁷⁸ The Larrakia men returned to Darwin eight months later where, according to Government Resident Douglas, ‘much satisfaction’ was caused among the Larrakia who were also given ‘a good assurance of our trustworthiness and ... a good idea of our power’.⁷⁹

After the above-mentioned dispute in which Orunga was killed, Douglas visited Escape Cliffs to ‘impress upon the Woolners the necessity for peaceful conduct towards the Larrakeeyahs in the vicinity of the settlement as well as to ourselves’.⁸⁰ The Wulna failed to be impressed by Douglas’ warnings and four months after this dispute there was further conflict between the Wulna and Larrakia. It allegedly erupted when the Wulna who were visiting the Larrakia camp near the Fort Point settlement attempted to ‘steal one of their lubras’. In the resulting fracas a Wulna man was speared. The alarm was given and the officers and men went to their stations but ‘no sooner were we seen by the Woolners than they effected a retreat and of course were not molested by us’. Douglas then ‘informed’ the Larrakia that ‘if they dreaded another attack they could send their old men, women and children close to the camp’. However, he expected the ‘fighting men to take care of themselves’. Douglas would only intervene in their intertribal quarrels if ‘after absolute defeat, the Larakeeyahs being in their own district, claimed my protection, when I should take steps to send the Woolner back from the vicinity of the camp’. Douglas believed that this policy would reach the Wulna whom he was ‘glad to see ... visit this part of the country provided they conducted themselves well towards us, and did not interfere with the Larakeeyah tribe who were located close to the camp and were living in friendly terms with us’.⁸¹

Apart from the official instructions which stressed the desirability for amicability between the Aborigines and the Europeans, there were further reasons for the new settlers encouraging an alliance with the Larrakia.⁸² In August 1870 threats were made

⁷⁸ Correspondence from Mr Edwards to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, 21 February 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 23/1871.

⁷⁹ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, 15 May 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 114/1871.

⁸⁰ Ibid.; Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 4 November 1870, CRS A1640/1, 1871/32.

⁸¹ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 4 November 1870, CRS A1640/1, 1871/32.

⁸² Instructions to the Government Resident of the Northern Territory, SA State Records, GRS1 194/1872.

to shoot the Howitzer gun on Fort Hill at the Larrakia camped on the tableland close to the Depot if they did ‘decamp’ without giving up the person who had recently taken the axes from Peel’s Well. Not taking any chances with the gun, the Larrakia left their camp without returning the axes. Douglas was much annoyed by this ‘affair’ because he ‘was on the fair way towards utilizing the natives, their presence when on friendly terms tending very much to the *safety* and *convenience* of the settlement’.⁸³ ‘Caution’ now had to be observed by small parties away from the township and the night guards had to be doubled. The susceptibility of the small European settlement to Aboriginal attack and the need for Aboriginal labour about the settlement saw Douglas explain to two ‘friendly’ Larrakia that the ‘the statement made as to the gun was unauthorised’, that his anger extended only to the guilty party and that the ‘innocent’ Larrakia need not be concerned. Perhaps convinced by Douglas’s explanations, the Larrakia returned to the tableland camp and continued their work in the Government gardens and assisting the settlers to erect their huts.⁸⁴

Aggressive measures were again used against Aboriginal people in January 1871 after they allegedly stole axes and knives and dug up the coconut palms planted along the road at Fannie Bay. The police and ‘all the other hands were got under arms, and proceeded to the camp for the purpose of ascertaining the culprits, if possible, and punishing them, or sending them all away’. However, the gun on Fort Hill was fired twice before they started and ‘on reaching the native encampment they found themselves in possession of the field, all of the niggers having cleared out’.⁸⁵ In following the official instructions that while he was to gain the Aborigines’ ‘good will and confidence by kindness and judicious liberality’, he was also ‘able to repel, and, if necessary, to punish, aggression’, Douglas informed the Aborigines that he would be ‘obliged to punish them if they injured plantations or our property’. He then ‘refused to have any intercourse with them for a few days’ and only ‘admitted them to favour again’ once they had ‘promised good behaviour’.⁸⁶

⁸³ Emphasis added. Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 16 August 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 89/1870. Following an account of a threatened attack by ‘hostile natives’ at Port Darwin, it was acknowledged that, ‘Had the Larrakeeyahs amalgamated with the Woolners the whole body would have been more formidable, and the small staff stationed here would have had to fight for it’ (*The Adelaide Observer*, 3 September 1870).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; *South Australian Register*, 21 October 1870.

⁸⁵ Extracts from a journal written from Fort Point, 30 January 1871, published in the *South Australian Advertiser*, 4 July 1871.

Douglas made good his threat to punish the Aborigines for damaging the white settlers' property. When an Aboriginal man took some melons from the Government garden 'he was taken before Government Resident ... and one of the old blacks was told to give him a horsewhipping before the rest of the camp'.⁸⁷ In April 1871 some of the sugarcane planted in the Doctor's Gully garden was 'injured by the natives biting and sucking them'. It was later found to be the Wulna people on friendly terms with the Larrakia who were responsible.⁸⁸ Shortly after the sugarcane incident a valuable horse was speared in the leg and died. Douglas immediately ordered the Aborigines away from their work on the government garden and directed Captain Sweet of the *Gulnare* to 'secure some of the natives from their canoes as hostages until the man who had speared the horse was secured'. This move was not successful so Douglas proceeded with the police, the Protector of Aborigines and two of his staff to the 'native camp' intent on securing two hostages. The Aborigines allegedly presented an armed attack but after some 'discussion', two Aboriginal men were 'persuaded to return with our party'. The remainder of the 'tribe [were] directed to retire beyond East Point some four miles from hence'. Douglas ascertained from these two men that the culprit was a man named Binmook who had speared the horse in retaliation for having his dog shot by one of the settlers. Douglas then held the two captured men hostage aboard the *Gulnare* for five days. He explained to the Larrakia that the hostages would not be injured and would be released after their 'tribe' had 'delivered' Binmook. Douglas argued that the measures taken were the best means of capturing Binmook and were also an attempt to prevent the bloodshed that might have occurred had his party tried to capture Binmook by force.⁸⁹ Binmook was subsequently 'brought in by the Port Darwin blacks' and after Douglas 'satisfied' himself that he was 'undoubtedly the man who speared the horse', Binmook was 'flogged' with a 'dozen cuts of a stiff riding whip across his shoulders'. He was then 'dismissed with a caution' and the two hostages released.⁹⁰ Douglas wrote of this incident:

The effect of punishing the native has been most excellent; the whole of the tribe have resumed their friendly relations with us, the men and women working for small

⁸⁶ Report from Government Resident Douglas, April 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 67/1871.

⁸⁷ Extracts from a journal written from Fort Point, 30 January 1871, published in the *South Australian Advertiser*, 4 July 1871.

⁸⁸ Report from Government Resident Douglas, April 1871, SA State Records, GRS 1 67/1871.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

rations of damaged flour as before. The detaining of the two men on board the 'Gulnare' has evidently not occasioned any ill feeling as one of them is amongst the best of our workers, the other has gone fishing but returns shortly to his tribe which is now encamped near us.⁹¹

If Douglas is to be believed and the Larrakia were not angered by this incident, it is quite clear that two settlers were. Withers and Kritznner wrote to the Commissioner for Crown Lands that Douglas had perpetrated 'one of the most inhumane and cruel acts ever inflicted upon poor innocent natives' in the keeping of the hostages. Given the Protector of Aborigines support of Douglas's actions, they appealed to the Commissioner to take steps which would 'prevent a recurrence of this uncalled for barbarity'.⁹² Douglas defended his actions claiming that he had acted in the interests of the Aborigines for if they did not 'learn their lesson the settlers here will not be likely to be more lenient than they have been in Carpentaria Queensland where the blacks have been driven back in all directions and on too many occasions with loss of life'.⁹³ Douglas justified the punitive measures further by claiming that there was no gaol at Fort Point and the previous settlement at Port Essington had shown that 'prompt and summary punishment' was 'the most effectual means of preventing crime'.⁹⁴ The Commissioner for Crown Lands concluded that he could not see the cruel injustice alleged nor that the Government Resident had 'inflicted any undue hardship upon the natives in question'.⁹⁵

In November 1871 the alliance between the new settlers and the Larrakia was affirmed when the 'chief of the Larrakeeyahs' informed the Government Resident that a 'large body' of Wulna were near the settlement and they intended spearing himself and the man who had administered the flogging to Binmook. Douglas ignored these warnings until the Wulna neared the Government Residency, which had been built on the plateau

⁹⁰ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 15 May 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 114/1871.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Correspondence from GE Withers and C Kritznner to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 12 April 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 90/187.

⁹³ Report from Government Resident Douglas, April 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 67/1871.

⁹⁴ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 29 August 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 245/1871.

⁹⁵ Memorandum from Commissioner of Crown Lands, 7 July 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 90/187; Correspondence from the Crown Lands Office to Government Resident Dougals, 4 November 1871, SA State Records, GRS4 Vol. 2 507/71 p150.

above the Fort Point settlement, and the horses paddocked there. He and a party of officers and men then ‘proceeded in the direction where the Woolners were reported to be’. Douglas found the Larrakia and the Wulna in their war paint and well armed with spears but no hostilities had taken place. Consequently he did not interfere but told the ‘Larrakeeyahs to keep the Woolners back, and that in the event of them being overpowered I would assist them’. Later that evening an Aboriginal man entered the Fort Point settlement with a spear wound in his back and informed the Government Resident that fighting had taken place on a beach about a mile away. Deeming it too late in the evening to intervene, Douglas waited until dawn the following morning when, accompanied by a party of thirty officers and men, he approached the ‘battlefield’, where ‘hostilities’ were due to ‘recommence’. He ordered the Larrakia to separate from the Wulna, sent a party down to the beach, ‘made a display of [his] piece’ and ‘directed the Woolners to return to their own country which they did in short loss of time and with evident great satisfaction that I had not further molested them’.⁹⁶

The Port Darwin correspondent for the *South Australian Advertiser* was not as concerned by the fighting as the Government Resident. From the cliff tops he described the beach battle-ground below as ‘certainly one of the most romantic scenes I ever beheld’. The newspaper printed a ‘graphic account’ of this dispute because it was ‘likely to interest both new-comers, and old colonists with lively recollections of the native shindies witnessed in the early days of South Australia on the Park Lands, at Glenelg and on battle-grounds more distant from the infant metropolis’.⁹⁷ The correspondent described how after a ‘wordy war’, spears were thrown from both sides. The women and children who were present retrieved them and gave them back to the men. The Larrakia asked the journalist and his fellow spectators to come down and help drive the ‘Woolnahs back to their own country’ but they declined the invitation. They did, however, go down to the ‘warriors’ where, ‘strange to say, in two minutes they were talking to us and to each other, as though nothing had been further from their thoughts than fighting’. With the approach of nightfall the spectators started back for their own camp and the Aborigines resumed their quarrel. The correspondent offers a slightly different account to that of Douglas regarding the success that the new settlers had in driving the Wulnas away the following morning. According to the

⁹⁶ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 14 November 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 32/1872.

⁹⁷ *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 February 1872.

correspondent it was ‘some time before they would believe us in earnest’ and it was only when they saw the colonisers ‘descending the cliff’ that they ‘made off into the jungles about the place’. Although the colonists searched for some time the Wulna could not be found.⁹⁸

The accounts of this dispute raise several questions. If this was a serious dispute why were women and children present? Did the Wulna refuse to believe the colonisers to be in earnest because the fight itself was not in earnest? Had the Wulna really planned to attack the settlement in revenge for the whipping of Binmook or was this a story concocted by the Larrakia to test the settlers’ commitment to their alliance? Did the Larrakia orchestrate the dispute to show the Wulna the extent of the alliance between themselves and the new settlers thereby warning the Wulna against too persistent an encroachment on their territory? Was this dispute an example of the way in which inter-tribal disputes were settled prior to colonisation and did the Wulna believe the colonists to be intervening in something which really did not concern them? Whatever the Larrakia and Wulna’s reasons for this dispute, Douglas gives a clear reason for his action in sending out such a large body of men to intervene. He wanted to give ‘the Woolners an idea of our force and to show them how hopeless it would be for them to attack *us*’. According to Douglas, the Larrakia were ‘greatly delighted’ at ‘being rid of the Woolners’ and assured him that the ‘Woolners will not trouble *us* again’.⁹⁹ It is unclear whether this ‘us’ refers to the colonisers only or the recently formed alliance. Visiting Darwin in 1873, William Wildey noted the motivations for and mutual benefits of this alliance:

Warlike as are the Woolnahs equally so are the Larrakeyahs, who are always prepared for the attacks of the former, and delight in going forth to meet them. As the Larrakeyahs are assured of our power to punish any treachery, they are friendly, and go in and out of Palmerston and Southport as they choose. Perhaps fear of the Woolnahs, a more powerful tribe numerically, causes them to be well behaved,

⁹⁸ *South Australian Advertiser*, 16 February 1872.

⁹⁹ Emphasis added. Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 14 November 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 32/1872.

otherwise they might be between two dangers. So they may be styled our advanced guard.¹⁰⁰

The colonisers' representation of the Larrakia as the friendly and rightful occupants of the Darwin region and the Wulna as treacherous outsiders and enemies of the Larrakia and, ironically, of the colonisers who had invaded Larrakia country is persistent throughout the early colonial period. The 'friendly' and 'treacherous' characterisations of the Larrakia and the Wulna originated with Stokes' earlier distinction of Adelaide River Aboriginal people as treacherous, hostile and 'resistant' compared to those in Port Darwin as being friendly and therefore 'welcoming'. In July 1874, the Larrakia were described as a 'diseased, weak, and cowardly tribe' who sought the 'protection of the Europeans for fear of the Woolnas, who make repeated attacks upon them and take away the lubras'.¹⁰¹ In 1877, Protector of Aborigines Morice positioned the Larrakia as 'weak' and the Wulna as 'larger and more warlike'.¹⁰² In 1878, the Wulna were described as the 'savage and vindictive Woolners'.¹⁰³ In 1886, the Wulna continued to be described as the 'great dread of the Larrakeeyahs' as well as being 'numerous, athletic looking fellows' who were 'always the chief trouble to settlers, and were the murderers of nearly all whites killed in the Territory'.¹⁰⁴

The decision of the colonisers to ally with the Larrakia - sometimes assisting them with arms to fight off the 'treacherous' Wulna - was in recognition that the Larrakia could warn them of impending attacks by other Aboriginal groups, because they could provide labour and local knowledge about the region, and because instructions issued to the colonisers by the South Australian government explicitly stated that they should seize every opportunity of fostering friendly relations with local Aboriginal people. The Larrakia desired this alliance as a means of assisting them in asserting their continuing authority over the Port Darwin landscape against neighbouring Aboriginal groups and ensuring that they had primary access to the goods that the newcomers were willing to give or trade. Another factor which could have motivated the Larrakia's

¹⁰⁰ William Brackley Wildey, 1876. *Australasia and the Oceanic Region with some notice of New Guinea. From Adelaide – Via Torres Straits – To Port Darwin Thence Round West Australia*, George Robertson, pp114-120.

¹⁰¹ *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 July 1874.

¹⁰² Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines Morice to Government Resident Price, 7 December 1877, NTRS F790 A2537.

¹⁰³ *Northern Territory Times*, 30 November 1878.

¹⁰⁴ *South Australian Register*, 2 July 1886.

desire for the alliance was the health of their society when Darwin was initially colonised. Throughout Australia, introduced illnesses to which indigenous people had little immunity spread to Aboriginal populations even before they had sustained contact with outside populations.¹⁰⁵ In 1839, Stokes had observed that Aboriginal people in Port Darwin were suffering from some kind of ‘influenza ... all having the remnants of colds, coughing severely when we met them’.¹⁰⁶ Thirty years later, Stephen King found that of the eighty Aboriginal people ‘mustered’ at Port Darwin there were some ‘fine men’ but many of the children were ‘suffering from some disease’ identified by sores and stiff joints in their arms and legs.¹⁰⁷ Chief Inspector of Police, Paul Foelsche was told by a Port Darwin Aboriginal man, Mangminone, that they dreaded the disease smallpox, that it had last appeared in the 1860s and had broken ‘out in the dry season, when the natives burned the grass’:

Old and young were stricken down with it, and a great many died, so much so that they could not bury them all, but left the corpses lying about ... The Port Darwin natives call the disease “Goobimwah”, and state it came from the Adelaide River tribes, and travelled westward.¹⁰⁸

Campbell Macknight details that a series of three or four small pox epidemics struck north Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries - the first occurring around 1789, the second around 1829-30 and the last, which was probably two separate outbreaks, from around 1860 to 1870. Macknight speculates that it spread from the Macassan trepanners and affected virtually all the mainland groups and resulted in substantial population loss.¹⁰⁹ This population loss from all generations would have had a significant impact on the cultural, economic and political organisation of Aborigines who were traditionally organised in relatively small Aboriginal family groups. It would also have impacted on the way in which Aboriginal groups organised themselves in relation to the colonisers.

¹⁰⁵ For a recent discussion of disease and Aboriginal Australia see Judy Campbell, 2002. *Invisible Invaders: smallpox and other diseases in Aboriginal Australia, 1780-1880*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, Victoria.

¹⁰⁶ John Lort Stokes, 1846 (facsimile ed. 1969). *Discoveries in Australia; with an account of the coasts and rivers explored and surveyed during the voyage of the HMS Beagle in the years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43, Volumes One and Two*, Adelaide, Libraries Board of South Australia. Vol 2, p21.

¹⁰⁷ The field diary of Stephen King Jnr, 15 July 1869, Mortlock Library, PRG627/278.

¹⁰⁸ P Foelsche, 1881-2. 'Notes on the Aborigines of North Australia', *Royal Society of South Australia Transactions*, Vol. 5, pp1-18.

¹⁰⁹ CC Macknight, 1986. ‘Macassans and the Aboriginal past’, *Archaeology Oceania* 21, pp69-72.

Rather than interpreting ‘friendliness’ as an inherent or exclusive characteristic displayed by the Larrakia on the arrival of the survey party in Port Darwin, chapters one and two have shown that the Larrakia made pragmatic decisions about their initial interactions based on prior knowledge and experience of Europeans, their weapons and their commodities. While it is difficult to understand the complexities of the negotiations that took place within the Larrakia clans regarding their response to colonisation, it is probable that two major concerns were highlighted. Firstly, the Larrakia sought an outcome which best ensured their survival. In the face of the devastating impact on their people from the small pox epidemics discussed above, together with their knowledge of the military strength and ready aggression of the whites, the Larrakia would not have wanted to court further population loss from a prolonged resistance against the colonisers. Secondly, the land the colonisers were intent on settling was Larrakia country and if the Larrakia were determined to survive and stay about their country, then they had to negotiate how they would do it. This resulted in them forming an alliance with the colonisers. However, the whole notion of an alliance between the colonisers and the Larrakia raises questions of further interest to this thesis. If it was possible for the colonisers to recognise the property rights of the Larrakia against the Wulna, and assist them to militarily defend those rights on several occasions, were these property rights recognised in any other way? Subsequent chapters are also interested in the endurance of this alliance. How long did the colonisers recognise the Larrakia as the prior and therefore rightful occupants of Darwin and accord them a distinct status because of this?

Conclusion

Various incidents discussed in this chapter further challenge the interpretation of the colonisation of Darwin being a peaceful and uncomplicated exercise for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people concerned. Aborigines were kept out of the Fort Point camp by the surveyor’s firing shots over their heads or pelting them with stones and by a declaration of boundaries through which Aboriginal people were made to understand they must not trespass. Aboriginal people’s camps were raided, their canoes destroyed, they were threatened with guns on numerous occasions and they were ‘encouraged’ to barter at gun point. The way that the Port Darwin correspondent for the *South*

Australian Advertiser referred to the violence perpetrated against Aboriginal people as a ‘system of dealing with natives’ further indicates that aggression against local Aboriginal people was not uncommon in the early years of colonisation. However, it is also true that this aggression was not one-sided. Apart from the spearing of Bennett and Guy, Aborigines raised their spears against the survey party on several other occasions. They set fire to the country through which the surveyors were travelling, removed survey pegs, crept around the Fort Point settlement under the cover of night, speared livestock, raided the colonisers’ gardens, stole food from their kitchens, and demonstrated an unwillingness to provide the colonisers with labour or food of any great substance. In short, they did many things to unsettle the surveying party in the new settlement.

Having said this, it is also apparent that despite these early difficulties, the Larrakia came back to the newly established settlement and developed an alliance with the colonisers. This alliance was sought after and crucial to both parties and was based on the Larrakia, as traditional owners of the Darwin region, asserting themselves and being recognised by the colonisers as the right group to negotiate an alliance with. However, it is also clear that this alliance was carried out in, what was emerging as, an unequal power relationship between the colonisers and the Larrakia. This is obvious from the way that the colonisers began to enforce their laws and rules over the local people and landscape in the Darwin region. A year and a half after the colonisers’ arrival, it seems a given that the fence they built around the Fort Point settlement was always there and Aboriginal people are automatically positioned on the outside of what is now a non-Aboriginal domain. The colonisers could determine when and where the place of barter was to be; when and which Aboriginal people could be about the camp, using such measures as those described above to deter them if they were not welcome; punish Aboriginal people for ‘inappropriate’ behaviour by forcing them to camp further away from the Fort Point settlement; and capture and hold hostage Aboriginal people to force them into assisting in the punishment of their countrymen. Subsequent chapters look more closely at this assertion of colonial laws on Aboriginal people and land in the Darwin area.

The following chapter is interested in the suggestion by historian, Peter Forrest, that the alliance between the Larrakia and the white settlers, defined by Forrest as a ‘feeling of

comradeship', 'arose out of the shared experience of being thrown together in a remote and difficult place'.¹¹⁰ This observation points to a limited understanding of Aboriginal people's intimate and complex relations with their country and suggests an inability to perceive the enormous impact of the invasion of Aboriginal people's lands on their ability to survive on their country as they had done prior to colonisation.

¹¹⁰ Peter Forrest, *NT News* 1 April 1997.

Chapter Three: Land and Meaning

In the 1890s the travel writer, Jerome Murif, toured Australia by bicycle. In his memoirs of that journey Murif described the Port Darwin township. He noted the unmetaled roads, the loose dark brown soil, the ‘many blacks hanging about’ and the ‘suggestiveness’ of the ‘three varieties of tracks which show prominently everywhere ... a few of booted whites, many of sandalled Chinamen, and over and under all, those of unshod natives’.¹ This chapter explores the way these tracks carved paths of meaning on the landscape, the new ones alternately copying, overlaying and supplanting the others. This chapter looks first at Larrakia meanings for and use of land in the Darwin region. Much of this section has been written in the past tense to show the way in which Aboriginal people in the Darwin region lived prior to colonisation and to encourage an awareness of the great negotiation and adjustment required by the Larrakia if they were to survive in their changing landscape following colonisation. Although this section is written in the past tense, it draws on the ethnographic texts written in the decades immediately following colonisation as well as current Larrakia resource use and knowledge. This chapter also looks at European visions of the landscape the colonisers claimed and invaded. The final section of this chapter looks at the appropriation of lands in the Darwin region by the colonisers and the immediate changes that took place on the land, some of which contrasted sharply with Larrakia land meanings and use. As in other parts of this thesis, this chapter continues to look at the way in which the re-naming, shaping and ordering of the landscape to sustain European vision and use supplanted existing Aboriginal land uses.

Larrakia land and meaning

Larrakia ‘country’ consists of both the sea and land. The importance of the sea to Larrakia people and other coastal Aborigines is reflected in their identifying as a ‘saltwater people’. Identifying in this manner is complex and has economic, political and spiritual dimensions.² One of the most important Dreamings for the Larrakia is a

¹ Jerome J Murif, 1897. *From Ocean to Ocean: Across a Continent on a Bicycle*, George Robertson, Melbourne. Cited in David Headon (ed), 1991. *North of the Ten Commandments. A collection of Northern Territory literature*, Hodder & Stoughton, Rydalmere, NSW, pp215-7.

² For a complex discussion of what constitutes ‘saltwater people’ see Nonie Sharp 2002, *Saltwater People: the waves of memory*, Allen and Unwin, pp33-8.

large sea-creature or Rainbow Serpent who travels the deep blue sea lanes between the Daly River and Darwin harbour and beyond.³ This Rainbow Serpent connects sites of significance for the Larrakia throughout their traditional country. According to the Larrakia, ancestral beings created topographical features in the landscape. One of the most important of these sites in the Darwin area is *Dariba Nanggalinya* or old man *Nanggalinya*, commonly known as Old Man Rock. *Dariba Nanggalinya* came to rest in the shallow waters off Casuarina Beach after travelling from the Koolpinyah waterhole near Gunn Point.⁴ Like other sites on the Larrakia's traditional country, *Dariba Nanggalinya*, has the power to cause significant events if disturbed or treated inappropriately. In addition to these dreaming sites, sites of significance for the Larrakia in the Darwin region include birthing places, living places, ceremonial grounds, burial sites, and places which are abundant in a particular type of resource.

The abundant resources of the Larrakia's sea country played a crucial role in their economic base. The resources Larrakia people harvested from the sea included dugong (*damadangala*), sea turtle (*dodalida*), string-ray (*batbirriang*), mud crab (*madla*), periwinkle (*damagula*), longbum (*danajara*), salt water mud mussel (*gunatbarawa*), hermit crab (*juwaning*), crocodile (*danggalaba*), barramundi (*dumabala*) and other kinds of fish.⁵ The existence of extensive shell midden sites on the high ground adjacent to the Darwin coastline shows that Aboriginal people have been harvesting marine resources from their sea country for hundreds of years.⁶

³ Maria Brandl, Adrienne Haritos, and Michael Walsh, 1979. *The Kenbi Land Claim to vacant crown land in the Cox Peninsular, Bynoe Harbour and Port Patterson areas of the Northern Territory of Australia*, Northern Land Council, Darwin, p69; EA Povinelli, 1993. *Labor's Lot: The Power, History and Culture of Aboriginal Action*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p147.

⁴ During an outing to Darwin's hinterland in the 1920s, Charles Conigrave and his party (including some 'blackboys') rode to Koolpinyah Station. Conigrave described a 'remarkable little lagoon, having precipitous rocky banks on three sides, [which] is called in the native dialect Koolpinyah, which signifies "Blue Lagoon". It is an eerie place and the blackfellows do not like going near to it' (CP Conigrave, 1936. *North Australia*, Jonathan Cape, London, pp146-8).

⁵ R Hodgson, 1997. *Aboriginal use of natural resources in the Darwin Region - Past and Present*. Report to the Australian Heritage Commission and the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

⁶ Extensive midden sites have been located around the Darwin harbour, particularly at Haycock Reach area where middens in densities of around twenty-two square kilometres have been found and at Winnellie, just outside the present day Darwin city area between Sadgroves Creek and Reichardt Creek. Such middens are generally found adjacent to the coastline, on elevated ground and close to permanent and semi-permanent water sources (Scott Mitchell, 1997. 'Wickham Point Archaeological Survey, Darwin Harbour, NT. Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Darwin LNG Plant, Appendix L. for Phillips Oil Company Australia; Trish Burns, 1997. *A Report on Aboriginal Shell Midden sites at Winnellie, Darwin Harbour*, June, unpublished report). Further archaeological sites in the Darwin region consist of skeletal remains, stone arrangements, open artefact scatters and fish traps (see N Richardson

Larrakia land is generally described as tropical savanna. Fresh water springs feed lagoons and creeks which sustain monsoonal rainforests, vine thickets and paperbark swamps. Further inland this tropical savanna is dominated by *Eucalypt* and *Acacia* woodlands, the ground is covered with a variety of grasses and, during the wet season, the rivers and creeks deluge into extensive floodplains.⁷ Such a landscape contained a great variety of plant and animal resources which were sustained by Larrakia people who harvested, hunted and fished them. This included long yam (*mariyanggwa*), green plum, wild passionfruit, fan (*binbirrimba*) and cabbage palm, lily root, pandanus nut, bush potato (*boetwitjba*), billygoat plum (*damiyumba*), bush peanut (*duldinbar*), bush apples (*mindimilma* and *mindilima*), goanna, wallaby, python, file snake, possum, bandicoot, quoll, jungle fowl (*kulkurka*), magpie goose (*gakingga*) and various kinds of duck.⁸

The anthropologist, Deborah Bird Rose, explains that in terms of day to day living, the basic element in the subsistence of indigenous peoples in pre-invasion times was ‘neither technology nor labour, but knowledge [which was] local, detailed and tested through time’.⁹ Larrakia people’s use of their ‘country’ was influenced by their knowledge of sources of fresh water, the seasonal availability of plant and animal resources, the location of resources used to make technical implements and medicines or to collect and trade with neighbouring groups and finally by the location of culturally important sites which required visiting, observing and managing in accordance with their law and customs.

The climate across the Top End of the Northern Territory is generally described as the wet-dry monsoon tropics. Ninety percent of the Top End’s annual rainfall falls during the ‘wet’ between November and March. While day-time temperatures are high

(ed), 1991 (revised 1995). *Archaeological Site Survey and Documentation – Darwin Region.*, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

⁷ Marjorie Sullivan, 1996. ‘Northern Australian Landscapes’, Peter Veth and Peter Hiscock (eds), *Archaeology of Northern Australia, Regional Perspectives, Tempus*, Vol. 4, p5.

⁸ Much of the information presented in this section is from the unpublished research and knowledge of Larrakia elders Topsy Juwayning Secretary, Lena Uraki Henry, Felix Iyanuk Holmes and Prince Midpul Wales who assisted Larrakia women, Lorraine Williams and Donna Jackson, and the botanist, Glenn Wightman, to compile the *Larrakia Plant Identikit: Common useful plants around Darwin, north Australia*.

throughout the entire year (ranging between twenty-eight and thirty-four degrees), intense humidity is the dominant feature of the months either side of the wet season. The less humid dry season falls between May and September and the southeasterly winds bring cooler night-time temperatures of around nineteen degrees. Aboriginal groups across the Northern Territory divide each year into many different seasons and each of these seasons influence the way that Aboriginal people occupy their country. Cultural geographer, Richard Baker, has described the way that Aboriginal people's 'intimate knowledge of their environment' was built 'through careful observation over thousands of years'. From his work with another saltwater people, the Yanyuwa from the Gulf of Carpentaria, he has constructed detailed charts of the classification of seasons and the seasonal calendar or availability of plant and animal resources.¹⁰

Deborah Bird Rose explains that indigenous peoples' seasonal knowledge of resources is based on an understanding that 'simultaneous events stand in a communicative relationship to each other'.¹¹ For example, Aboriginal people from the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory know that March flies are telling them that the crocodile eggs are ready. Similarly the 'other type of biting fly tells you that the bush plums are ready. When the broilga sings out, the *jarlalka* (dark catfish, associated with flood waters) starts to move. When the little bird *nini* starts crying, it's hot weather time and a good time to kill emu. When the flowers of the *jangarla* tree (*Sesbania formosa*) fall into the water, the barramundi are biting'.¹² Local and seasonal knowledge particular to the Darwin region is explained by Larrakia woman, Topsy Juwaning Secretary, whose father taught her how to find yams with a hardened mangrove digging stick and which ones to be mindful of:

We used to go dig for yam, they teach us to [find] the yam. When it's dry season, they say 'Here look, this the one ... eat that yam.' Dry season, you got to, when that burn grass ... you know dry season, heat, and you dig the yam ... [What's that cheeky yam?] It's a round like a pumpkin. Leaf, beautiful like fur. But don't touch it. If you

⁹ Deborah Bird Rose, 1992. *Dingo Makes us Human. Life and land in an Aboriginal Australian culture*, Cambridge University Press, p6.

¹⁰ Richard Baker, 1999. *Land is Life: From Bush to Town. The Story of the Yanyuwa people*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, pp47-9.

¹¹ Deborah Bird Rose, 1988. 'Exploring an Aboriginal Land Ethic', *Meanjin*, Vol. 47 (3), pp382-3.

¹² *Ibid.*; see also Deborah Bird Rose, 1996. *Nourishing Terrains. Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.

touch your mouth, it'll sting you ... Yeah. The whole body. Leaf and trees and that fruit underneath. Some-time when they touch that thing ... go away, they can't talk any more. That's that tree now.¹³

Larrakia people also know that when the black wattle tree flowers it is time to go and get stingray in the muddy shallows off the beaches and that it is also good hunting for salt-water turtle, shark, mullet and crab.¹⁴ As Rose makes clear, there is a certain pragmatism about this system of knowledge, 'if human beings are to forage with the greatest success and minimal outlay of energy, they must know what is happening at any given time'.¹⁵ Following this reasoning, it was no coincidence that Larrakia and other Aboriginal people collected annually at Koolpinyah Station, on the boundary of Larrakia country and close to extensive floodplains, during March and April, at the end of the wet season, to collect goose egg.¹⁶

Native vegetation was not used solely for food. Fish spears and nets were crafted from the beach hibiscus (*lalwa*) lining the foreshore. The milkwood and some paperbark (*gweybilwa*) trees were used to make bark or dug out canoes from which fish, turtle and dugong were hunted. A long thin piece of wood with vegetable strands tied around one end was called a *galmarrua* and was used by Larrakia people to collect honey or 'sugarbag' (*dabinggwa*) from native bee hives which were in inaccessible places. Numerous jungle vines provided the Larrakia with decorative armbands and the fibrous leaves from sand or cabbage palms or pandanus (*biyamarrmar*) were stripped, cured and rolled on the thigh to produce string for weaving string bags (*denela*), mats, baskets, necklaces and bracelets. The base of young pandanus leaves could be eaten and the seeds of the pandanus could be eaten after being soaked in water, then roasted in the fire. Hibiscus, paperbark and branches of trees were used to make the dome shaped shelters described in chapter one that were used by the Larrakia during the wet season. During the dry season the Larrakia obtained shelter from the sun and the cool

¹³ Topsy Juwayning Secretary, interviewed by Samantha Wells, 24 September 1996.

¹⁴ Hodgson 1997.

¹⁵ Rose 1988, pp382-83.

¹⁶ Koolpinyah Station was taken up as a mixed farming lease by the Herbert brothers in 1908. It was located to the west of the Adelaide River on Gunn Point and from its inception many Larrakia, Wulna, Limilngan and Tiwi people worked on the station. Herbert Family Papers, Koolpinyah Station Journals, Northern Territory Archives Service 1362. See for example entries for 21 March 1909, 9 February 1911, 12 March 1912 and 6 April 1914.

night-time winds by using strategically placed sheets of paperbark.¹⁷ Sheets of paperbark were also used for bedding, as plates or to wrap food for ground ovens and for making torches to warn off the nocturnal monster the *birrawulidda* who was described by the Larrakia as having ‘no nose, two blanks for eyes, and two additional, powerful visual organs at the back of the neck, by means of which he can see a very great distance’.¹⁸ This figure was an important being for the Larrakia. They told William Wildey in 1873 of their fear of this evil spirit and how they smoothed down the grass under the burial platforms in trees in order to detect any visitation of the ‘browl’.¹⁹ In 1895, the ethnographer TA Parkhouse observed that during ceremonies a post was fixed in the ground and painted with red ochre which represented the devil or ‘biraue’.²⁰ The Larrakia also told the ethnographer, Herbert Basedow, in the early 1900s, that this *birrawulidda* used his ‘shinbone as a wooden trumpet’ when ‘corroborreeing with his companions. During the day the *birrawulidda* camped in holes or caves but his tracks were seen by Aboriginal people who can become paralysed with fear on sight of them’.²¹

Apart from the uses described above, the Larrakia also used native plants to make weapons and musical instruments and for ceremonial purposes. Bamboo (*gwarigwa*) was also used for a *mamilima* or for the shafts on large spears. The hard timber from the ironwood tree (*delenyggwa*) was used by the Larrakia for flat fighting sticks and poisonous spearheads. The *mamilima* or didjeridu was made from the trunks of *Eucalypts* like woollybutt (*maminyjuma*) or stringybark (*manigurrma*) which had been hollowed out by termites. The leaves from the ironwood tree were burnt and used in the final stages of a funeral ceremony. The silky white vegetable down from kapok seedpods were used by the Larrakia to decorate their bodies during ceremonies. Fur tassels were hung from bracelets and necklaces woven from pandanus or cabbage palm or made by grass stems threaded together. Headbands were woven from possum fur,

¹⁷ Herbert Basedow, 1907. ‘Anthropological Notes on the Western Coastal Tribes of the Northern Territory of South Australia’, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, Vol. 31; *Larrakia Plant Identikit*; Samantha Wells (ed), 2001. *Saltwater People: Larrakia Stories from around Darwin*, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Darwin.

¹⁸ Basedow 1907.

¹⁹ William Brackley Wildey, 1876. *Australasia and the Oceanic Region with some notice of New Guinea. From Adelaide – Via Torres Straits – To Port Darwin Thence Round West Australia*, George Robertson.

²⁰ TA Parkhouse, 1895. *Native Tribes of Port Darwin and its Neighbourhood*, Australia and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. Report 6.

coated with clay and feathers hung from it. Decorative belts were made from stringybark and fur and ochre was used to paint designs on their bodies.²²

Native vegetation was also used to treat ailments. The milky-looking juice from a leafless succulent climber called *gaoloowurrah* was used to treat smallpox. Boils were treated with poultices made with water and leaves from certain trees; coughs and colds were treated by eating mangrove worm (*da-law*), and diarrhea was treated by eating a 'soft kind of rock of a chalky appearance'.²³ The blood-red resinous substance from a *Eucalypt*, *gnewaylah*, was applied to wounds and old sores. The bark scraped from the bush, *malimgarracah*, or the juice from the bark of the milkwood tree, *gaoloanulkah*, also helped heal these sores.²⁴ Seedpods from the black wattle tree were soaped up and used as an antiseptic and particularly bad wounds, like those caused by spears, were stopped up by a poultice made from the pounded bark of the native plum.²⁵ Leaves from the sandpaper fig were used to sand wooden objects and also to scratch the surface of ringworms before pulp from the wild passionfruit was applied to the sores. The milky white sap from the leaf stalk of the sandpaper fig was used in treating sores. Leaves from the pandanus were also boiled and placed on sores to help them heal.

The various uses and meanings of land the attention paid to aspects of their country by the Larrakia contrasted sharply with those of the white colonisers. The following section discusses the vision the European explorers and early settlers brought to the land they were 'discovering' before looking at some of the immediate changes that took place on land in the Darwin region following colonisation. Many of these changes and landscape uses contrast sharply with the meanings and use the Larrakia held for their land.

²¹ Basedow 1907.

²² Basedow 1907. Young women initiates were decorated in a similar fashion to the young men and underwent a smoking ceremony which was conducted by Larrakia women elders. The depiction of women's business by these early ethnographers is slight compared to that of the men, probably because the early ethnographers in this region were men and not permitted to observe women's ceremonial business.

²³ *Larrakia Plant Identikit*; Wells (ed), 2001; P Foelsche, 1881-2. 'Notes on the Aborigines of North Australia', *Royal Society of South Australia Transactions*, Vol. 5, p9; P Foelsche, 1885. 'On the Manners, Customs, Religions, Superstitions of Natives of Port Darwin and the West Coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria', *Royal Anthropological Institute Journal*, Vol. 24.

²⁴ Foelsche 1881-2, 1885.

²⁵ Foelsche 1881-2.

European Vision

The New Zealand ecologist and historian, Geoff Park, writes how ‘scanning the land really is ... old human business – making sense of what is immediate to the senses, subjecting what you see to what your culture leads you to know’.²⁶ In his study of the journals of Australian explorers, Simon Ryan similarly argues that the explorers’ descriptions of the land that they saw were generated by pre-existing cultural formations. They had ‘conventions of seeing’ which possessed ideological agendas of their own and worked to deconstruct the originality and immediacy of the explorer’s observations.²⁷ Ryan also examines the nexus between imperial power and the explorer’s surveillance and argues that supposedly innocent descriptions of landscape were really expressions of imperial greed.²⁸ The overtly ‘picturesque’ landscape descriptions by explorers established nature ‘solely as an object to be valued according to its ability to please and serve human beings’.²⁹ In the more advanced stages of colonisation, Ryan argues that there is a ‘particularly instrumentalist gaze surveying the land, to which aesthetics is irrelevant’. This gaze was a pragmatic appraisal of the land’s capacity for producing wealth and sustaining incoming populations rather than innocent or aesthetic landscape descriptions. If the land was described in picturesque terms it was to construct it as ready for exploitation.³⁰

Apart from any aesthetic preconceptions that the members of the Northern Territory survey expeditions may have brought with them, their descriptions of the country they saw were greatly influenced by their instructions to *find*, (as quickly as possible because much of the land had been sold sight unseen) and therefore their desire to *see*, land eminently suited to colonisation. The much sought after land would contain a township site located high above a harbour which would provide ‘healthy’ sea breezes and a good port site. It would have a suitable base for the connection of the overland telegraph cable and would be surrounded by lands suited to agriculture and pastoralism.

²⁶ Geoff Park, 1995. *Nga Uruora. The Groves of Life. Ecology and History in a New Zealand Landscape*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, New Zealand, p33.

²⁷ Simon Ryan, 1996. *The Cartographic Eye. How Explorers Saw Australia*, Cambridge University Press, p54.

²⁸ See Greg Denning’s critique of Ryan’s work in which he charges Ryan’s ‘literary eye’ with seeing ‘a rather phallogocentric group “penetrating” virgin lands or at least just “unveiling” them’ (Greg Denning, 1998. *Readings/Writings*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, p76).

²⁹ Ryan 1996, p54.

³⁰ Ryan 1996, pp71-2.

Visions of a teeming metropolis and a harbour full of ships fresh from trade in southeast Asia with a hinterland of cattle stations and agricultural farms influenced the way the surveyors saw the country they had come north to colonise. This is reflected in the descriptions and naming of land in the Adelaide River-Darwin region by the members of the Northern Territory surveying expeditions. In the surveyors' depictions of this country as 'very tame and flat', having 'large grassy plains ... stretching to the eastward, as far as the eye could reach; a dead level covered with long waving grass' or having 'extensive plains, thinly timbered with a range of mountains in the distance', the land about the Adelaide River was imbued with pastoral potential.³¹ Finnis's emphasis on the wealth of the landscape and it being of a 'very useful description' is reflected in the language he used to describe the country. The land was '*richly* grassed' and the presence of 'very sweet water' added '*materially* to the *value* of the *rich* land already discovered so near the coast'.³² In Finnis's desire to see the pastoral potential of the country, he enthused that the country was 'splendid ... for stock of all kinds; I have every reason to believe that wool will be grown as well as in South Australia'.³³ Despite Finnis's enthusiasm, it was soon realised that sheep could not thrive in the tropical climate of the Northern Territory.³⁴

It was not only in pastoral terms that the surveyors assessed the country. The type of vegetation, the accessibility and quantity of fresh water, the nature of the soil, the presence of lime and rock, the dryness or bogginess of the country and the bearing of the harbour were all important factors in selecting a site for settlement. Etched on the surveying maps were descriptions of particular parts of country in the Adelaide River - Darwin region such as 'Gum, Iron, Stringy and Paper barks, Fan and Fern Palms', 'timbered with gum, Iron and Stringybarks', 'swampy', 'well grassed and watered', 'very thickly timbered, boggy' and 'very thickly timbered, cork trees and cabbage

³¹ John Hutchison and Frederick Howard, 1864. Surveying Schooner 'Beatrice'. Extract from the remark book of Her Majesty's Surveying Schooner 'Beatrice' whilst employed in the Northern Territory of South Australia, in 1864, SAPP No. 18/1865; D D'A Webling (ed), 1995. *The Journals of Alfred Charles Webling, Narrating Experiences and descriptions of early South Australia, particularly the Port Augusta region of Spencer Gulf, and the Escape Cliffs Settlement, Adelaide River*, p42.

³² Emphasis added. The Journal of BT Finnis, 24 June 1864, SAPP No. 89/1865.

³³ Report from BT Finnis, 10 October 1864, SAPP No. 89/1865.

³⁴ See Alan Powell, 1988. *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*, Melbourne University Press, pp97-8.

palms'.³⁵ The members of the Escape Cliffs' surveying expedition initially overlooked Port Darwin as a site for the future settlement. Although the Darwin harbour gave Hutchison and Howard a 'feeling of security' especially with the point described as being about two miles southeast of Emery Point and having a 'fortress-looking headland' (and predictably named Fort Point), Alfred Webling thought the harbour 'hot and sultry owing to the harbour being completely land-locked' and the mosquitoes and sandflies troublesome.³⁶ Frederick Finnis did not like Port Darwin either, condemning it as hot, completely landlocked and out of reach of the refreshing sea breezes experienced at Escape Cliffs. Although he thought the harbour 'capricious' he admitted that it afforded 'good shelter for shipping'.³⁷ Finnis described Darwin harbour as 'magnificent' in terms of 'shipping and land conveniences' but thought it inferior to Escape Cliffs as the main settlement site because the harbour was 'landlocked, shut in by rocks on the north side, and encompassed in the form of a horse-shoe, towards all other quarters by low mangrove shores'. Drawing on the commonly held belief that good air flow was essential to a healthy settlement, Finnis Snr described land about Port Darwin as being 'completely excluded from all breezes of a refreshing character; and those from the eastward, when they do prevail, which is seldom, must travel over a malarious region'.³⁸

BT Finnis was later condemned for favouring Escape Cliffs as the site for settlement over other possibilities. Following the recall of Finnis to South Australia, JT Manton travelled to Port Darwin and examined Point Emery from an 'engineering point of view as to its eligibility for the site of a large city'. He subsequently described the harbour's entrance as 'beautiful and perfectly clear of rocks, shoals and bars', and the harbour itself as 'magnificent'. The deep, still water close to Point Emery afforded 'plenty of room to accommodate a sufficient number of ships trading with a large commercial city'. Manton consequently had no hesitation in recommending Point Emery as a suitable site for a large town with its 'picturesque coastline', its cliffs high above the sea and the relatively flat land stretching back from the coast. The criticisms of Port

³⁵ F Litchfield, WP Auld, BT Finnis, 1865. 'Sketch Map of the Northern Territory in the Vicinity of Adam Bay', in Bessie Threadgill, *South Australian Land Exploration, 1856-80*. See also 'Northern Territory Survey, Surveyors' General Description of Soil &c.', SAPP No. 32/1870-71.

³⁶ Hutchison and Howard 1864, SAPP No. 18/1865; Webling 1995.

³⁷ Correspondence from FR Finnis to AE Martin, 28 April 1865, Mortlock Library, PRG 550/2.

³⁸ Report from BT Finnis, 2 May 1865, SAPP No. 15/1865; Report from BT Finnis, 10 October 1864, SAPP No. 89/1865.

Darwin being landlocked he dismissed as a bonus, 'I presume this, with plenty of deep water is what constitutes a good harbour for unless it be sheltered it is no harbour at all'. Using an instrumentalist gaze, Manton further appraised the Port Darwin landscape. He noted the abundant building stone at Point Emery and Talc Head, the limestone obtainable from the coral reefs near the Vernon Islands and the plentiful supply of fresh water found twenty or thirty feet below the surface at Point Emery. In contrast to the Larrakia people's extensive use of native vegetation about the Darwin region, Manton considered the 'timber' growing around Point Emery 'only fit for rough buildings, fencing and firewood' and advised that timber for 'superior' purposes would have to be imported. Overall Manton argued that there was 'no place equal' to Port Darwin and Point Emery as a site for the town and port of the first settlement. In its favour Manton included its 'geographical position', 'probable healthiness', and its convenience and facilities for communicating with the interior of the country where 'good land' was 'known to exist'.³⁹ It was such favourable reports that influenced the Surveyor-General, GW Goyder, to set his sights on Port Darwin as the location of the future capital of the Northern Territory.

Just over a month after the 1869 Northern Territory survey expedition's arrival at Port Darwin, Goyder advised the South Australian government that notice could be given to the land-order holders to select their town lots. Furthermore, he assured the government that he was 'very pleased' with what he had seen and that South Australia had 'no reason to fear the result of her connexion [sic] with this place; sooner or later it must turn out well'. Goyder, who had arrived in the middle of the wet season and therefore saw the country at its most lush, believed the country to be 'first-class' for horses and cattle which could readily be shipped to India, the 'mostly rich' soil suitable for cultivation of cotton, sugar and rice and the timber 'fine' and suitable for nearly all purposes.⁴⁰ The harbour was 'splendid' and suitable for vessels of the largest tonnage and, he further reassured the government, the 'quality of the land under survey, the timber, vegetation, and conveniences for traffic equals, if not surpasses, the most sanguine expectation of the land-order holders and those interested in the development of the country'.⁴¹

³⁹ Report from JT Manton, 20 December 1866, SAPP No. 16/1867.

⁴⁰ GW Goyder, Northern Territory Survey Progress Report, 2 March 1869, SAPP No. 31/1869.

⁴¹ Ibid.

So suited was land in the Port Darwin area for the colonial enterprise (or so strong was the desire to see land suited to the colonial enterprise) that, in less than a month of surveying, Goyder had chosen three township sites, 'all healthy and free from swamp'. The main township was to be at Fort Point not the previously mooted Point Emery, and the subsidiary townships of Virginia and Southport were to be located on East Arm (the Elizabeth River) and 'near the tumbling waters at the head of the navigation of the South Arm' (the Blackmore River) respectively. Goyder completed the survey of the Fort Point township a few weeks after the survey expedition's arrival in the Territory. It comprised 999 half-acre allotments, roads, reserves, parklands and a cemetery and cemetery reserve. Nearly two months later, the survey of the fourth and final township site at Fred's Pass had been completed. By October 1869, the Northern Territory survey expedition had surveyed 665,866 acres of land including roads and reserves. The Expedition's ability to survey the land so quickly also says much about the kind of town planning used in the survey. Reece believes that credit must be given to Goyder's 'determined approach' to the surveying work but notes that the 'extraordinary speed of his town surveys was partly due to the fact that he did little more than superimpose on the four [township] sites the grid model reflected in Adelaide'.⁴² After a morning's work in which the local topography, particularly the narrowness of the Darwin Peninsula, was taken into consideration the survey plan was adopted for Fort Point. Geoff Park cites the landscape historian, JB Jackson, in arguing that 'nothing more clearly shows the cherished values of a group than the manner in which they organise space'.⁴³ Following this argument it is apparent that the assertion of the grid model on the Port Darwin landscape was not just a time saving device. It invested the landscape with a sense of order readily identifiable to those white settlers who would soon occupy its streets, parks and cemeteries. In his study of Colonel William Light (who was responsible for laying out the city of Adelaide), Paul Carter writes that the role of the surveyor was clear:

By chequerboarding the land, to prepare it for economic tillage; by finding the lines of least resistance, by levelling unprofitable differences, to maximise the circulation

⁴² R Reece, 1989. 'Four Expeditions in Search of a Capital', P Stathan (ed) *The Origins of Australia's Capital Cities*, Cambridge University Press, Sydney, p 309.

⁴³ Park 1995, p99.

of goods, in this manner preparing the ground for world domination. And this implies a poetic as well as a spatial practice; in giving names to local phenomena, the object will not be to articulate their uniqueness and differences, but to assimilate them to the discourse of the imperial machine.⁴⁴

In 1839, at the same time that he named the Adelaide River after Britain's Dowager Queen, Stokes prophesied, 'Monuments may crumble, but a name endures as long as the world'.⁴⁵ Such naming evokes royal imagery, imperialism and conquest ideology and it was no surprise that when Captain Hutchison set his course down the Adelaide River in 1865 he described it as 'noble'.⁴⁶ The assigning of European names to the landscape in the Adelaide River – Darwin region transformed land and water features into objects for European understanding and invested the locations with intent. It rendered what was new and unexplored both familiar and conquered. The Fort Point township was called Palmerston after Britain's then Prime Minister. It was on land that the Larrakia knew as *Garrmalang-gwa*. The principal streets of the Palmerston township were named after members of Goyder's survey party before they actually reached Port Darwin. An exception was in the naming of the town's principle street 'Cavenagh' after the Commissioner for Crown Lands who was also honoured in the naming of the town's only square. Goyder's surveyors also subdivided the land into 'Hundreds' bearing, among others, the names of Adelaide politicians or influential men such as Bagot, Hutchison, Ayers, Strangways, Guy, Hughes, Cavanagh, Colton, Glyde, Milne, Hart, Finnis, Goyder, Howard, Waterhouse and Blyth. Very occasionally was a geographical feature of the country, the use to which the place was going to be put, an event experienced there or perhaps an attempt at recording indigenous place names reflected in the surveyors' naming of places. Examples of this in the Darwin region include Escape Cliffs, Raft Point, Point Fright, Marrara, Leanyer Swamp and Ilwaddy Creek.

⁴⁴ Paul Carter, 1996. *The Lie of the Land*, Faber and Faber Ltd, London, p235.

⁴⁵ John Lort Stokes, 1846 (facsimile ed. 1969). *Discoveries in Australia; with an account of the coasts and rivers explored and surveyed during the voyage of the HMS Beagle in the years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43, Volumes One and Two*, Adelaide, Libraries Board of South Australia, Vol. 2, p271.

⁴⁶ John Hutchison and Frederick Howard, 1864. Surveying Schooner 'Beatrice'. Extract from the remark book of Her Majesty's Surveying Schooner 'Beatrice' whilst employed in the Northern Territory of South Australia, in 1864, SAPP No. 18/1865. See Rose 1992, p408 for a discussion of this in relation to the Victoria River.

Some of the early Northern Territory colonists overlooked or ignored Aboriginal people's land interests and constructed the land as the 'quintessence of wilderness, a place not owned or affected by man'.⁴⁷ The doctor with the Escape Cliffs' survey expedition, Ebenezer Ward, provides some clues as to how this was possible. In a classic separation of nature from culture, Ward makes it clear that although Aboriginal people were present they did not own or cultivate the land. Aboriginal people were 'wild children of the bush' and merely 'roamed at will all their lives' over the land.⁴⁸ As seen in chapter one, Stokes' acceptance of indigenous people's 'savagery' enabled him to experience 'a feeling of pride and pleasure engendered by the thought that we are in any way instrumental to the extension of man's influence over the world which has been given to him to subdue'.⁴⁹ Even though Stokes held a ready expectation that Aboriginal people would be present if not actually visible on the lands he was exploring and even though he had interacted with Aboriginal people in Port Darwin, 'man' was not thought to have extended 'his' influence over this part of the world.⁵⁰ As seen in the introduction to this thesis, Harriet Daly also inferred that Aboriginal people had left no mark on Darwin's landscape, 'It was all just as nature had made it, just as it had remained from the beginning of time - untouched and untrodden by the foot of man; a region known only to the degraded tribes of savages, who had hitherto been the sole occupiers of this magnificent piece of country'.⁵¹ For Daly these 'degraded tribes of savages ... members of the Larrakiah tribe' had little impact on the 'untouched' wilderness of the Darwin region. In Daly's eagerness to represent an untouched, wild landscape far from the 'civilised' shores of Adelaide, she also overlooks the 'developments' that had taken place in Darwin during the first year of colonisation.

In 1837, Edward Gibbon Wakefield asked rhetorically, 'Is it not the will of God that the earth should be replenished and subdued, that the desert should give rise to the fruitful field, the frantic warcry to the hymn of praise, and the frightful depository of the

⁴⁷ Rhys Jones cited in Ian Donaldson & Tamsin Donaldson (eds), 1985. *Seeing the First Australians*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, p183.

⁴⁸ Diary of Ebenezer Ward, Mortlock Library, PRG 1000/1, pp91-2.

⁴⁹ John Lort Stokes, 1846 (facsimile ed. 1969). *Discoveries in Australia*, Vol. 2, p2.

⁵⁰ In Willshire's 1896 depiction of country in the Victoria River District, Rose notes that the contrast in the 'myth-images' of land and of people is most frequently 'between the fertility and beauty of the land and the non-productivity and savagery of the inhabitants'. In this depiction, Aborigines are unable to comprehend the fertility of their environment and their 'primitive weapons' unable to exploit it (Rose 1992, p408).

unburied dead to the country steeple and the village school?’⁵² Land that had been ‘left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement of Pasturage, Tillage, or Planting, is called, as indeed it is, *waste*’. As Geoff Park notes, ‘no one could claim dominion over land whose soil did not bear the marks of their labour in it’.⁵³ Such argument drew on the beliefs of seventeenth century philosophers who held that cultivation or tilling of the soil was a moral and necessary adjunct to Christianity and Civilisation and by extension, rightful occupation of the soil. To be a hunter or a farmer, Tom Griffiths writes, was identified as the ‘great watershed in human history, the great divide between savagery and civilisation. The European invaders of Australia felt themselves to be on one side of that gulf and condemned Aborigines for being on the other’. Using their own measures of land ownership, Europeans believed that Aboriginal people had ‘failed to invent agriculture or farming, or to make permanent structures or to visibly change the land. They had failed to sign history’.⁵⁴

Eric Rolls observes that when the first white settlers arrived in Australia the country looked ‘superb’ and says that the commonest remark of ‘those practical white men who first saw Australia was, ‘You won’t have to clear it or cultivate it’.⁵⁵ Griffiths also highlights the early colonists’ impressions of the land as being ‘remarkably civilised [in] appearance’ and who found it ‘difficult ... not to fancy that the hand of man had been engaged in combing and arranging the elements of natural beauty’.⁵⁶ These observations were not generated solely by pre-existing cultural visions and hopes but because the early colonists were actually seeing cultivated pastoral plains. One of the major tools that Aboriginal people used in managing or manipulating their environment was fire. ‘Firestick farming’, a phrase coined by archaeologist Rhys Jones, refers to the strategic and controlled burning which Aboriginal people used to hunt game out of hiding places or to attract game to succulent grasses newly sprouted after the fire; to extend the fruit season of certain plants like cycads and, as many Australian native

⁵¹ Mrs Dominic D (nee Harriet Douglas) Daly, 1887. *Digging, Squatting, and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia*, London, pp45-6.

⁵² Cited in Park 1995, p40. Wakefield had pioneered the nineteenth century land settlement scheme ‘systematic colonisation’ which laid the foundations of South Australian colonisation and on whose modified principle the Northern Territory was colonised.

⁵³ Emphasis in original. Park 1995, p39.

⁵⁴ Tom Griffiths, 1996. *Hunters and Collectors. The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p14.

⁵⁵ Rolls 1997, p39.

⁵⁶ Charles Griffiths cited in Griffiths 1996, p14.

plants require fire to flower or to germinate their seeds, to encourage the fruiting of others.⁵⁷ Griffiths explains that the grasslands and woodlands that Europeans found attractive had been sculpted by Aboriginal people who regularly fired the landscape to keep it open for hunting with the soil itself becoming enriched by thousands of years of their fires.⁵⁸ Although the colonists acknowledged that the land was well adapted for pastoralism, Griffiths argues that they nevertheless, ‘overlooked the evidence of Aboriginal firestick farming, their domestication of plants and impact on animals, their artistic and spiritual signatures, their emphasis on gathering as much as hunting, their season housing and deep attachment to place, their relative affluence. These things were unobserved or unacknowledged by whites’.⁵⁹

The ethnohistorian, Greg Denning, challenges Simon Ryan’s argument that whatever the explorers said they saw was actually a metaphor for something else - ‘macho sexuality, their greedy imperialism, their rationalising scientism’. Denning is interested in what the explorers ‘actually saw’, particularly in regards to indigenous people, rather than what they thought they were seeing as interpreted by Ryan. Denning highlights the immense difficulty of seeing ‘what others saw in different times and circumstances’ but believes that the cultural knowledge available today allows an interpretation of Aboriginal agency and action beyond the depictions offered up by explorers which were informed by their cultural prejudice.⁶⁰ Ryan does however point to the way that the colonisers deliberately avoided the question of who had ‘adapted’ the land and for what purpose. As Ryan explains some ‘explorers’ could see ‘other space, other time, other worlds’ and provides the example of the explorer and botanist Ludwig Leichhardt who journeyed overland from Queensland to the Northern Territory in 1845.⁶¹ Leichhardt documented the way the ‘natives seemed to have burned the grass systematically along every watercourse, and round every waterhole, in order to have them surrounded with

⁵⁷ See Rose 1996, Rolls 1997. The use of fire in Aboriginal societies cannot be understated. Apart from use in agriculture and hunting, fire is used for cooking, especially important in the curing of certain foods to rid them of their toxins and make them edible; for warmth and light; in ceremonies; for cleaning up an area prior to camping; for hardening spear points and digging sticks; for communicating with other groups; to drive away dangerous supernatural figures; and to ‘erase the traces of life so that dead people will not want to return’ (Rose 1996, pp64-5).

⁵⁸ Griffiths 1996, p15.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p14.

⁶⁰ Denning 1998, pp76-80.

⁶¹ The ‘other space, other time, other worlds’ quote is from Denning 1998, p77.

young grass as soon as the rain sets in ... it is no doubt connected with the systematic management of their runs, to attract game to particular spots'.⁶²

Aboriginal people were constantly observed lighting fires around the Port Darwin-Adelaide River region but it is unclear whether JT Manton associated these burning practices with indigenous people's land management schemes. On an expedition to the head waters of the Adelaide River in September 1866, Manton looked at the suitability of the country for cattle and, perhaps unwittingly, identified Aboriginal burning practices as a means of managing and increasing the country's output. From Manton's observations of the fires on the Adelaide River, he noted that if grass or reeds were burned off at any time between July and November:

a very fine feed for sheep and cattle will soon be forthcoming; for, owing to the very wet nature of the subsoil, heavy dews, and excessive heat, the young grass and reeds will be up four or five inches in a week or ten days after the country has been burned, and have almost the appearance of a beautiful wheat field, upon which our sheep and cattle improved exceedingly fast.⁶³

That fire was accepted as a land management tool in the Darwin hinterland by the early twentieth century is evidenced by the managers of the Koolpinyah cattle station who constantly record the way their Aboriginal employees were sent out to burn country during the dry season.⁶⁴ In August 1937, the managers of Koolpinyah station recorded the way their Larrakia employee, Gerard Neilanga, 'went footwalk to burn grass at Koorabun, got a good fire going'. A week later, the managers took some visitors from Darwin to 'Korrabum to see the result of the burning off Gerard did last week. Grass beginning to spring'.⁶⁵

⁶² Ludwig Leichhardt quoted in Ryan 1996, pp74, 161.

⁶³ Report from JT Manton, 3 December 1866, SAPP No. 16/1867.

⁶⁴ See for example the entries for 10 June 1913, 'Bennedy, Long Harry and Tony[?] leave to burn Howard Creek cattle country' and 6 June 1923, 'Smiler and Sambo burn grass around Snake Billabong and along plains to Bankers Jungle', Herbert Family Papers, Koolpinyah Station Journals, Northern Territory Archives Service 1362.

⁶⁵ Herbert Family Papers, Koolpinyah Station Journals, 3 & 10 August 1937, Northern Territory Archives Service 1362.

This understanding of Aboriginal land management practices was not widely accepted during the initial colonisation of Port Darwin. It has been shown in previous chapters that at least some members of the Northern Territory survey expeditions understood that there were distinct Aboriginal groups who were responsible for distinct tracts of land about the Darwin region and that land was important for Aboriginal people's survival. Draftsman Bennett had recorded the tribal districts of the 'Woolnah', 'Larrakeyah', 'Meeyah' and 'Warnunger' on a map as well as the indigenous names of particular localities and identified the 'chiefs' of those localities.⁶⁶ Goyder too had identified the portions of four 'native districts' in his survey of the Northern Territory. Bennett and Goyder were both given to understand that the Darwin region was within Larrakia country. But this was as far as it went. Although some Aboriginal words ('Marrara', 'Leanyer' swamp, 'Ilwaddy' Creek) appeared on the early surveyors' maps and are perhaps approximations of Larrakia place names provided by local Aboriginal people, the failure of the early surveyors to record Aboriginal place names or understand Aboriginal land management practices is notable.⁶⁷

In 1869, Surveyor-General Goyder had recommended that the white settlers learn local Aboriginal languages. This was not from any desire to understand Aboriginal people and their relations with their country better, but so that the 'object and motives of the whites' could be 'clearly explained' to them and the Aborigines 'be satisfactorily

⁶⁶ Bennett was with both the 1864-67 and the 1869-70 surveyor expeditions which makes it difficult to determine when his map was drafted. Bennett's map is in SA State Records, GRG35/256 Vol. 11. It is likely that in identifying chiefs for specific places, Bennett was following the official instruction that the surveyors recognise the 'rank and social position of the various chiefs' and support their authority. Apart from references to select Larrakia men as chiefs of Kings (Chief Neurlunga, King Miranda, King George, King Solomon), it is not clear that the colonisers recognised the 'rank and social position' of 'chiefs' or kings in other ways. A photograph of an elderly Warai man from south of Darwin taken during the second world war shows him wearing a king plate but it is difficult to determine if the practice of conferring king plates on Aborigines was as widespread in the Northern Territory as it was in the south. Perhaps the colonisers realised early on that, while elderly Aboriginal people had a high status in Aboriginal society they did not really have chiefs. This may account for almost identical instructions being issued to the Protector of Aborigines three years later, minus the provision regarding chiefs.

⁶⁷ See McKenna for a discussion of the way the far south coast of New South Wales represents one of the most concentrated areas of Aboriginal place names in south-eastern Australia and how the use of these place names has unsettled history making in that area (Mark McKenna, 2002. *Looking for Blackfellas' Point: An Australian History of Place*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney. See Heather Goodall for a discussion of the way the New South Wales Surveyor-General, Thomas Mitchell, pressured the commissioners for Crown Lands to inform themselves as to Aboriginal people's tribal lands and to gain an understanding of which land was most favoured for reserves by Aborigines (Heather Goodall, 1996. *Invasion to Embassy. Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1170-1972*, Allen & Unwin in assoc. with Black Books, pp51-2).

convinced of the futility and impolicy of opposition' to white settlement.⁶⁸ Consequently, one of the official instructions issued to the Protector of Aborigines was that he acquire 'knowledge of the language of the tribes who may be located in the neighbourhood of the new settlement', particularly so he could 'act as an interpreter between them and the settlers'. It is not clear that this ever eventuated. Although JWO Bennett compiled a *Wulna* vocabulary and there are some insignificant references to local Aboriginal languages being learnt or understood, there was little early official attempt to learn the *Larrakia* language.⁶⁹ This was made clear by the editor of the local newspaper who, in 1874, debunked any notion that the Protector of Aborigines was 'deeply engaged in studying the native languages and that he passes most of his evenings in the wurlies, acquiring a knowledge of the social manners and customs of the interesting people who are committed to his charge'.⁷⁰ Another newspaper correspondent also doubted whether this was the case but explained, the 'poetical and euphonious language of our sable brethren of Port Darwin is not to be picked up so readily as our law makers would have people believe'.⁷¹

While the new settlers were officially instructed to learn Aboriginal languages, it was not until the rise of ethnography in Darwin from the 1880s that the *Larrakia* language, place names and details of their relations with their country were recorded. However, this was done out of ethnological interest rather than because of official instructions and the ethnographic knowledge that was collected was used for publication in academic journals rather than having any local application.⁷² In an ironic twist to this early failure to pay attention to Aboriginal languages, the Superintendent of Kahlin

⁶⁸ GW Goyder, *Survey of the Northern Territory*, 27 September 1869, SAPP No 157 1869/70.

⁶⁹ In April 1869, assistant naturalist Hoare wrote out some of a 'native vocabulary' for Dr Peel. However, it is unclear whether Hoare was translating the *Larrakia* or the *Wulna* vocabulary (The diary of WW Hoare, 29 April 1869, Mortlock Library, No. 341). Official correspondence also suggests that Police Trooper Todd may have had some working knowledge of both *Larrakia* and *Wulna* languages as he was called upon to interpret information from Aborigines. See correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner for Crown Lands, 1 July 1870, SA State records, GRS1 81/70 and Report from the Government Resident, April 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 67/1871.

⁷⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 January 1874. This comment pertains to Point Twelve of the official instructions to Aborigines which instructed the Protector to 'lose no time' in trying to acquaint himself with the 'general condition, and the manners and customs of the various tribes'. This was advised so that the 'Government may be in a position to consider your suggestions and send you more regular and detailed instructions in the future'.

⁷¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 30 January 1874.

⁷² See Foelsche 1885; TA Parkhouse, 1894. 'Remarks on the Native Tongues in the Neighborhood of Port Darwin', *Royal Society of South Australia Transactions*, Vol. 19, pp1-18; Parkhouse 1895 and Basedow 1907.

Compound, FL Godfrey, was asked in 1914 by the Northern Territory Department of Lands to mark on a map the ‘names of different tribes along the coast’. When this request went unanswered Godfrey was reminded, ‘we are likely to require the native names soon’.⁷³ Superintendent Godfrey went a lot further than just recording Aboriginal tribal names. He compiled an extensive list of Aboriginal place names in the Darwin-Cox Peninsula region, many of which bear a resemblance to the place names which continue to be known and used by Larrakia people today. These place names are used for sites discussed in the following section of this chapter. If the colonial officials had dictated that Larrakia place names be recorded by the early surveyors and used in the new settlement there would be a very different official nomenclature of the Darwin landscape today.⁷⁴ An understanding of Larrakia place names may also have allowed the early colonisers to have a better understanding of the Larrakia’s relations with their country.⁷⁵

Appropriation and Change

European colonisation brought many changes to the Port Darwin peninsula which were in direct competition with or mimicked pre-existing Larrakia land uses and meanings. The following section looks at the way the landscape began to change and take shape as a settlement during the first decades of colonisation. While the first section of this chapter looked at general Larrakia ways of living about their country in pre-invasion times this section juxtaposes European land appropriations with very specific Larrakia land uses and meanings.

As soon as Goyder’s surveying expedition arrived in Darwin harbour they set about making changes to the local landscape which would accommodate their pre-conceived vision of a major town and seaport. Point Emery was originally favoured as the site for

⁷³ Memo from JE Day to FL Godfrey, n.d; letter from FL Godfrey, 1 May 1914, Correspondence is held at the Place Names Committee, NT Department of Lands, Darwin.

⁷⁴ In subsequent years, Larrakeeyah, Mindil, Lameroo and Myilly – all allegedly approximations of Larrakia words and names – were used to name a suburb, two beaches and a geographical point. The 1970s and ‘80s saw the development of new suburbs to the north of Darwin and the resultant proliferation of Aboriginal names. However the suburbs have been named after Aboriginal language groups from across the Territory not Larrakia language place names or words.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of the importance and complexity of indigenous place names to Aboriginal people see Michael Walsh, 1997. ‘The land still speaks?’, Deborah Bird Rose and Anne Clarke (eds), *Tracking*

the future capital city because of its flat tableland, the sea breezes it attracted, the height of the cliffs above sea level, the presence of freshwater and the depth of the anchorage below the point. Add to this the view that could be obtained of all parts of the harbour and its suitability as a landing and launching pad for canoes and you have more reasons why Aboriginal people also favoured this area as noted by Captain Howard when he stumbled over an Aboriginal camp in this vicinity in 1865. The physical evidence would have suggested to the surveyors that this was an Aboriginal living place. What they probably did not know was that it was a place of significance to the Larrakia as a men's ceremonial ground, *Gundalagwa* and was also part of the Dreaming track *Ngayin.gilmak* which links significant places in the Darwin region with those on the Cox Peninsula and beyond.⁷⁶ Like many sites of Aboriginal significance, *Gundalagwa* has particular rules or laws which must be observed while in the area – the primary one being that women are not permitted to move beyond a specific place in this cultural landscape. If the Larrakia had been aware that Point Emery was being mooted as the immediate site for permanent European occupation they would have been relieved when Goyder cast his eye a few kilometres southeast and decided to locate the township on the tableland near Fort Hill (*Mayrere*) and Stokes Hill (*Delila*). Point Emery or *Gundalagwa* was now relegated to the outskirts of the newly fixed township site.

Aboriginal people who had heard tell of or witnessed European 'settling' practices at Escape Cliffs would not have been surprised at the immediacy or means with which the newcomers took up and transformed the newly acquired landscape. After finding a suitable place for a landing site, members of the survey expedition ventured ashore and began felling trees to build stockyards for the bullocks, horses and goats they had brought with them. The very top of Fort Hill was cleared of 'heavy timber and scrub', then burnt, a flagstaff erected and the Union Jack hoisted thus announcing European presence, ownership and intention for the area. In establishing their camp of tents and mosquito nets below Fort Hill the survey party cleared 'dense jungle'. Further trees were felled for timber out of which a storehouse, stables and a floating jetty were constructed. Wood was collected for fuel and to line wells, bark was stripped to roof

Knowledge in North Australian landscapes: studies in indigenous and settler ecological knowledge systems, North Australia Research Unit, The Australian National University, Darwin.

huts, timber was cut to make seats, tables and specimen boxes which were rapidly filled by the naturalists in the party. Fences were established and defined European space and, as seen previously, became the boundaries that Aboriginal people were not allowed to breach. Rock was blasted for making roads and stone was removed from the beach and surrounding bush to lay out a road from the Fort Point camp to the jetty, the tableland and to Peel's Well.

European livestock was grazed and watered at the small fresh water creeks in the region including Horse or Burton's Creek.⁷⁷ A dam was later formed across this creek so as to preserve water for the government gardens which had been established there. Aboriginal people who had relied on these supplies of fresh water may have been surprised at the speed with which the livestock drained or muddied small creeks and watercourses thus preventing their use. In the quest for a permanent supply of fresh water for their own use, the surveyors dug numerous exploratory holes and formed several wells. A fresh water spring about one and a half miles to the north west of Fort Point was located, a well dug and named Peel's Well after the survey expedition's doctor. Another fresh water spring on Lameroo Beach was dug for a well which became known as the Overland Telegraph (OT) Well and supplied the water needs of the fledgling Darwin community. By 1879 a further twelve wells had been dug for public use and the some of the town folk had sunk wells on their town allotments. Government Resident Price no longer held any concern for the availability of fresh water in Darwin.⁷⁸ On the 'rich soil' surrounding these springs and wells gardens were established. In Doctor's Gully (*Ninyji*), near Peel's Well, a garden was laid out and cress, radishes, cabbage, lettuces and shallots grown. Melon, potato and garlic seeds were also planted. Sugar cane was grown in a garden established in the surveyor's camp and another in Doctor's Gully.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Michael Walsh, 1989. *Ten Years On: supplement to Kenbi land claim book*, Northern Land Council, p18.

⁷⁷ Burton's Creek may be the 'Horse Creek' referred to on some early maps which then may have been known more locally as 'the creek' which ran into One Mile Dam. Bill Harney refers to this creek as 'Ilwada' (WE Harney, 1957. *Life among the Aborigines*, R Hale, London).

⁷⁸ There were seven wells at the nursery, one each at Point Emery, the Hospital, and the Police Station and two on the Esplanade (Government Resident EW Price, Reports on the Northern Territory, 20 May 1879 and 13 October 1879).

⁷⁹ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 2 June 1871, SAPP No. 35/1871.

As seen in the previous chapter there was an altercation near one of these newly dug wells which resulted in Aboriginal people being forced to move away from this site. It is unclear whether this was due to a contest over the use and abuse of water or the lands surrounding this water by the colonisers. However, we do know that the same fresh water springs and surrounding land that the colonisers were appropriating for their wells and gardens were important sites to the Larrakia, not just for their supply of fresh water and general predisposition as good living areas. For Larrakia people the fresh water springs on their country are the physical manifestations of various Dreamings. For example, in naming a beach near one of the springs 'Lameroo', the newcomers appropriated a Larrakia name. For Larrakia people, Lameroo Beach is the site of *damoe-ra* the fresh water spring behind the beach at the base of the cliff. In Larrakia language the primary meaning of *damoe-ra* is 'eye'. However it also has the secondary meaning of 'spring' and this is the meaning of the word *damoe-ra* in this case. This spring was created by the trevally fish *doemgi-la* who jumped from the saltwater, when the tide was coming in, and created the spring by the impact of its landing.⁸⁰ The contestation of the use of Lameroo Beach by Aboriginal people as a living space and Europeans as a social space is discussed later in this thesis.

After the initial establishment of the main surveying camp at Fort Point and the surveying of the Palmerston township, teams were dispatched to survey the subsidiary township sites and the surrounding hinterland. The actual task of surveying involved intense 'modification' of the landscape. This included clearing land for roads, burning large tracts of country to improve visibility, driving surveying pegs into the ground and burning the bush in a large circle around the surveying camps both to prevent surprise attacks by Aborigines and to prevent the survey party from being burnt by fires lit by Aboriginal people. Roads and tracks soon marked the Darwin landscape as the surveyors moved further afield. Ten years after the colonisers arrived, Government Resident Price enthused that 135 miles of road with substantial bridges now extended south from Darwin.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Mark Harvey, 1995. *Place Names and Sites of Significance in the Darwin Area*, January Revision.

⁸¹ 'A short sketch of the Northern Territory of South Australia, being the result of personal observations during a residence of six years', by Government Resident Edward William Price, SAPP No. 138/1880.

As discussed previously, Goyder chose four township sites for settlement in his initial survey. It was during his examination of land in the east arm of Darwin harbour (now called the Elizabeth River) that we see a deliberate appropriation of a readily identifiable Aboriginal place. Leaving most of the Expedition engaged at Fort Point, Goyder took a small team in a whale boat and searched the east arm of the harbour for a landing place and suitable site for the township 'Virginia'. In this region, Goyder examined an opening in the mangroves which led to a 'native grave' near the high water mark. Goyder was dissatisfied with this spot as a possible township site and continued further down the stream searching for a more appropriate place. This was unsuccessful and Goyder returned to the vicinity of the burial area, decided that this was the best site for a township and made a 'rough sketch of the country about a mile each side of the landing place'. He then 'blazed' some trees as 'indications to Mr Mitchell's party of our presence'.⁸² The following month Goyder relocated this township site a further two miles away, not because of concern over the Aboriginal burial place but because of his dissatisfaction with the depth of the anchorage at this proposed township site. On a sketch map of the land now designated for the Township of Virginia Goyder drew two large shell mounds and a 'native wurley'.⁸³ It is likely that these two 'shell mounds' were Aboriginal created shell middens and indicate a long term use of the place for both collecting a particular type of marine resource and as a living site. The deliberate erasure of prior Aboriginal land uses is shown in Goyder's official town plan of Virginia where these readily identifiable sites of Aboriginal occupation no longer exist. They have been erased and supplanted by a town plan replicating the square grid model used in the City of Adelaide complete with bordering north, south, east and west terraces. The Virginia township was to be surrounded by parklands on three sides and contain streets named London, Ryan, Lowther, Irwin, Hinton, Cerrold, Francis, Armstrong, Fisher, Wells, Holland and Hardy.

Further appropriation of Aboriginal created shell middens occurred with the establishment of the Fort Point township. Goyder's 1869 journal contains constant references to the 'men burning lime' in the settlement which was probably obtained

⁸² Diary kept by the Surveyor General, GW Goyder, 1 January – 28 September 1869. Mitchell had been dispatched to examine the country as far as the east arm.

from midden sites within the Darwin area. In June 1871, Government Resident Douglas wrote of the large supplies of shells from the ‘unaccounted for shell heaps inside the mangrove belts’ which, together with coral from the coast, was used for making the lime used in the construction of the Government Resident’s house.⁸⁴ The Government Resident’s house was sited on the tableland above the original surveyor’s camp at Fort Point and indicates not only the appropriation of what were possibly Aboriginal shell middens but also the appropriation of a Larrakia living space, often cited as being on the tableland above the Fort Point surveying depot. When the Commissioner of Crown Lands travelled to the Northern Territory in 1873, he too suggested redressing the absence of lime for building and agricultural purposes by using the ‘large accumulations of shells just outside the township - some of these fifty to one hundred feet long, several feet high, and ten to twelve feet wide’ as well as the ‘large quantity of shells ... discovered on an island not far from Palmerston’ (‘Shell’ Island which was known to the Larrakia as *Igga-jellork*).⁸⁵

The plethora of native vegetation which the Larrakia managed and harvested for a variety of uses from their fertile country has already been discussed. The fertility of the land was also appreciated by the colonisers. In 1871, Government Resident Douglas enthused that land about Palmerston was capable of growing ‘fine crops’ and that, further inland, away from the coast, there were ‘large tracts of the richest deep chocolate soil, land which can be easily cleared, and where the plough can be used with the greatest effect’.⁸⁶ Douglas avowed that, ‘These lands would grow anything in any climate; nothing can surpass their richness, or the favourable formation of the country in which they exist – the ground being full of gentle undulations, giving every variety of aspect and the most advantageous fall for drainage, where it is required’.⁸⁷ When the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Reynolds, visited the Northern Territory in 1873 he too enthused over the fertility of the land. He believed that tropical and semi-tropical fruits

⁸³ Surveyor General Goyder, Sketch Map of a Traverse on the East Arm of Port Darwin, 26 March 1869, Field Book 6A, held at the Place Names Committee, NT Department of Lands, Darwin.

⁸⁴ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 2 June 1871, SAPP No. 35/1871.

⁸⁵ T Reynolds, 1873. The Report of the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration of his Official Visit to the Northern Territory, via Galle, Singapore, Java, Macassar, and Timor, July 30, SAPP No. 55/1873.

⁸⁶ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 2 June 1871, SAPP No. 35/1871.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

would flourish in Darwin and that the soil, heavy rainfall, climate, ‘rank vegetation’, succulent grasses, rich alluvial flats, and the ‘magnificent plains covered with grasses’ all indicated that the country was ‘well-adapted for sugar, rice, tobacco, and perhaps coffee and tea’. Reynolds was also ‘struck’ by the capacity of Port Darwin, believing that very few harbours in the Australian colonies could ‘surpass it for safety and breadth’.⁸⁸

In keeping with these optimistic projections, ‘land’ was represented in line with the uses to which it was to be put. Land on which sugar cane was to be grown became ‘good sugar land’.⁸⁹ ‘Swamp’ land between Fort Hill and Stokes Hill was to be ‘reclaimed’ and made useful.⁹⁰ Land was ‘rich soil’ capable of ‘growing a luxuriant crop of grass, on which animals become rolling fat’.⁹¹ The ‘tropical jungle’ made way for the Experimental Nursery which, singlehandedly, proved the ‘adaptability of the climate for sugar and cotton, and other tropical produce’.⁹² Consequently, land in the Darwin hinterland was cleared and burnt in the preparation for planting sugar cane and cotton. In 1881, Mr Delissa was busy ‘breaking some rich soil’ for sugar cane growing on the Cox Peninsula.⁹³ Land was also ‘taken up’, ‘cleared’ and ‘got ready’ for coffee and other tropical agriculture at Rum Jungle.⁹⁴ The Chinese were growing sugar cane at ‘Mindale’, about a mile from Darwin and had established gardens elsewhere about the township. Great swathes were cut in the forests of cypress pine on Indian Island for use in Darwin buildings. Cypress pine was particularly favoured because it was a hardwood and therefore termite resistance. In 1883, the Government Resident wrote that the ‘white ants have committed great ravages this season. Every possible piece of timber, not being cypress pine, no matter how well protected, has been destroyed’. The white ants had ‘demolished’ the verandah of the Residency, the roofing timber of the Inspector’s quarters, the Government offices, forge, stables, cart-shed, senior operator’s quarters ‘and finally the courthouse’ - all were replaced by cypress pine.

⁸⁸ Reynolds 1873, SAPP No. 55/1873.

⁸⁹ EW Price, Report of the Government Resident on the Northern Territory, 28 September 1881.

⁹⁰ EW Price, Report on State of Northern Territory, 29 March 1881, SAPP No. 33/1881.

⁹¹ EW Price, Report of the Government Resident on the Northern Territory, 28 September 1881.

⁹² EW Price, Report of the Government Resident on the Northern Territory, 30 September 1880.

⁹³ EW Price, Report of the Government Resident on the Northern Territory, 28 September 1881.

⁹⁴ EW Price, Report of the Government Resident on the Northern Territory, 4 January 1882.

The rapidity in which the land was modified under the imagination and will of the colonisers is exemplified in Government Resident Price's description of how he had 'selected a piece of jungle land, three miles from Palmerston, at Fannie Bay, close to the sea' and 'put to work' five hundred Chinese people on it. They first cleared away all the timber on the land, piling then burning it, then dug trenches to a depth of twenty-two inches. In around four months, a little over thirty acres of land was cleared and trenched. With the onset of the wet season, twenty-eight Chinese were retained to plant and dig wells. Cotton, twelve kinds of sugarcane, arrowroot, tobacco, tea, coffee, peanut, indigo, Chinese oil plant, broom corn, rice, Chinese grass cloth, sorghum, maize, and a number of spice trees were planted throughout November and December. While it was too early to speak of the successes of such crops, Price enthused 'Nature has intended Port Darwin to be a great place, and so most certainly the northern door of Australia must be'.⁹⁵

It is ironic that, if nature had intended Darwin to be a great place, it was only through the 'de-naturing' of the landscape that the land could realise its potential. The notion that such development could tame or civilise the land is evident in the suggestion of JG Knight that prison labour be used to clear a road through the newly surveyed township at Fannie Bay which was at that time nearly 'all bush' so that intending purchasers could view the allotments. Knight thought that when the land was sold 'it would fetch a much higher price than if disposed of in its primitive condition'.⁹⁶ It is also apparent in the local newspaper's description of Mr MD Armstrong's occupation of a block at Rapid Creek and the way he had made a 'vast opening ... in what was originally a dense jungle'. It was believed that the land, 'exposed to the influence of the sun for the first time for an age, looks to be quite good enough to repay the labour and money that will have to be expended on it before it can be cultivated with any success'. Adjoining Armstrong's block was that of Mr Daniels, including land known as 'the rice garden' which the Chinese allegedly abandoned after Daniels secured the land all round them. Daniels cleared a large area of this for planting and the newspaper praised 'the additional improvement of a solid fence running through the block' which gave 'the

⁹⁵ 'A short sketch of the Northern Territory of South Australia, being the result of personal observations during a residence of six years', by Government Resident Edward William Price, SAPP No. 138/1880.

⁹⁶ JG Knight, Clerk of Courts and Deputy-Sheriff, 16 January 1886, *Report on the Northern Territory, 1885*.

place an air of permanency and genuineness that is pleasing to behold'.⁹⁷ Bringing sun (that is light and civilisation) appeared to be the only way to enrich the obviously worthless jungle. Use of the words solid, permanency, genuineness and pleasing suggest that the colonial vision of rolling plains with fat cattle and super-abundant agricultural farms was not far off.⁹⁸

It is these landscape descriptions and optimistic projections of future agricultural growth in the territory that expose the capitalistic nature of European imperialism. As seen previously Aboriginal people were thought not to 'own' the land because of their perceived failure to put their labour into it. However, while those European settlers praised the fertility of the land, they soon realised that the population to work or cultivate (and thus truly own) the land could not come from within Australia. Once the Northern Territory surveying expedition returned south, it became the constant lament of the early Government Residents of the failure of the Northern Territory to attract a decent sized European population with the wealth and economy which would accompany them. In contrast to the optimism described previously, Government Resident Scott wrote in 1876 that there was nothing 'very cheering to report' about the Northern Territory. There was a 'diminished population' and Scott believed that there was 'very little doubt that nearly every person in the Territory would go if it were convenient to do so'. He thought that this was because of the 'trying' climate and a general disappointment with the place as people had believed 'they were going to make fortunes and, instead of which, the great majority are no better off and everyone is more or less injured in health'. At this time, Larrakia and Wulna people outnumbered Europeans in the Darwin area.⁹⁹ However, the difficulty in estimating the size and potential of an indigenous labour force meant that the sights of the colonisers became focussed further afield.

As early as 1869, Goyder expressed concern over whether Europeans would be able to work productively in the north's tropical climate and, although he believed in 'acclimatization', advised that 'labour could be obtained from adjacent islands, and at a

⁹⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 29 December 1893.

⁹⁸ Landscape descriptions also reflected events happening at the time. Land becomes 'leprous districts' (that is where leprosy was believed to have originated) or 'black areas' (that is lands where Aboriginal people committed murders).

⁹⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 March 1876.

cost so trifling compared with that of European labor, that the latter would only be resorted to where inspection or direction became necessary'.¹⁰⁰ A few years later, the Commissioner of Crown Lands suggested that 'coolie labour' be introduced to the Northern Territory from either Timor or Singapore. The Commissioner enthused that the Territory's 'striking geographical position' would ensure it became 'the point where the superabundant population of those islands may find a foothold and a home where millions of acres wait for the occupancy of a race just adapted to their special wants'.¹⁰¹ In August 1874, Captain Douglas returned to the Northern Territory with one hundred and eighty six Singapore Chinese and ten 'Malays'.¹⁰² They did not fare as well as expected and the Government Resident reported in 1875 that at least half of these laborers were elderly and were to be returned home. Those capable of labour were employed on road work, in the Botanic Gardens and in growing vegetables.¹⁰³ The hypocrisy involved in the colonial project was demonstrated by the decision of the colonisers to import 'cheap' labour to work the land, thus truly claiming it for Europeans while simultaneously deciding that Aborigines did not truly own the land as they had not changed it with their labour.

The non-Aboriginal population of Darwin and its hinterland was also substantially boosted by the influx of Chinese people who began coming to the goldfields (situated between Southport and Pine Creek) during the late 1870s.¹⁰⁴ In May 1879, there were 3162 Chinese people in the Northern Territory. One thousand were located in Darwin compared with about 450 Europeans. The majority of the Chinese worked on the goldfields panning for alluvial gold. However, this work was only possible during the wet season and, once the rains stopped, they moved back into the Darwin area. Once there, the Government Resident put them on 'relief work' for fear that they might starve to death. In March 1880, Government Resident Price advised that there had been almost 100 deaths in ten weeks amongst the Chinese, believed to have been caused by disease and opium use. Fear that the Chinese would spread disease to the European

¹⁰⁰ GW Goyder, Northern Territory Survey Progress Report, 3 May 1869, SAPP No. 31/1869.

¹⁰¹ Reynolds 1873, SAPP No. 55/1873.

¹⁰² Telegram from Government Resident Scott, 5 August 1874, SA State Records, GRS1 289/1874.

¹⁰³ GB Scott, Government Resident's Report on Northern Territory, 12 February 1876.

¹⁰⁴ Of the three subsidiary townships surveyed during Goyder's 1869 expedition, the township of Southport was the only one to come into existence. It flourished during the gold rush of the late 1870s and 1880s when it provided the main point of stores and departure for the goldfields but then dwindled when the Palmerston to Pine Creek railway (completed in 1891) bypassed it.

population resulted in their camps being moved further away from the town area.¹⁰⁵ European men who had come to work the goldfields without success were also put on relief work. They were paid 5 shillings a day compared to the one shilling a day that the Chinese were being paid in 1879.¹⁰⁶ Those on 'relief work' were employed clearing and trenching on the proposed site of the Experimental Nursery at Fannie Bay, 'reclaiming' land at the Fort Point camp, clearing away mangroves, and 'clearing roads thereby allowing the sea breeze to blow freely over the town which greatly conduces to public health'. A gang was also employed lengthening the Gulnare jetty and some of the Chinese dug several more wells about the town area.¹⁰⁷

By 1886, there were approximately 4000 Chinese people in the Northern Territory with 1200 of them in Darwin and its immediate neighbourhood.¹⁰⁸ Two years later, the territory's Chinese population had reached 6750, many of whom were employed on the Darwin to Pine Creek railway. However, at this time, the South Australian Government was caught up in the national anti-Asian sentiment and placed a poll tax on Chinese entering the Territory. From 1888, the numbers of Chinese in the Territory declined and their 'occupational composition changed as the coolie class went home to China and the merchants stayed and continued to expand their hold on the Territory economy'.¹⁰⁹ In the 1890s, Darwin's multicultural community was made up of not only Chinese people but about 150 'Indians' and 'Cingalese' and over three hundred Japanese, Filipino, Torres Strait Islander, Indonesian and Malaysian pearlers.¹¹⁰

Once the Darwin settlement had been established, Aboriginal people from across the Northern Territory made their way into the settlement for a number of reasons. These included a continuation of pre-colonisation visitation, curiosity, a desire for staple foods or stimulants like tea, sugar and tobacco that were available in the settlement, to acquire European goods, for trade, because of economic necessity due to environmental damage, to seek protection from aggressive miners or pastoralists, to partake in the

¹⁰⁵ See *Northern Territory Times*, 26 January 1884.

¹⁰⁶ EW Price, Report on State of Northern Territory, 29 March 1881, SAPP No. 33/1881; EW Price, Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 13 October 1879.

¹⁰⁷ EW Price, Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 20 May 1879 and 13 October 1879.

¹⁰⁸ JL Parsons, Government Resident's Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory, December 1886.

¹⁰⁹ Powell 1988, p116-7.

¹¹⁰ Powell 1988, pp116-8.

annual distribution of rations of blankets and food by the government or because other Aboriginal groups had come in.¹¹¹ Of the 288 Aboriginal people at the 1899 distribution of government rations in Darwin, there were seventy-three 'Larrakeeyah' and twenty-six 'Southport Larrakeeyahs', twenty-three 'Wagites' (people from the Daly River), sixty-eight 'Woolners', thirty-one 'Manassi', forty 'Alligators' (people from the Alligator Rivers region) and twenty-seven 'Cherites' (people from the Daly River).¹¹²

Substantial population movement to the Darwin area impacted on the resources and economy of the local people. Neighbouring Aboriginal groups visiting the Darwin region in either the long or short term would have put pressure on the same natural resources that Larrakia people were dependent on. TA Parkhouse, an ethnographer working in Darwin in the 1890s, heard 'strong expressions of dissatisfaction at a friend who had overstayed his welcome and it was forcibly put to him that food was not so plentiful that his presence was any longer desirable'.¹¹³ It is unclear whether this was inter-clan rivalry or whether the food referred to was European or indigenous in origin. However, Parkhouse uses this exchange as an example following his explanation of how land was divided amongst Aborigines in Darwin. It can therefore be suggested that the Larrakia, or a clan or family of the Larrakia, were asserting their rights to their land and the resources, European or indigenous, on it.

According to a Northern Territory customs official in the 1890s, Alfred Searcy, Chinese people worked Darwin harbour during the prawn spawning season with very fine nets. They would catch tons of prawns which they would dry and send to China. Searcy believed that using this method 'millions were destroyed' and advocated the protection of the fisheries in these waters. Searcy also described the 'immense quantities' of small fish which were caught in nets staked for hundreds of yards alongside the mangroves and served up by the Chinese as white bait. The Chinese also caught crab and rock cod.¹¹⁴ Another method of fishing which would have impacted on marine resources was the use of dynamite. In 1877, PM Sers was said to have provided

¹¹¹ see Baker 1999, pp128-142.

¹¹² 'Census of Natives at Annual distribution of Blankets', Saturday 22 April 1899, NTRS F790 A8842.

¹¹³ Parkhouse 1895, p639.

the town with fish that he caught, with the assistance of two Aboriginal men, off 'Lamara' beach by throwing dynamite into the water.¹¹⁵

As seen earlier in this chapter, native vegetation in Darwin was cleared in the development of the township and the establishment of fruit and vegetable gardens, orchards, rice-fields and other plantations. However, it was not only land clearance, gardening and more intense fishing practices which depleted natural resources in the region. For many the Northern Territory was considered a 'sportsman's paradise'. Soon after Darwin was colonised, a formalised shooting season was programmed to take place in the months following the dry season, that is September through to November. It is likely that this season followed Aboriginal hunting seasons when birds, fish and game were easier to spear in water holes and lagoons made smaller by their drying out towards the end of the dry. Various localities within the Darwin region became known as 'hunting resorts'. In October 1883, the local newspaper reported:

Wild fowl, in the shape of geese, have been exceedingly plentiful during the past few weeks, and have afforded fine sport to our local knights of the trigger, who when business spares them are only to be found at Knuckey's Lagoon, or on their road to it or back again; the one way loaded with ammunition and tucker, the other with the welcome birds, which are, as a rule, distributed with great lavishness amongst our hungry townfolk. We say hungry advisedly for if it was not for these welcome additions to the *menu* our tables would bear the appearance of ten years ago - bare of all, except bouilli, bacon and bread.¹¹⁶

In September 1884, the local newspaper advised that 'our local sportsmen' could 'now obtain some good shooting at Millner's lagoon; the geese are not so plentiful as they have been in previous seasons; but there are quite sufficient to repay the trouble of a ten mile drive'.¹¹⁷ In 1892, the *Northern Territory Times* took great pleasure in reporting

¹¹⁴ Alfred Searcy, 1905. *In Northern Seas*. Being Mr Alfred Searcy's Experiences on the North Coast of Australia, as recounted to E Whittington, reprinted from 'The Register' (South Australia) by Authority of the South Australian Government, WK Thomas & Co, Grenfell Street.

¹¹⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 5 May 1877.

¹¹⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 13 October 1883. The paper attributed the 'scarcity of butcher's meat' to the leanness of the cattle due to the lengthy dry season and because of the insufficient importation of sheep to the Territory.

¹¹⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 September 1884.

on the hunting potential of the Northern Territory. A pig shooting party ‘knock[ed] over a couple of wild porkers’ on the Cox peninsula, a ‘buggy party’ at the lagoon ‘bagged over thirty geese and sundry smaller feathered fry’ and, closer to Darwin, the ‘sacred kangaroo’ was ‘victimised by both dog and gun to some considerable tune’. ‘One way or another’, the paper reported, the ‘exceptionally good character of the season, from a sporting man’s point of view, is being solidly maintained. As we have said before, anything like the present remarkable abundance of game is not remembered by the oldest Palmerstonian’.¹¹⁸ Another newspaper report referred to the ‘luck’ of a shooting party who had managed to ‘bag 150 geese’ in a few hours at ‘one of our shooting resorts’.¹¹⁹ In 1898, Baron von Swaine and ‘his friend Mr Mead’ visited the Territory and ‘indulged in a little buffalo shooting’ at the Adelaide River where they ‘assisted at the slaughter of 40 or 50 of these animals’ with a ‘few alligators’ being ‘thrown in for variety’s sake’. The Northern Territory Times opined that the visitors had ‘gone away with a very high opinion of the Territory from a game-hunting point of view’.¹²⁰ In September 1901, a ‘party of local shootists’ camped at ‘The Jungle’ for a few days and were ‘said to have had a fair amount of success in “potting” several marsupials, and to have been delighted with one of the best of the few pleasant excursion resorts near Palmerston’.¹²¹

Alfred Searcy recounts how magpie geese flying over to the lagoons at night were attracted by the sheen of the white roofs in Port Darwin and Southport and, mistaking them for water, would swoop down fairly low, following which they were shot down by the local residents. He also writes how the lagoons and belts of jungle ten or so miles from Darwin were, in the season, a great place for ducks and geese and how, ‘Many a happy day I put in there with others killing something’. Searcy, perhaps unwittingly, demonstrates how natural resources in the Darwin region were completely depleted. He recounts how Shell Island (in Darwin harbour) was a favourite seasonal camping place for a large variety of parrots:

We used to post ourselves just before sundown under the trees near the mangroves, and wait the coming of the birds. If they happened along proceedings commenced

¹¹⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 May 1892.

¹¹⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 22 November 1895.

¹²⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 12 August 1898.

and continued until it was too dark to see them. Lanterns were then produced, and a search made for the birds among the mangrove roots. The largest take I heard of was 250. Suddenly the birds ceased to turn up at the island. We put the cause down to the fact that several of the crew of a pearling schooner who had died of beri beri were buried there.

Searcy considered kangaroo shooting one of the 'most enjoyable sports' in the jungles close to Darwin, particularly in 'the cool of the early morning, when everything was wet with dew and all was so quiet and still':

We generally had a crowd of niggers to beat inside, and we, remaining on the outside, had our shooting as the marsupials broke cover ... On one of our expeditions we secured 20 kangaroos - that is, evening and morning shooting. These were all carted into the township, and, to the great disgust of the butcher (for they are excellent eating), distributed round. We never wasted kangaroo, and it was not an uncommon thing to see it figure on the bill of fare at the hotels'.¹²²

Kangaroo was also hunted on horseback with dogs although the country was thought to be too thickly timbered or 'too rotten' which rendered the 'chance of a bad fall a bit too pronounced' to make this 'sport' altogether 'comfortable' or 'pleasant'.¹²³ In 1905, His Excellency the Honorable Victor Hood, visited Darwin and spent a day shooting at the Casuarinas, twelve kilometres from Darwin. They had 'fairly good sport, bagging 16 kangaroos, a turkey and some jungle fowl and pigeons'.¹²⁴

References to the colonisers 'hawking of geese' around the town and the bad tempers of the local butchers indicate that many of the shooting parties distributed or sold their catch in the township for consumption.¹²⁵ However, it is clear that people also hunted purely for sport. In February 1905, the height of the wet season, visitors to East Point complained that the 'pretty road leading through the jungle ... was poisoned by sickening odours arising from the putrefying carcasses of not less than five different

¹²¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 6 September 1901.

¹²² Searcy 1905, 12ff.

¹²³ Searcy 1905, 12ff; *Northern Territory Times*, 19 July 1901.

¹²⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 12 May 1905.

¹²⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 September 1895 and 22 November 1895.

kangaroos, which had apparently been shot by some “sportsmen”, and left lying near the roadway. Two of the animals had been disemboweled’. In contrast to the above descriptions of hunting, the editor of the *Northern Territory Times* remonstrated, ‘Shootists who find a pleasure in slaying animals for “the mere sport of the thing” - a cruel and senseless, if it not be a wicked pastime - might at least remove the dead carcasses to such a distance from a public thoroughfare that they will not become a source of offence to others’.¹²⁶ Some months later, a correspondent to the newspaper drew attention to the ‘shocking and sinful waste of good food’ which had recently taken place in the ‘wholesale slaughter of wild geese, ducks, etc ... at some of the shooting resorts near town’. The correspondent described how a ‘good proportion of the game thus ruthlessly destroyed is left rotting upon the ground’ and concluded with the ‘satirical query as to “whether this kind of thing can rightly be designated sport in the true sense”’.¹²⁷

As seen from the above discussion, land in the Darwin region took on new meanings in line with its town, agricultural, pastoral, mining and hunting development and potential. The landscape in and adjacent to the emerging township also held changed social meaning as the white settlers appropriated certain places as pleasure resorts and recreational areas. The following discussion highlights the way that particular places held interest for both the colonists and Aborigines and contrasts the uses and meanings of each group. Sight-seeing excursions were made on foot, by buggy or by boat to Talc Head, West Point, Fannie Bay, East Point, the ‘crystal clear’ waters of Rapid Creek, Dripstone Caves, the ‘romantic’ Casuarinas and the jungle behind Casuarina Beach where there was an enormous Banyan tree, eighty foot high and covered with ‘numerous twisted ramifying roots 2,000 square yards’. Aboriginal people also visited this jungle, ‘tapping various trunks for honey’ which was plentiful there.¹²⁸ Dripstone Cliffs was named by the colonisers for the stone comprising the cliffs and shallow caves on Casuarina Beach. It is also the site of the *Ngartba-ngartba* frog Dreaming where the Larrakia people used to dance a frog corroboree. As a small child, the Larrakia woman, Topsy Secretary remembered throwing these three-eyed saltwater frogs into the sea but says there were no *ngartba-ngartba* frogs there now because there

¹²⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 3 February 1905.

¹²⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 1 September 1905.

¹²⁸ *Adelaide Observer*, 6 May 1882.

were too many people in the area. This frog dreaming site is linked to a significant frog dreaming site at *Binybinya* on the Cox Peninsula.¹²⁹

On a boating trip from Port Darwin to Escape Cliffs in 1874, some white sightseers passed by and remarked upon ‘two small rocks jutting out of the sea, with deep water all around, forming one of those curious feature seen so often in these parts, viz., isolated rocks in the midst of deep water’. These rocks were seen about a mile from Lee Point and half a mile from the low water mark. These rocks, ‘curious’ to the sightseers, were probably the instantiation of the Larrakia’s Dreaming site, *Dariba Nanggalinya*, discussed earlier in this chapter. As the travellers passed around Lee Point they may have observed the rock lying on the tip of the point which is the instantiation of *Binybara*, one of the wives of Old Man *Nungalinya*. Unaware of the cultural significance of this area to the Larrakia, the sightseers overlaid this space with their own social meanings. The ‘very flat’ beach at Lee Point was suggested as ‘a beautiful field for croquet parties and picnics’. It was noted, however, that this pleasure was likely to be offset by the swift passage of the tide. The travellers continued their journey into Shoal Bay (*Biloerr-gwa*) where they became ‘tide-bound’ about 300 yards away from a ‘good fresh water creek’ containing ‘quantities of fish’. This creek was probably Kings Creek or *Lurrmaring* for the Larrakia. Some of the party explored further up the beach in search of shells and saw three Aboriginal people who were ‘very timid and made their escape into the scrub’. They also saw an Aboriginal burial place, the body wrapped in paperbark and bound with grass and placed on a raised platform in a tree.¹³⁰

On public holidays in Darwin ‘picnics to the suburban beauty spots gave the town a vacant sort of look for the day’.¹³¹ The colonists took walks along newly established paths and roads which no doubt erased, crossed or replicated the paths made by Aboriginal people as they moved about the landscape. ‘Lovers walk’ wound down into the gully behind Government House. The East Point tracks or ‘Knight’s Roads’ were ‘cut through the jungle ... for the benefit of the driving and pleasure-seeking

¹²⁹ Harvey 1995.

¹³⁰ Extract from an article, ‘From Port Darwin to Escape Cliffs’ by ‘A Correspondent’, *Northern Territory Times*, 8 May 1874. The travellers described the burial place at length because the mode of burial was considered ‘quite a novelty’ and would ‘doubtless be interesting to those who have only observed the obsequies of civilised countries’.

citizens'.¹³² Labourers from Fannie Bay Gaol built a road in 1902 which promised to 'add vastly to the attractiveness of a drive to Fannie Bay or East Point'. It travelled past the Chinese gardens and into the Experimental Gardens where it went past a 'picturesque old Banyan tree', the coconut avenue and some 'magnificent clumps of bamboo and other interesting specimens of tropical vegetation', before emerging via a gateway at the northern side of the garden and meeting up again with the main road.¹³³ Other places deemed worthy of a stroll by foot in this new social landscape included the Lameroo Beach baths, Gulnare Jetty, the plateau near the corner of the Government Offices, the hospital at Doctor's Gully, Point Emery, the Chinese gardens at Mindil Beach and the Botanic Gardens. On horseback, a sightseer could visit the 'big tree', or East Point or Fannie Bay gaol.¹³⁴ The increasing number of 'pleasure excursions' around Port Darwin suggests that both the landscape and Aboriginal people have been tamed or were considered tame enough to conduct these outings. When Miss Ada Booty visited Darwin in 1884 she considered it safe enough to take 'a long solitary walk to Mindel Beach' and, with a companion had a 'long ramble' along Casuarina Beach and into the nearby jungle to the 'grand old Banyan tree'.¹³⁵

From a white settler perspective, the landscape about Darwin was 'civilised' through the clearance of vegetation and stone, the building of roads and fences, the digging of wells, the establishment of permanent houses and the taking up of particular parts of the landscape as social space. Within three decades of colonisation the town consisted of three hotels, a butcher, stone buildings, the Commercial bank, a drapery, photographic studio, the NT Times building, business houses, merchants, tailors, grocers, the railway department, hospital, public school, cricket oval, botanic gardens, bath house, the Roman Catholic and Wesleyan Churches and the Chinese Joss House. Chinatown was well established along Cavenagh Street and the harbour was full of Japanese and Filipino pearling luggers, ships and the canoes of Aborigines.

However, on 24 January 1897, the new township was devastated by a severe cyclone which killed an estimated twenty-eight people, the majority of whom were Aboriginal

¹³¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 11 November 1892.

¹³² *Northern Territory Times*, 12 February 1892. This road was named after the late Government Resident, JG Knight, who was keen on 'pretty drives' (*Northern Territory Times*, 22 July 1898).

¹³³ *Northern Territory Times*, 1 August 1902.

¹³⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 November 1904.

or Asian. Two Europeans were killed. The local newspaper described the scene on the morning after the cyclone as ‘one of indescribable chaos and desolation. Words cannot do justice to the awful spectacle of ruin and devastation. Nothing but jumbled up heaps of broken and twisted material represented what the day before were comfortable and in some cases handsome buildings’.¹³⁶ Strongly built houses had collapsed or shifted from their foundations, roofs were blown off houses and government buildings, two major stores were almost totally demolished, telegraph posts were bent or torn up, sheets of iron, timber and branches of trees were strewn everywhere and on the harbour, launches, luggers, and craft of all other kinds were either sunk at their moorings or blown ashore. In Chinatown, whole rows of shops and dwellings were levelled. The Government Residency was slightly damaged and the flagstaff blown out of the ground completely. The public school collapsed, one end of the hospital was damaged and the roof was blown off Fannie Bay gaol. The sheds at the cricket oval were destroyed and the bathhouse was blown into the sea. The three places of worship (the Roman Catholic Church, the Wesleyan Church and the ‘Joss House’) ‘tumbled into irretrievable ruins’. The fruit and ornamental trees in the government gardens were destroyed, cultivation patches about the town were washed away in the rush of water, and ‘on the selections out from town the storm fiend reveled in destruction and houses, fruit trees, goats, fowls and so forth disappeared in a twinkling’. Between the town of Darwin and Rapid Creek ten kilometres away, the environment was devastated:

Thousands of trees were torn up by the roots; others were snapped off like carrots, and others again, though left standing, were shorn of their leaves. The road to the Creek was choked with timber, and the whole character of the country has been changed by the thinning of the forest ... birds of all kinds were found dead on the beach.¹³⁷

Given that many of the deaths caused by the cyclone were of Aboriginal people, the impact of the cyclone on local Aborigines did not rate much of a mention in the local newspaper. The lighthouse keeper from Point Charles, across the harbour from the township, drew attention to the plight of Aborigines following the cyclone by appealing

¹³⁵ Diary of Ada Booty, 3 October 1884 and 16 August 1884, Mitchell Library B1189 A447 CY926.

¹³⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 January 1897.

¹³⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 January 1897.

to the Government Resident for rations for the Aboriginal people who had turned up at the lighthouse from neighbouring islands because the cyclone had destroyed their food supply.¹³⁸ Whether the Larrakia attributed the 1897 cyclone to the many disturbances taking place on their country or the inappropriate treatment of a site of significance is not possible to tell from the historical record. However, following a significant earth tremor in Darwin in 1931, the local paper reported that the ‘Larrakeyah blacks’:

had their own theory of the cause of the earth tremor that occurred at Darwin on Saturday night. At Casuarina is a large stone close to the sea. They believe this to be the King God, the first aborigine and the creator of all others. Occasionally the tides reach up to the stone, and the aborigines state that the King God must have turned over in his sleep - 'big fish been bite 'um,' thus causing the earthquake.¹³⁹

The Larrakia’s belief in the power of the sentient landscape to cause natural disasters was expressed in 1994, when an unexplained boat accident near *Dariba Nanggalinya*, prompted the Larrakia woman, Topsy Juwaning Secretary, to speak to a local newspaper of her concerns that many Darwin people might be unaware of the awesome power of Old Man Rock, 'Dariba Nungalinya is a real sacred site. It's not a joke. People might think it's superstitious but it's not, it's real'.¹⁴⁰

The anthropologist, Beth Povinelli, has worked with the Belyuen Aboriginal community across the harbour from Darwin on the Cox Peninsula and therefore amongst Larrakia cultural sites. She explains how a site’s displeasure is attributed to a foreign group’s sweat and language.¹⁴¹ Povinelli writes:

Because the country is sentient, the ground, for Belyuen Aborigines, is always potentially liable to act for its own reasons. They attribute catastrophes such as oil spills, skin cancer, the ozone hole, and pollution to country acting as an agent and punishing Aborigines and non-Aborigines alike for their transgression of mythic and ceremonial areas ... The country comments on what is happening around it by

¹³⁸ See Correspondence from Pt Charles Lighthouse Keeper, Hugh Christie, 23 May 1898, NTRS F790 A8342 and 8 May 1900 NTRS F790 A9699.

¹³⁹ *South Australian Advertiser*, 31 March 1931:9.

¹⁴⁰ *Northern Territory News*, 30 April 1994.

¹⁴¹ Povinelli 1993, p52.

emerging from or submerging into the sea or ground and by sending out disease or other natural objects.¹⁴²

Povinelli describes how country can be placated by Aboriginal traditional owners talking to it and explaining who is there and why they are there. People also ‘chuck sweat’ at the site to let it know who is there and that they do not wish to disturb it.¹⁴³ Such knowledge and action is a way of managing country and being responsible for it. Povinelli explains how country is calmed by the familiar sounds and smells of Aboriginal people labouring on their country and responds by providing food, goods and conception Dreamings. However, if the country is ‘confronted by foreign bodies, the landscape sends out climatic changes or mental and physical disease.’¹⁴⁴

As discussed previously, one of the major tools that Aboriginal people used in managing or manipulating their environment was fire. Deborah Bird Rose’s many years of research in north Australia shows that Aboriginal people describe their burning practices as ‘cleaning up the country’. Country which has not been burned and therefore properly cared for is believed to have become ‘wild’.¹⁴⁵ In an interesting juxtaposition of the colonial belief that in establishing towns the colonisers were civilising the landscape, Aboriginal people would no doubt have viewed the emerging town settlements as ‘wild’. That is, the changing landscape was rapidly becoming wild with the interruption and prevention of Aboriginal land management schemes. The sentient landscape was also ‘wild’, that is angry, because of ill-treatment through the culturally inappropriate use of the land and the resources on it.

Conclusion

Even though Aboriginal territories had been recognised, languages and place names recorded, living places seen and lifestyles witnessed, the resource rich and spiritually meaningful Aboriginal landscape of the Darwin region was disregarded by the colonisers in their desire to locate a site for the future capital of the Northern Territory. Having decided that Darwin would be the site of the future capital city, the colonisers

¹⁴² Povinelli 1993, p150.

¹⁴³ Povinelli 1993, p151.

¹⁴⁴ Povinelli 1993, p167.

claimed and manipulated land in the region in line with its new purposes. The colonial surveyors and early colonists paid scant attention to the way in which the previous indigenous inhabitants had fished the creeks, dug crab from the tidal mudflats, hunted in the surrounding forests, used natural resources in their ceremonial and daily lives and sustained the country by travelling through it, talking to it and affirming their presence on it and their responsibility towards it. Fresh water systems were dominated, altered and sometimes destroyed by town, pastoral, agricultural and mining activities as well as by the spread of noxious weeds. The clearance of natural vegetation, the movement of men, carts, horses, goats and cattle through grasses, woodlands and wetlands, the blasting of rock, the introduction of plant and animal species which became feral and alterations to Aboriginal land management schemes altered the ecology of the region.

As seen in this chapter, the objects of Aboriginal people's hunting lifestyles were also affected by the prevention of Aboriginal land management schemes, ecological change, substantial population influx to the area and the white's unsustainable hunting of resources. Mudcrabs and certain types of shell fish were dependent on the mangrove communities redesignated as swamp land to be 'reclaimed' and made useful. Wallaby, goanna, possums and quolls, dependent on the grasses, trees and waterholes for their survival fled from all this activity. In 1889, the missionaries at Rapid Creek observed that the 'game too gets every year less abundant before the guns of the whites as well as the spears of the Blacks'.¹⁴⁶ By 1905, gaoler Strath reported that there was 'considerable difficulty now in getting the quality of firewood which has been for years past supplied; the ironbark timber and other hard wood that used to be around the prison [at Fannie Bay] is completely exhausted, and to get any of this hard wood great delay and expense is incurred in getting it carted, being such a long distance from the prison'. Large quantities of mangroves and bamboo were subsequently cut and dried for firewood.¹⁴⁷

This chapter shows that the Larrakia people had extensive knowledge of their country and the resources on it. However, the ability of the Larrakia to continue to sustain

¹⁴⁵ Rose 1996, pp63-6.

¹⁴⁶ Correspondence from Father Strele to the Minister for Education and the Northern Territory, 24 May 1889, SA State Records, GRS1 521/1889.

¹⁴⁷ Report of Gaoler, AG Strath, 18 January 1905, *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1904*.

themselves physically and culturally on their country depended on them being able to manage or control it. The colonisation of the Darwin region had a significant impact on Aboriginal people's abilities to live about the Darwin region in the ways that they had done prior to colonisation. As discussed above, changes to the ecology of the region resulted in the spread of weeds about the town. It is thoroughly ironic that it was Larrakia people who were called upon to rid the town of the horehound weed which threatened it. It seemed to one commentator that fifteen years after the white settlers arrived, the 'whole of the Larrakeyah tribe of niggers, lubras and piccaninnies included' were engaged in clearing the vacant town allotments of horehound and wireweed.¹⁴⁸ Clearing weeds from the township was to be one occupation that Aboriginal people in the township performed for many years. The performance of such labour was one way in which Larrakia people negotiated their changing space, landscape and economy. The following chapter looks further at the ways in which Larrakia people negotiated and resisted these vast changes to their economic and cultural landscape.

¹⁴⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 21 February 1885.

Chapter Four: Inclusion and Exclusion

The changes to the landscape and hence traditional economy of indigenous people in the Darwin region described in the preceding chapter influenced Larrakia responses to and involvement in the transformation of their physical and cultural landscape. It is difficult to understand Aboriginal responses to such changes given that the perpetrators of these changes created the historical record. However, it is probably true that there was no one, unified response from Aboriginal people to colonisation. As seen in chapter two, one of the motives of the surveyors in taking three Larrakia men back to Adelaide with them, was to try and ‘dis-arm the hostility evinced by *a portion of their tribe* to the white man settling upon their lands’.¹ Individual Aboriginal people no doubt acted differently at different times and for different reasons. This chapter examines various responses from the Larrakia to colonisation as they negotiated the changing space of the landscape. Within these responses it is apparent that there are several dichotomies. For example, if the Larrakia participated in the clearance of their landscape to plant vegetable gardens and then carted water to nourish these introduced plants, it is also true that these vegetable gardens, once established, were raided for food. If the Larrakia participated in the labour supply for the settlement, it is also apparent that they did it on their own terms. If the Larrakia participated in the emerging social life of the settlement through spear throwing demonstrations and their performance of corroborees, it is also true that they maintained a distinct ceremonial life.

Apart from renegotiating their changing landscape, the resources on it and their traditional economy, the Larrakia had to negotiate the changing political space of the town due to the influx to Darwin of Aborigines from across the Northern Territory. The first part of this chapter looks at the way in which Larrakia people negotiated this political space particularly in terms of the disputes between Aboriginal groups which were recorded so frequently by the colonisers. It then looks at the Larrakia people’s participation in the altered economy of the town area through their involvement in labour, hunting and social and cultural practice. It examines the motivations for Larrakia involvement in these white settler activities as well as the degree of control

¹ Correspondence from McKinlay, Davis and Daly to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, 28 October 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 104/1870; see also correspondence from McKinlay, Davis and Daly to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Immigration, 17 September 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 100/1870.

over their participation. The chapter then looks at the maintenance of autonomous Aboriginal lifestyles in the Darwin region and how certain practices and behaviour were defined by the colonisers as ‘out of place’ in their newly claimed space. While the first part of the chapter discusses the way that the Larrakia people worked with the colonisers, the second part of the chapter shows the Larrakia maintaining aspects of their autonomous lifestyles and resisting the changes taking place on their country.

The Aboriginal landscape

As seen in the previous chapter, Aborigines from across the Northern Territory came into the colonial settlement on either short or long term visits. These visits resulted in various encounters and negotiations and perhaps provided the scope for increased social and ceremonial activity between the Larrakia and other Aboriginal groups.² However, the ‘encounter’ between these Aboriginal groups which is most discussed in the local newspaper is disputes. As discussed previously, these disputes occurred in the initial years of white occupation and saw the colonisers team with the Larrakia to evict warring Aboriginal groups, in particular the Wulna. As settlement progressed, disputes between Aboriginal groups continued to be a feature of town life.

In May 1876, one morning was ‘unusually lively’ owing to a dispute between the Larrakia and Wulna. This dispute resulted in Nalunga, the ‘Larrakeyah king’, dying and four others being wounded. It is unclear what injuries the Wulna sustained but it was allegedly the Larrakia who went to the Wulna camp and ‘commenced the usual growl’. A sign of the ongoing alliance between the Larrakia and the colonisers is demonstrated by the fact that the injured men were conveyed to the residence of Dr Sturt who extracted the spears.³ Two years later, the ‘Woolner and Alligator blacks mustered in force’ at ‘the Jungle’ on the outskirts of Darwin. The following morning they attacked the few Larrakia who had remained in their camp, killing two men, Nosey and Douglas.⁴ In what seems to be a pay-back for these deaths, five Aborigines from the Larrakia camp, Davey, Sambo, Rowdy, Miranda and Benham later killed the Wulna man, Scotchman, described as a ‘terror to the Larrakeyah tribe’.⁵

² See Richard Baker, 1999. *Land is Life: From Bush to Town. The Story of the Yanyuwa people*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, p129.

³ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 May 1876.

⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, April-July 1878.

⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 January 1879 and 8 February 1879.

Davey, Sambo, Rowdy, Miranda and Benham were subsequently charged with ‘feloniously, willfully, and with malice aforethought, killing and murdering ... Scotchman’. The accused Aborigines maintained that they had not intended killing Scotchman but ‘wanted to drive him away as they were afraid of him’ because he had killed Nosey and Black Douglas and were ‘only waiting to bring back the Woolners here [Darwin]’. Police Inspector Foelsche provided evidence to the court that Sambo and Davey had, on the evening previous to the killing, asked if he wanted them to bring Scotchman into custody. Sambo and Davey had assisted Foelsche on other police matters and knew that Foelsche had a warrant for Scotchman. They also told Foelsche they were afraid of Scotchman because he had killed their countrymen and that some years ago he had speared Government Resident Douglas and they did not want him about the settlement. Foelsche did not sanction Sambo and Davey bringing Scotchman into gaol and ‘took no notice’ of them saying ‘something about spearing him [Scotchman]’. The following morning, after Scotchman had been killed, Davey and Sambo went and told Foelsche what they had done.⁶

The magistrate subsequently warned the accused Aborigines that they ‘must be more careful in future’ and although the press ‘could not quite catch all he said’ believed ‘that the advice he gave them was taken to heart, as they left the court more than ever persuaded to forsake their Mosaical notions, and become solid Christians’.⁷ Or were they? Foelsche’s evidence reiterates some of the points raised in chapter two regarding the alliance between the Larrakia and the colonisers. The Larrakia’s offering to apprehend Scotchman for Foelsche would do both him and themselves a favour. The Larrakia were also politically astute in using in their defence the threat of the Wulna coming to town and the incident where Scotchman had speared Government Resident Douglas – two things that the colonisers were likely to be wary of. That Foelsche took no notice of the Larrakias’ threats to spear Scotchman suggests that he was willing for Aboriginal law to be enacted. That the Larrakia were confident in their rights to do is shown by the way they presented themselves to Foelsche the next morning.

In January 1880, another dispute between the Wulna and Larrakia was broken up by the police. Government Resident Price subsequently ordered the Protector of Aborigines to

⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 8 February 1879.

make it known to the ‘Woolnas that they must either clear out from the neighbourhood of Palmerston or else cease to attack the Larrakeeyas and behave quietly’.⁸ Such an instruction repeats those orders issued to the Woolna nearly a decade earlier and shows the ongoing colonial awareness of Larrakia rights within the township. The Larrakia also enlisted the aid of allied Aboriginal groups in the defence of their rights to the township. In January 1882, a dispute between the Woolna and Larrakia took place which resulted in many of the Larrakia crossing the harbour to West Point.⁹ A few weeks later, ‘the greatest native fight that has taken place in Port Darwin for many years’ occurred. The Northern Territory Times detailed the way that the ‘diplomatic relations between the Larrakeyahs and Woolners had become strained, and it was evident to the Christians who were squatting on their lands that before long it would end in bloody war’. The Larrakia’s visit to ‘their circumcised friends, the Waggitjes’ on the Cox Peninsular resulted in the Wagaitj sending a ‘powerful contingent of men and spears’ to Darwin. The following morning, ‘the warriors, who had been gradually nearing each other, commenced the fight with a terrible yell and a shower of spears, which compelled the allied forces to beat a hasty retreat towards the centre street of the town. Here they rallied and made a fierce onslaught on the brave Woolners (who were greatly outnumbered) driving them down into the bush, killing some and wounding many others’.¹⁰ The dispute was then interrupted by the police and the participants ‘quickly retreated a distance of twelve miles, when a decisive battle took place, ending in the defeat of the Woolners, who say they will return within a week with another tribe and drive the allied forces into the sea’.¹¹ The next recorded incident of the Woolna’s allies, the ‘Alligator blacks’, arrival in town was not until much later that year and it is unclear whether this resulted in the promised revenge.¹²

In May 1887, a ‘disagreement’ between the ‘Larrageeyah, Woolner, and Alligator tribes’ near the town cemetery resulted in the ‘Alligator black’, Bob Murray, spearing ‘Davey, a Larrageeyah native, through the back with a stone spear’. The police ‘dispersed the combatants’ and Davey’s wound was treated at the Darwin Hospital.¹³

⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 8 February 1879.

⁸ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines Morice and Government Resident Price, 6 January 1880, NTRS F790 A3816/1879.

⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 21 January 1882.

¹⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 February 1882.

¹¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 February 1882.

¹² *Northern Territory Times*, 2 December 1882.

¹³ *South Australian Register*, 5 May 1887; *Northern Territory Times*, 7 May 1887.

The Jesuits who had established a mission for Aborigines at Rapid Creek (see following chapter) suggest that this dispute occurred because the missionaries had distributed flour to 'Alligator River' people who had camped near the mission. An Aboriginal man 'of considerable eloquence' 'inflamed' other mission Aborigines until they 'determined to throw out the Alligators and drive them back by force into their own territory'. The missionaries described in great detail the 'flint-tipped' spears used in the fight, the 'terrifying' paint markings on the Aborigines, the countenance assumed by the warring tribes and the strategies the allied 'Woolnar and Larakyas' used to fight the 'very strong Alligator tribe'.¹⁴ When the man whom the missionaries considered had caused the dispute returned to the mission they ordered him to leave. He did so but soon returned 'leading a great crowd of natives painted for war and armed with stone pointed spears'. While no violence ensued it is apparent that the missionaries did not understand that they were undermining the traditional rights of local Aborigines by distributing rations to non-local Aborigines and then exercising their [the missionaries] power over local Aborigines who were asserting their rights both to the land and also to the new resources on their land.

Reasons for these disputes no doubt varied with time and incident and were only one part of the complex relations between Aboriginal groups. This is particularly evident in the way that the Larrakia were sometimes shown as being allied with the Wulna. It is difficult to understand the nature of these disputes given the Eurocentric nature of the reporting but they certainly occurred over many years and often resulted in the death or serious injury of some of the participants. It is likely that such disputes were a continuation of Aboriginal law and some individual killings or woundings suggest the carrying out of traditional forms of punishment for transgressions of this law.¹⁵ These disputes persisted into the twentieth century. In a letter to his parents in 1904, Will Jefferson described in detail the 'great spear fights' which took place annually in Darwin.¹⁶ In 1908, a challenge was issued to the Larrakia man, Elbow Davie, by an

¹⁴ Extract from Annual Letter of Jesuit Mission in North Australia, May 1887 quoted in R Levitus, 1982. *Everybody bin all day work: a report on the social history of the Alligator Rivers Region of the Northern Territory 1869-1973*, Report to the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, p73.

¹⁵ In January 1891 a dispute between 'Larrakeyah and Woolnah and Alligator natives' resulted in one 'warrior' being speared in the foot' (*Northern Territory Times*, 16 January 1891).

¹⁶ Jefferson described how the 'two tribes arrange themselves into separate bodies and at a place half a mile out of the town have regular battles with spears and other weapons' (Correspondence from Will Jefferson to his mother, 24 October 1904, Mitchell Library, MSS623). A month later, Jefferson described to his father the way, 'two hundred niggers assembled on the fighting ground and the tribes arranged themselves on either side of the road. Then the two chiefs came out and started to air their

Alligator Rivers man via a ‘message stick’ that contained a picture of a turtle and an alligator (perhaps representing clans) because he had admonished him for ‘lubra stealing’.¹⁷ A white settler, Vern Marsh, graphically recalled hundreds of Larrakia and Tiwi people feuding on Mindil Beach in the early twentieth century. He and his friend, Roy Green, watched the battles from the safety of the coconut palms and barracked for the Larrakia – perhaps because they were the ‘home team’. In one battle he saw five people killed.¹⁸ Aboriginal people today are certainly aware of the seriousness of these battles. Kitty Pan Quee told the anthropologist, Diane Bell, how her Kamu countrymen had died in a battle around the early 1900s:

From this way the Larrakiya and Wagach all bin fight, all about and go back. All my mothers, countryman, uncle, all bin live, all bin alive first ... All that Larrakiya and Wagach bin come up and fight along that place, Kamu country. They fight for die I think. Might be for country. All my Kamu mob bin die along that fight now ... We bin come and stop along Adelaide River now.¹⁹

Similarly, the Wulna-Limilngan man, Felix Iyanuk Holmes, believes that the population of the Wulna was greatly reduced because of protracted fighting with the Larrakia. Holmes describes how ‘the Wulna resorted to tipping their spear points with poison from the King Brown Snake Dreaming and that many men on both sides were killed’.²⁰ While such fighting may have been a continuation of traditional disputes it is also probable that the Larrakia were responding to new pressures brought on them and their land by the siting of the settlement on it. The new settlement and the commodities it had to offer meant that the Larrakia had to be even more vigilant in asserting their authority over Aboriginal action in the township and preventing permanent incursions from outside Aboriginal groups on their lands.

grievances, while the men shook their spears and did their war dances and the women shouted insults across the road at their enemies. After about an hour or more of this pantomime things began to get lively, but beyond the discharge of a couple of spears which did no harm, nothing happened. After a bit more talk matters were adjourned till this afternoon when they have agreed to meet and fight it out to the finish. I am going along to watch it but am afraid it will be too late for this mail’ (Correspondence from Will Jefferson to his father, 7 November 1904, Mitchell Library, MSS623).

¹⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 July 1908.

¹⁸ Vern Marsh interviewed by Barbara James cited in David Ritchie, 1989. *Mindil Beach Bones*, Paper delivered at the ‘Under the Banyan Tree’ luncheon seminar, NT State Library, April, p19.

¹⁹ Submission from Diane Bell, Women’s Interests, October 1981, Daly River (Malak Malak) Land Claim.

²⁰ David Ritchie and Toni Bauman, 1991. *Limilngan-Wulna (Lower Adelaide and Mary Rivers) Land Claim*, Anthropologist’s Report on Behalf of the Claimants, p18.

It is not clear whether the disputes described above are serious disputes or the ‘sham’ fights that Aborigines also engaged in and provided a source of entertainment to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.²¹ In December 1904, Jefferson lamented, ‘The spear fights are all over now, and the next excitement will be Chinese New year which falls I think in February’.²² A correspondent writing to the *South Australian Advertiser* in 1874 wrote that the only ‘game’ of the local Aborigines worth seeing was their ‘sham fights with bamboo canes’. The correspondent described the way in which the Aboriginal participants ‘file[d] off in two companies, about fifty men on each side *in puris naturalibus*, marked with red, white and blue color, and feathers in their heads. They fight about an hour, when one side is supposed to be beaten, and both parties retreat to hold a corroboree’.²³ On another occasion, the Woolnah did not respond to an invitation from the Larrakia to join a ‘sham fight’ with small bamboo spears, so the Larrakia commenced amongst themselves and ‘an old native called Mat Davis was struck under the right eye’. The wound bled profusely and the old man died. Those Larrakia present immediately began grieving, the women ‘howling and beating their heads and backs and the ground with heavy sticks’.²⁴ The *Northern Territory Times* describes the interest taken in these ‘games’ but also warns of the potential danger:

Notwithstanding that these games are nothing novel in the township, they always seem to draw a number of spectators. The hideous frights they make of themselves, the extraordinary contortions into which they throw their bodies and limbs, the agility with which they evade the missiles, and the instantaneous flashes of anger and vindictiveness displayed when one on either side happens to be struck, all tend to make the exhibition an attractive one to the whites - that is, so long as they don’t get a lick themselves.²⁵

²¹ References to ‘play fights’ occur in the Koolpinyah Station Journal of 1923. On 4 March 1923, it was recorded ‘Boys had a play spear fight’. Two weeks later, ‘boys painted themselves for a spear fight – only Bill, Munda and old Harry (Harry’s father) came so no fight’ and the following day, ‘All the Alligator blacks and their friends waiting for buffalo camp to start came here to have spear fight with station hands. Latter won. Gerard had flour given to him to act as host. Rain stopped fighting at the right moment’ (Herbert Family Papers, Koolpinyah Station Journals, Northern Territory Archives Service 1362).

²² Correspondence from Will Jefferson to his mother, 20 December 1904, Mitchell Library, MSS623.

²³ *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 July 1874.

²⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 29 May 1875.

²⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 14 August 1875.

However, this ‘play’ fighting also caused trouble in the town. In December 1900, a white resident, Leo Mackay, appealed to Inspector of Police Foelsche for ‘protection against the continuous danger that exists in driving along the main streets within the town boundaries’. Mackay detailed the number of times that he had to avoid the main street of the town and drive through the bush to ‘avoid being hit by flying spears thrown by a number of blacks who choose the middle of the road for a battlefield’.²⁶ Further accounts evidence the way Aborigines re-appropriated the changing space and circumstances of the town in their disputes. Jefferson described how the warring ‘tribes arranged themselves on either side of the road’. Other accounts describe how the disputes took place on the ‘centre street of the town’ or ‘close to Cavenagh Square’ and how the Larrakia crossed over to the Cox Peninsula to enlist the aid of the Wagaitj in a dispute by hitching a lift in a settler’s boat.²⁷

Following a ‘play fight’ between the ‘Larrakeah’, ‘Mallak-Mallak’ & ‘Cherite’ on the one side and ‘Alligators’, Woolnahs and Minniagie’ on the other, Foelsche advised the Government Resident that the way to ‘effectively stop this nuisance’ was to ‘clear the visiting tribes out to their own country’.²⁸ The inappropriateness of the changing town space for the use of spears was also discussed during the trial of the Larrakia who were responsible for the accidental death of Emma, a young Aboriginal woman who had got in the way of a revenge attack on ‘Daly’s camp’ by Aborigines from the Lameroo Beach camp.²⁹ During this inquiry the coroner warned that ‘although natives in the distant bush might be allowed to settle their quarrels in their own way, those who lived in or near the township, and who might be considered to be living under the protection of the law must not take the law into their own hands’. The jury deemed the Larrakia man, Galoot, responsible for Emma’s death and he was sentenced to gaol for five years with hard labour.³⁰ Such comment makes it clear that ten years after Inspector Foelsche had taken no notice of the Larrakia’s threat to spear Scotchman, Aboriginal people were no longer permitted to settle disputes in their own way in the changing space of the town. Even so, it is also clear that in these disputes the colonisers continued to attribute the

²⁶ Correspondence from LE Mackay to Inspector Foelsche, 8 December 1900, NTRS F790 A10143.

²⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 February 1882; *South Australian Advertiser*, 29 May 1876; *Northern Territory Times*, 21 January 1882.

²⁸ Correspondence from Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 10 December 1900, NTRS F790 A10143.

²⁹ Tim Smith has carried out extensive research on the Aboriginal photographs of Paul Foelsche and the name lists which accompany these photographs. He identifies Emma as Larrakia and being fifteen years old in 1887. Smith also identifies ‘Daly’ as Larrakia.

Larrakia a distinct status in the town. The Wulna continued to be warned to behave appropriately towards the Larrakia – although ‘A White’ had questioned in 1876 why the Wulna were ‘allowed to molest’ the Larrakia who were not ‘protected as in the early days of the settlement’.³¹ In the above incident, Foeslche makes the distinction that he would clear the ‘visiting’ tribes to their own country. The Larrakia were also treated at the local hospital for any wounds incurred during these disputes.

The Aboriginal political landscape in Darwin is also evident in the way Aboriginal groups negotiated the town space in terms of living areas. In 1885, there was an estimated one hundred and fifty Larrakia and Wulna people present in Darwin. The main Larrakia camp was on Lameroo Beach and the Wulna were camped on the vacant town allotments.³² The ethnographer, TA Parkhouse, provides further evidence of the way in which Aboriginal groups demarcated space in the town area. In his ‘notes principally concerning the Larrakia’, Parkhouse described the way in which the land was ‘subdivided’ among several families with ‘territorial rights’. This ownership he described as a ‘real one’. The ‘Lammerru Beach’ camp was, ‘as it has been for generations, [the camp] of the family in whom that part is vested’. Half a mile from this camp, at the head of Smith and Cavenagh Streets, was the main Larrakia camp. Another about a quarter of a mile on towards Point Emery, was the camp of the Daly family, who were also Larrakia. About 150 yards north of the main Larrakia camp, was a camp which belonged to the ‘Wulnars’ who were related to the Larrakia by ‘alliance or descent’. The Wulna who were not related to the Larrakia camped on the north-east side of Cavenagh Street. Each of these living areas comprised circles of ‘wurlies’ with each circle preserving its privacy and made up of distinct families.³³ Some of the Larrakia and Wulna families identified by the early white settlers were the Nilungas, Billymooks, Mirandas, Emus, Solomons, Dalys and Slocums.³⁴

Changing Economic Space

³⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 1 December 1888.

³¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 May 1876.

³² Protector of Aborigines, RJ Morice, Report on the Condition and Position of the Aborigines, 21 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882.; Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines Wood, to Government Resident Parsons, 6 August 1885, CRS A1640/1 1885/995.

³³ TA Parkhouse, 1895. *Native Tribes of Port Darwin and its Neighbourhood*, Australia and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. Report 6, p638-9.

The changing landscape, demography and resource use in the Darwin region impacted on the traditional economy of Larrakia people. The following section explores the way in which the Larrakia negotiated their changing economic base through engaging with the new economy as labourers and domestic servants. They also used aspects of their traditional knowledge to engage with this new economy by assisting exploring parties and hunting expeditions and in presenting cultural performances to a white audience.³⁵

The willingness of the colonisers to encourage and engage local Aboriginal people in employment during the early years of settlement was no doubt due to official instructions which stipulated, 'Every inducement should be offered to them [Aboriginal people] to work for the settlers, and you should endeavour to make them feel perfect confidence that, in such cases, their services will be properly rewarded'.³⁶ Aboriginal people were to be encouraged to work for the colonisers for a number of reasons. These included a belief that Europeans were not properly acclimatised to undertake some of the more labour intensive work in the tropical climate (a notion which fed into a larger debate about whether whites could actually survive in the tropics); a belief that work was a 'civilising agency' and that Aboriginal engagement in this activity would not only assist their 'development' but facilitate the colonisation of the Territory; and because of a desire on the part of the colonisers to further the alliance discussed previously between the original occupants of the Darwin landscape and themselves.

As seen in chapters one and two, Aboriginal people readily engaged in barter with the surveyors and new settlers. They supplied goods to the naturalist, brought fish and crab into the Fort Point settlement and undertook to cut bark for lining the roofs of the huts being erected by the colonisers. By August 1870, the Larrakia were deemed 'extremely useful in working at many things'.³⁷ Larrakia people accompanied the Land Order Holders and Agents party in selecting land for interstate and overseas buyers.³⁸ They cleared vegetation to make way for government buildings, private houses and sporting facilities like the Cricket Oval. They collected rock to raise the verandah of the

³⁴ Ibid.; Mrs Dominic D (nee Harriet Douglas) Daly, 1887. *Digging, Squatting, and Pioneering Life in the Northern Territory of South Australia*, London, p66-7.

³⁵ See Henry Reynolds, 1990. *With the White People: The Crucial Role of Aborigines in the Exploration and Development of Australia*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria.

³⁶ Official Instructions to the Government Resident of the Northern Territory, SA State Records, GRS1 194/1872.

³⁷ Correspondence from Government Resident Douglas to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 16 August 1870, SA State Records, GRS1 89/1870.

Government Resident's house, assisted the white settlers in putting up their huts, worked in the gardens and as servants for private settlers, carted water and collected firewood.³⁹

When William Wildey visited Port Darwin in 1873 he observed the way that over one hundred Aboriginal people, mainly women and children, entered the township each morning and undertook any 'light work' the new settlers had for them, 'such as fetching water, sweeping the yard, picking over potatoes and doing scullery work'.⁴⁰ In 1874, Government Resident Scott employed a number of Aboriginal people clearing ground of 'surplus scrub and timber around the Hospital'. These employees worked 'pretty cheerfully under an overseer' and, while the amount of work performed was not 'very large', Scott thought it 'may pave the way to make them of use to the general community and ultimately will tend to civilize them'. Given that the 'expense of keeping them' and the wages of an overseer were not high, Scott believed that the 'labor performed fully warrants the outlay'.⁴¹ Even with the import of labourers from Singapore to the Northern Territory in 1874, Aboriginal people continued to be employed about the town area. In 1877, Aboriginal men were employed to work in a gang 'under a white overseer' cutting and drying bush hay, clearing stumps from the roads, clearing the town of the horehound plant said to have 'completely overrun the place', and breaking stone for road repairs.⁴² Local Aboriginal people worked in the newspaper office and Harriet Daly recounted the way the local newspaper had been going along smoothly until the 'compositor' caught gold fever. The editor had to produce the paper himself and the 'only labour he was able to enrol was a gang of Larrakiah blackfellows, who were employed in "rolling", "posting", and "flying" that

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Rough Journal of Acting Government Resident, J Stokes Millner, SA State Records, GRS1 80/1870.; *South Australian Advertiser*, 4 July 1871; Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, SA State Records, GRS1 256/1871; *Northern Territory Times*, 8 May 1874.

⁴⁰ WB Wildey, 1876. *Australasia and the Oceanic Region with some notice of New Guinea. From Adelaide – Via Torres Straits – To Port Darwin Thence Round West Australia*, George Robertson, p118.

⁴¹ Correspondence from Government Resident, GB Scott, to Commissioner of Crown Lands, 21 May 1874, SA State Records, GRS1 127/1874. An extreme view of the link between labour and civilisation was expressed by a correspondent to the local newspaper who had seen Aboriginal people in Wyndham, 'chained to each other by the neck, carrying water or improving the street' or shifting the hill at the back of the township'. This correspondent thought that 'so long as they are doing useful work even the neck-chains do not seem to be out of place. Work is, to my way of thinking, the best aborigines' civilising agency' (*Northern Territory Times*, 27 October 1899).

⁴² Report from Government Resident EW Price to the Minister for Agriculture and Education, 15 May 1877, SA State Records, GRS1 282/1877.

particular issue'.⁴³ In 1879, local Aborigines assisted in the clearance of five acres of land around the hospital of 'dead trees and scrub' which resulted in a 'nice open appearance' and caused a 'fine current of air through the buildings'. Consequently, the hospital, if viewed from the sea, was said to have 'quite a park like look about the place'.⁴⁴

By 1882, Aboriginal men were employed in the stores about Darwin, in the landing of cargo, as servants, in the government stables and as police trackers. The Aboriginal women washed and ironed clothes and were 'nurse girls' to white settler's children and were said to become 'very fond of their charges'. In 1885, eleven Larrakia people went into the bush with white men as servants and several were employed on the pearling luggers. Others were taken to Sydney and some to Queensland. According to Protector of Aborigines, Percy Wood, the employers of the Larrakia 'speak highly of them'.⁴⁵ In mid-1886 'over twenty Larrakeahs' went with the pearling boats to King Sound, and were spoken of in 'very favourable terms'.⁴⁶ During 1888, five local Aborigines spent six months at the Coogee Aquarium in Sydney – for what purpose is unclear but they were listed along with the other 'curiosities' that Harry Stockdale took with him when he left the Territory.⁴⁷ Local Aboriginal people were also employed by the pastoralists, Goldsborough Mort & Co., and travelled as far as Indonesia in their work for the company.

The Larrakia who were working on pastoral properties remote from Darwin occasionally experienced difficulties returning to their country. In 1894 three 'Larrakeyah Aborigines ... Shagger (William), Elsie and Kissa' were allegedly being detained on a Kimberley pastoral station against their will and were 'anxious to return to their tribe'.⁴⁸ A 'Larrakeyah boy' named Jimmy from Marrakai Station in the Darwin hinterland was also said to have been taken to Queensland and was unable to return home. The pastoralist, HWH Stevens, advised that the loss of Jimmy to his

⁴³ *Northern Territory Times*, 18 August 1877; Daly 1887, p228.

⁴⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 15 February 1879.

⁴⁵ Report of Protector of Aborigines, Percy Moore Wood, 8 January 1886, in *Governments Resident's Half yearly report on the Northern Territory, December 1885*.

⁴⁶ Report of Protector of Aborigines, Percy Moore Wood, 30 June 1886 in *Government Resident's Half yearly report on the Northern Territory, June 1886*.

⁴⁷ Report of Protector of Aborigines, Percy Moore Wood, 8 March 1889, in *Government Resident's report on the Northern Territory, 1888; Northern Territory Times*, 23 February 1889.

⁴⁸ Correspondence from HWH Stevens, 19 February 1894, NTRS F790 5992/1894.

parents had ‘always been a great trouble to them’.⁴⁹ In 1898, Constable O’Keefe from the Gordon Creek Police Station wrote that there were three Aboriginal women there who wished to return to their country and husbands. Two of the women were from Port Darwin.⁵⁰

Larrakia people also used their knowledge of country, people and location of distinct camps as well as their tracking skills to locate misplaced persons and to find suspected criminals or gaol escapees. Two Larrakia men, ‘Missionary Davey and his brother Sambo’ assisted the police in capturing the escaped prisoners Abdoolah and Solomon (Aboriginal) on Cox’s Peninsular.⁵¹ A few years later Larrakia people assisted Inspector Foelsche in bringing in the Aboriginal men involved in a murder at Collette’s Creek.⁵² Larrakia people also assisted in collecting evidence for the prosecution of those Aborigines involved in the Daly River murders.⁵³ ‘Blackboy Frank, a Larrakeyah native’ assisted in the capture of one of the Aborigines suspected in the murder of some Europeans near Port Keats.⁵⁴

That Larrakia people were sought after as employees, and that their employment was recognised in facilitating the development of the Northern Territory, was explicitly stated by Elsie Masson who came to the Territory in 1912 as the governess to the Administrator’s children. In her 1915 book, *An Untamed Territory*, Masson particularly advised women coming to the north to ‘employ only Larrakia blacks whose country is Darwin’ as domestic servants because they were more likely to stay about their country, and therefore their employment, than Aboriginal people from elsewhere. Masson paid tribute to the Larrakia domestic servants who in ‘smoothing the domestic path of the women’ were ‘taking part in the development of their own country’.⁵⁵ While Larrakia people were sought after as employees, the payment of wages to Aboriginal people employed in the town area was a long time coming (see chapter six). The damaged flour that Larrakia people initially received in exchange for their goods and services slowly evolved into the payment of rations of flour, sugar, tea, meat, tobacco, pipes and clothing in various quantities and distributed at the will of the employer. Aboriginal

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Correspondence from Constable O’Keefe, 24 August 1898, NTRS F790 A8386/1898.

⁵¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 16 February 1878.

⁵² *Northern Territory Times*, 14 May 1881.

⁵³ *South Australian Advertiser*, 10 December 1884.

⁵⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 17 February 1905.

employees were occasionally given a sixpence or shilling although Police Inspector Foelsche thought that they had ‘very little idea of the value of money’. This opinion was contradicted by complaints to the paper that Aboriginal people had been ‘getting into a very annoying habit of begging, not only for tobacco, but for sixpence and shillings’.⁵⁶

Whether Aboriginal people considered the payment they received from their employers ‘proper reward’ for their services as specified in the official instructions is not clear. In 1885, Protector of Aborigines Wood warned that, although Aborigines were a ‘great help to the white population’ in Palmerston, they were ‘beginning to understand the value of money and in cases will not work without wages’.⁵⁷ In 1891, Government Resident Knight sought advice regarding the remuneration of ‘natives engaged about Palmerston’.⁵⁸ A year later, local Aborigines engaged in ‘seafaring pursuits at £1 a month and food and clothes’ demanded higher rates of pay and it was suggested that a strike was imminent. These ‘seeds of unionism’ were thought to have been sown by pearlers in the North-west –who many Larrakia had worked for.⁵⁹

This poor remuneration raises questions as to what incentive Aboriginal people had to provide an obviously much used labour supply to the town. Although a changing landscape and traditional economy provided some of the motivation for this engagement with the new economy, the incentive for Aborigines to work was not purely monetary. Providing labour ensured the Larrakia’s ongoing alliance with the settlers, access to highly sought after European or Chinese commodities and enhanced their already privileged status within the town area. However, it is also apparent that Aboriginal people participated in this labour force on their own terms. They chose when and for how long they would work, who they would work for and what kind of employment they considered most profitable. A certain amount of choice and bravado was shown by the Aboriginal woman who walked past the wife of the police inspector who, in trying to attract this washerwoman who was employed elsewhere, ‘vociferated in loud tones –

⁵⁵ E Masson, 1915. *An Untamed Territory. The Northern Territory of Australia*, pp42-50.

⁵⁶ Correspondence from Inspector of Police, Paul Foelsche, to Government Resident, EW Price, 15 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882; *Northern Territory Times*, 19 March 1881.

⁵⁷ Report from Protector of Aborigines, Percy Moore Wood, 8 January 1886, in *Government Resident’s Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory, December 1885*.

⁵⁸ Correspondence from JG Knight to Minister for Education, 6 January 1891, SA State Records, GRS1 528/1890.

⁵⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 14 October 1892.

“If you no come on me tell em Mr Foelsche, then he send policeman and drive blacks out of town!””. As the paper wryly notes, ‘Surely this is not recognising the principle, *that we all possess equal rights*’.⁶⁰

Aborigines also juggled their participation in the European economy with their autonomous lifestyles. This is apparent in the numerous official complaints of Aboriginal people’s failure to adopt a western work ethic. In 1876, the Government Resident reported that he could ‘employ many of them usefully if they would only continue working, but if they work a day they rest two or three afterwards’.⁶¹ Protector of Aborigines, Morice, also noted the way that after Aboriginal people had been working for a while they would leave the township and ‘go and live in the bush for a few weeks or months’.⁶² Again in 1899, it was reported that there were a ‘fair number’ of Aboriginal people ‘employed by the townspeople as servants, in some cases giving much satisfaction to the employer, but it is very hard to keep them any length of time, as after a short time of service they return to bush life’.⁶³

Some colonisers considered Aborigines too ‘lazy’ to supply the settlement with fish or to provide continuous labour about the settlement.⁶⁴ However, it is more probable that local Aborigines weighed up the return they were given for such services and either declined to participate or determined an equivalent level of participation. In 1877, Government Resident Price wrote of the Aboriginal work gang he employed, ‘I give no pay, but good rations and I find that each man costs about ten shillings per week and performs about half as much work as a European’. Whether Europeans were, in general, likely to perform *any* work for no pay is doubtful. Price only judges the work output not the financial incentive to work. That the colonial officials did not expect non-Aborigines to work for no money is evident in the payment of five shillings per day to the Europeans and one shilling per day to the Chinese employed on government ‘relief’ work. In October 1879 the Chinese employed on relief work ‘rioted’ for higher

⁶⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 June 1881.

⁶¹ Report from Government Resident, EW Price, 14 September 1876, SA State Records, GRS1 453/1876.

⁶² Report from Protector of Aborigines Morice, 21 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882.

⁶³ *Government Resident’s Report on the Northern Territory, 1898*.

⁶⁴ See for example Government Resident’s Report, 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 256/1871, Report from Government Resident, EW Price, 14 September 1876, SA State Records, GRS1 453/1876 and Report from Protector of Aborigines, F Goldsmith, 12 March 1898, SA State Records, GRS 1 333/1898.

pay.⁶⁵ It is likely that Aboriginal people were well aware that these labourers were paid in cash for the same services that they were providing for rations of flour.⁶⁶ Even so, the coloniser's interpreted the failure of Aboriginal people to adopt a western 'work' ethic and their insistence on engaging with the employment offered on their own terms as further evidence that Aborigines were lazy and indolent.

Other whites believed that Aboriginal people possessed an innate inability to keep regular work schedules. In 1876, the editor of the *Northern Territory Times* wrote that Northern Territory Aborigines, when 'mixed with Europeans', were 'content to beg for enough 'tum-tum' to keep him from starvation, or give his labour for a loaf of bread'. However, they had 'no desire to imitate the labors of a white man' as they were not 'ambitious for fine houses, orchards and gardens, and would never entertain the idea of fencing in a plot of ground and putting his hand to the spade to make a harvest for himself'. The editor lamented, 'The country may be reclaimed but not the native. Train him as you may, treat him to every luxury to be obtained, he will at last betake himself to the wild forest and plain, and remain the enemy of the white intruder'.⁶⁷ Similarly, in 1888 the Government Resident linked Aboriginal people's 'antipathy to regular work' with their being 'careless children of the sun and wilds, content with the food for today'. Such sentiment elucidates the failure of some of the early colonisers to understand that Aborigines had an entirely different economy, land ethic and cultural responsibilities which influenced their movement about their country.

Traditional knowledge and the changing landscape

Larrakia people used aspects of their 'traditional' knowledge to engage with the colonisers and assist them in various pursuits. Larrakia people assisted exploration parties as guides, by facilitating contact with other Aboriginal groups, looking after horses, establishing camp sites, guarding exploration parties and providing food. Shargar, a young Larrakia man who had just gone through the ceremony of 'being made a young man', accompanied David Lindsay on his 1883 explorations to the Roper and

⁶⁵ See Report of Government Resident, EW Price, to the Minister for Agriculture and Education, 15 May 1877, SA State Records, GRS1 282/1877; Report of the Government Resident, EW Price, 13 October 1879; Report of the Government Resident, EW Price, 29 March 1881. Many of the white men employed on relief work were 'newcomers' who were not acclimatised and were 'a burden on the Government as their labour is of very little value' (Report of the Government Resident, EW Price, 29 March 1881).

⁶⁶ Report from Government Resident, EW Price, 14 September 1876, SA State Records, GRS1 453/1876.

Liverpool River regions.⁶⁸ ‘Sambo, a Larrakeeya native’ accompanied WG Stretton on an exploration of the Alligator Rivers region in 1894.⁶⁹ Some Darwin Aborigines went with an exploration party to Melville Island in 1887. They guarded the party all night and, when rations were low, they located a turtle nest and supplied the party with the eggs.⁷⁰ The Larrakia man, Bubs Mananilla, and two Wagaitj men, Loman and Tobatchie, were employed by the Government Geologist on a surveying trip around the Northern Territory coastline in 1906. They gave their employers ‘every satisfaction’ being always ‘cheerful, willing and intelligent’. They introduced the surveying party to other Aboriginal groups, sailed the boat, caught fish and, at night time, entertained the surveying party with songs accompanied by the didjeridu.⁷¹

The opportunity for exchanges other than economic ones is also evident in DE Kelsey’s memoirs of his childhood days in Darwin during the 1870s. Kelsey recounts the way that he ran about the bush with the ‘blackboys’ who ‘taught me a lot of their ways in hunting, and I often came home laden with wild fruits and small game, that they and their dogs had run down to earth’. Kelsey also acknowledges that what he learned from ‘the natives came in very handy for me in later years’.⁷² Kelsey was employed in Mr Adcock’s store as an errand boy. However, Kelsey and ‘two or three black boys about my own age’ spent most of their time ‘wandering about the tropical jungle in search of butterflies and insects for Mr Adcock’, who was keen on his insect collection.⁷³ When Kelsey was older he and ‘two or three black lads about my age’ took out a boat or dugout canoe and ‘poked into every nook and cranny the coast possessed in search of adventure’.⁷⁴ Further evidence of the intimacy between Aborigines and white settlers is apparent in Reverend Bogle’s account of his hunting trip to the lagoons with ‘two blacks’ where he was met by Ned Tuckwell and his family (of four women and sixteen children) who accompanied them. The Aborigines shot eight geese and one duck.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 12 August 1876.

⁶⁸ David Lindsay, 1884. ‘Explorations through Arnheim’s Land’, SAPP No. 239/1884.

⁶⁹ Correspondence from WG Stretton to Government Resident Herbert, 18 October 1905, SA State Records, GRS1 343/1905.

⁷⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 October 1887.

⁷¹ *South Australian Register*, 27 August 1906; See LCE Gee’s journal reproduced in HYL Brown 1905, ‘Reports (Geological and General) resulting from the explorations made by the Government Geologist and Staff during 1905’, Government Printer, Adelaide.

⁷² DE Kelsey, edited by Ira Nesdale, 1975. *The Shackle. A Story of the Far North Australian Bush*, Lynton, Blackwood, South Australia, p14. Kelsey’s recollections are from the early 1870s.

⁷³ Kelsey 1975, p27.

⁷⁴ Kelsey 1975, p45.

⁷⁵ The Diary of Reverend Archibald James Bogle 1875-77, Mitchell Library, C663/CY1187. Tuckwell is identified as the Larrakia man, Benham, by Tim Smith.

Aboriginal people used their hunting skills to assist European endeavours. At the Government Resident's request local Aboriginal people went out and speared the pigs on the tableland as they were destroying the government gardens.⁷⁶ Larrakia people also lent their hunting skills and local knowledge to the colonisers who were bent on realising the craze of collecting crocodiles (then known as alligators). In February 1892, the *Northern Territory Times* declared that Alligators were 'in' and the 'household that can't display a stuffed and polished member of that pachydermoid family on its sideboard or over the front door will shortly be as much out of fashion as a myall nigger'.⁷⁷ This interest in crocodiles began as early as 1874 when Aborigines at the Southport township collected crocodile eggs for the 'spirited pioneer colonists' who incubated them in hot sand until they were just ready to hatch and then preserved the 'young fry' in bottles of spirits hoping that they would attract a good price in the Southern colonies.⁷⁸ Local Aborigines assisted in killing a 'monster' crocodile at Southport but they also collected live crocodiles and sold them in town to the white settlers who stuffed and displayed them.⁷⁹

The pastoralist, Harry Stockdale, took up this crocodile craze. In late 1888, Stockdale was returning to Sydney and so great was his 'anxiety' to take a live crocodile with him that he enlisted the services of Tom Cherry, a 'Larrakeyah black', who 'could speak good English', was 'adept at capturing crocodiles' and was 'very smart'. Stockdale's memoirs of the crocodile hunt are especially interesting because he incorporates Larrakia language into the story which reveals a depth to the relationship between Stockdale and Cherry. In Stockdale's memoirs he tells how Cherry knew of a 'Dunkalibaa' (crocodile) nest across the harbour which was located next to a 'corowa' (fresh water) creek and like an 'ordinary sized haycock which contained 49 'baen' (eggs) about the size and colour of duck eggs, but more pitted and with a greasier looking surface. Cherry crossed the harbour fully equipped in his 'goon-a-gwarrah' (canoe) and hid himself in the six foot high 'mani-yal-mon' (long grass) near the crocodile nest. After a 'long and noiseless wait' Cherry was 'awarded by the

⁷⁶ Correspondence from a Darwin storekeeper to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, 22 May 1871, SA State Records, GRS1 213/1871.

⁷⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 12 February 1892.

⁷⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 13 February 1874.

⁷⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 17 April 1874, *Northern Territory Times*, 9 June 1883, *Northern Territory Times*, 15 January 1892, *Northern Territory Times*, 29 January 1892.

appearance of one of the owners thereof about ten feet in length'. 'As quick as thought', Cherry launched his harpoon and struck the crocodile, the dart sinking deeply into the thick of its tail near the body of the crocodile. The crocodile was then 'left to his own reflections' until the following day when a retrieval party went out to collect it. Stockdale at first thought that the crocodile had escaped until they hauled on the harpoon and the 'fun began' as the crocodile 'lashed the water with his great tail until it played over and round us like a ships hose, and once or twice he bellowed like a bull'. Cherry managed to get a rope around the crocodile's jaw and some other Aborigines bound the end of its tail. It was then tied to a sapling and transported back to Darwin. Stockdale recounts how:

Cherry assured us 'that one berry saucy phellar' 'im Noarro (bad fellow) but 'im not Lariba (old fellow) 'im only young phellar im by and bye supposed my not spear 'im grow wil-le-garrah (big fellow) 'im grow mitlo'wallo (fat fellow) and berry saucy, 'im not eat em Melingah (dog) and cow and horse and white phellar (aronga - ra - berong) 'im frightened alonga Belaera (blackman) cos that one poke 'im finger alonga eye and make 'im let go damn quick.⁸⁰

Stockdale took the crocodile to the Coogee Aquarium in Sydney where it 'died of melancholia and too cold water some six months afterwards'.⁸¹ In the retelling of this story, Stockdale's respect for Cherry's hunting prowess is obvious.⁸² This contrasts with another hunting enthusiast, Alfred Searcy, who wrote of the 'crowd of niggers' they employed to 'beat inside the bush' frightening the wallaby while the colonists waited outside with guns poised. Searcy also describes the 'immense fun' listening to

⁸⁰ 'Harry Stockdale reminisces about Australian crocodiles', Harry Stockdale, Miscellaneous Papers 1898+, Mitchell Library, A1581 CY Reel 855.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² The editor of the *NT Times* also describes how 'astonishing' it is 'how simply the natives effect the capture of these powerful brutes. They wait until they get their intended victim in a shallow waterhole. They then ascertain by means of a long pole where the brute's head is, and being satisfied on that point, a rope with a noose in it is fixed on the edge of the water with darkies in readiness to haul it taut. Then by stirring him up gently with a pole the alligator is conducted into the noose, the rope is tightened on his jaws, there is for an instant a splash of water, sand, alligator and aboriginal, and then the tail being firmly under the control of the blacks, the fight is at an end and nothing remains to be done but to lash the creature securely to the poles by which he is to be carried to his doom (*Northern Territory Times*, 29 January 1892).

Aboriginal people accompanying hunting parties and attracting geese by imitating them and talking ‘all same old man’.⁸³

While Searcy was amused by Aboriginal hunting methods, it is also apparent that the white settlers respected Aboriginal local knowledge.⁸⁴ William Bednall wrote to a southern friend of his nature walks accompanied by his employee, Tom Croker, who explained to Bednall the ‘various native names of the places and some of their own legendary lore’ making his walks ‘sometimes very pleasant’. Bednall was particularly impressed with Croker’s ability to rub two sticks together and make a fire to light his pipe.⁸⁵ A local Aboriginal man, ‘Blind Miranda’, assisted the colonists in locating a potentially lucrative mineral vein running along the high water mark at Mindil beach and described as known to ‘natives for many years past under the Larrageeyah name of Tappilanda’.⁸⁶ Local Aborigines also assisted in ensuring the safety of white settlers. They warned the newcomers to their country of the dangers of local produce such as the poisonous variety of yam, the ‘fruit-like outer skin of the nut from the fern palm’, or a species of mangrove, the juice of which could, ‘kill em eye altogether’.⁸⁷ When DE Kelsey was nine he came off his horse and was knocked unconscious. Some local Aborigines saw his tracks leaving the road and, finding him ‘badly knocked about’, carried him home.⁸⁸ The ‘black attache’ of a kangaroo shooting party at the Casuarinas, on the outskirts of Darwin, killed a ‘formidable looking brown snake’.⁸⁹

⁸³ Alfred Searcy, 1905. In *Northern Seas. Being Mr Alfred Searcy's Experiences on the North Coast of Australia*, as recounted to E Whittington, reprinted from ‘The Register’ (South Australia) by Authority of the South Australian Government, WK Thomas & Co, Grenfell Street.

⁸⁴ Tom Griffiths makes the point that when Europeans invaded Australia they ‘happened upon a continent of hunters; and they brought with them a hunting culture’. However, Griffiths argues that for the colonists, ‘these two forms of hunting symbolised the distance between their society and that of the Aborigines’: ‘Europeans perceived the indigenous culture as preoccupied with subsistence hunting, an activity that was seen as desperate and dependent. In the imperial culture, hunting was an elite sporting and intellectual pursuit, class-conscious and recreational: it was a quest for sport, science and trophies, a ‘refined’ hunting and gathering. That transformation – from hunting to the Hunt, from dependence on nature to manipulation of it, from an essential economic function to an elite social one – was seen by many nineteenth-century Europeans as a prerequisite of advanced culture’ (Tom Griffiths, 1996. *Hunters and Collectors. The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p14).

⁸⁵ Correspondence from William Tompson Bednall to Daniel John Adcock, 25 April 1874, Mortlock Library, V1245/1.

⁸⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 19 March 1887. Larrakia meanings for this mineral vein, ‘tappilanda’, were probably very different to the colonisers who saw it as something to be dug up and exploited. It is likely that this was a vein of tin as the word ‘Tappilanda’ was also used by the Larrakia to describe a type of receptacle (SW Herbert, 1873. ‘Reminiscences of Life in the Northern Territory during the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line, August 1870-November 1872’).

⁸⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 21 August 1903.

⁸⁸ Kelsey 1975, p25.

⁸⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 19 August 1892.

While Aborigines participated in hunting with the colonists as a means of securing food for themselves and to further the alliance discussed previously, they also used their hunting skills to engage with this altered economy. As seen above, Aborigines in Darwin caught and sold live crocodiles to the townsfolk. In 1905, Aboriginal people killed a dugong and were seen ‘hawking portions of the flesh around town for sale’.⁹⁰ Aboriginal people from Koolpinyah Station (which included Larrakia station employees) hunted goose eggs and crab for themselves or sold them to the station or took them to Darwin to sell them.⁹¹

Larrakia people also drew on aspects of their traditional knowledge to engage with the changing social and cultural landscape of the new settlement. The desire of the colonisers to include the Larrakia in the new ceremonies taking place on their land and the willingness of the Larrakia to participate was evident during the ceremony marking the erection of the first pole in the northern section of the overland telegraph line which stretched from Port Augusta to Port Darwin. To honour the day, a holiday was proclaimed and a ‘tribe of natives called “larikees” were gathered to give additional interest to the event’. The Larrakia were dressed in ‘ridiculous costumes, composed of old clothes given to them by the seamen and villagers’. Following the planting of the pole, the white settlers indulged in a banquet and the Larrakia were given flour, biscuits and tobacco.⁹² As seen in the introduction to this thesis, Larrakia people also accompanied the white settlers on various pleasure excursions about Darwin. Harriet Daly described the way that the white settlers picnicked at Fannie Bay where they were, ‘followed of course by a specially chosen escort of Larrakiahs, who never failed to include themselves in what was going on’.⁹³ Daly’s paradoxical representation of the Larrakia as both ‘specially chosen’ and ‘never fail[ing] to include themselves in what was going on’ suggests the alliance between the colonial settlers and Larrakia that is discussed throughout this thesis.

⁹⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 17 February 1905.

⁹¹ Herbert Family Papers, Koolpinyah Station Journals, Northern Territory Archives Service 1362. Aboriginal people on Marrakai Station, on the Adelaide River, allegedly speared thirty pigs belonging to the station. The pigs were then sold to the Chinese who were working on an alluvial gold field near Marrakai (*Northern Territory Times*, 24 July 1903).

⁹² Captain George Calder, 1897. *Stirring Events. Ashore and Afloat*, W. Cole Printer and Publisher, Melbourne, p69.

⁹³ Daly 1887, p63.

Larrakia people opened the 1873 Boxing Day festivities with a spear throwing exhibition which ‘had been arranged in honour of Christmas and its festivities’.⁹⁴ Running races and high jumping were held for the Larrakia with Larrakia generation terms being used to describe the events, for example ‘Balliere’, ‘Molineux’, ‘Nyms’ and ‘Larraba’. The first two terms specifically describe stages of Larrakia men’s business while the last two words are more general words for young boys and old men respectively.⁹⁵ About sixty Larrakia were present at this event and among them were some ‘very smart men ... well made, lithe, and active with cheerful faces’ who would stand well in any comparison with ‘the native tribes of the interior’.⁹⁶ While the physique of local Aborigines may have provided some competition for Aborigines in the interior, the commentator noted somewhat smugly that the ““noble savage”, with all the advantages of a wild life ... was not a match for the white men as even the best results of the Larrakia could not exceed those of young Australians in other colonies’.⁹⁷ These observations reveal that it was not just their spear throwing, running or high jumping but Aboriginal people themselves who provided the coloniser’s with spectator sport.

Again in 1877, an otherwise ‘quiet’ Christmas and New Year was enlivened by ‘some sports among the natives’ organised by Mr Nelson of the Royal Hotel. The sports were ‘numerous and varied’ and ‘afforded great amusement to a considerable number of spectators, as well as to the blacks themselves’.⁹⁸ Over subsequent years, Aboriginal people continued to feature in specific races and events such as ‘climbing the greasy pole’.⁹⁹ In 1891, the New Year ‘athletic meeting’ concluded with hurdle and flat races for Aboriginal people of all ages and sexes. Aborigines were rewarded by what the editor of the local paper believed they would describe as a ‘big fellow tuck-out’.¹⁰⁰ In April of that same year, an Athletic Association Sport’s Day was concluded with a

⁹⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 2 January 1874.

⁹⁵ I have previously highlighted the absence of Larrakia place names on surveyor’s maps. While Larrakia language was used in the naming of sports events and in the reminiscences of Stockdale, Larrakia language was appropriated for other means. Two race horses were named Lameroo and Mindel. The name ‘Larrakia’ came to be used, with a variety of spellings, for various boats, a gold mine and a suburb.

⁹⁶ This number of Aborigines was said to have been reduced by there being ‘only one part of the tribe which remains in the neighbourhood of Port Darwin, the rest being at Southport and elsewhere’ (*Northern Territory Times*, 2 January 1874). An athletic sports day was also held at Southport that same year with ‘Ben Muck’ winning the 100 yards race (*Northern Territory Times*, 9 January 1874).

⁹⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 2 January 1874.

⁹⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 6 January 1877.

⁹⁹ See for example *Northern Territory Times*, 1 January 1887.

¹⁰⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 9 January 1891.

‘number of races for youngsters and aboriginals’ which ‘made an appropriate termination to a most excellent afternoon’s enjoyment’.¹⁰¹ Aboriginal people participated in the swimming carnivals held at the Lameroo Beach baths and in horse racing, although on one occasion an illegal manoeuvre by a ‘black boy’ jockey resulted in ‘strong protest’ against Aboriginal people being permitted to ride in the races as it was thought that ‘their ignorance of the rules endangered the lives of other riders’.¹⁰²

In April 1890, the Commander and Officers of the *HMS Cordelia* and a number of townspeople, were entertained by an Aboriginal spear throwing exhibition which took place on the Cricket Oval during the intervals of a cricket match. The Aborigines ‘performances with the spear’ were deemed ‘tame’ and ‘very poor’ by the local paper. However, the high jumping demonstration was ‘certainly very much better’. Overall the newspaper opined that ‘Her Majesty’s warriors’ would be ‘disappointed if they expect to see any marvellous throwing’ but thought that ‘such an exhibition would probably be novel to most of them’.¹⁰³

Local Aborigines were increasingly called upon to gratify the curiosity of tourists who were ‘anxious to see the noble savage in a state of festivity’ during their ‘corroborees’.¹⁰⁴ According to the anthropologists, Catherine and Robert Berndt, the term ‘corroborree’ passed into English as a word for all Aboriginal ceremony, ritual and entertainment involving singing, dancing and social effervescence generally, a use they believed was too vague and which lumped sacred and non-sacred together in an undifferentiated way.¹⁰⁵ In the Port Darwin settlement, early commentators like Harriet Daly described these corroborees as ‘native games’. These ‘games’ were slowly incorporated into the new cultural life of the settlement. As early as June 1870, George Deane observed, ‘Blacks had a corroborree females all went up to see them’.¹⁰⁶ However, it was not until twenty years later that ‘corroborees’ were held on a regular basis to entertain visiting dignitaries, tourists, local white settlers and Aboriginal people themselves.

¹⁰¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 3 April 1891.

¹⁰² See *Northern Territory Times*, 1 August 1902, *Northern Territory Times*, 15 August 1902.

¹⁰³ *The North Australian*, 25 April 1890, 2 May 1890.

¹⁰⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 29 May 1891.

¹⁰⁵ Cited in Michael Parsons 1997, ‘The tourist corroborree in South Australia’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 21, p46.

When the Governor of South Australia visited the Northern Territory in April 1891, he was given a reception and banquet by the Chinese community, inspected various Government Departments, the Overland Telegraph Office and the 'Leper Camp', visited the Government gardens, went to the Adelaide River on a crocodile hunt and attended a ball at the Residency which was preceded by an 'aboriginal corroboree'. The Aborigines 'cut their antics for an hour or more to the intense delight of the Governor' on the spare ground fronting the Residency, which was considered by the local paper as a 'very fair specimen of Aboriginal entertainment'.¹⁰⁷ The Larrakia and Wulna took part and were:

appropriately decorated with ochre and other fantastic ornaments of fur or feather. It was undoubtedly well done, far better than I had thought possible with semi-civilised blacks, and their strange antics and maneuvers, monotonous only to the uninitiated, were carried out with great spirit.¹⁰⁸

This 'corroboree' was deemed so great a success with both the Governor and the general public that a 'similar demonstration' was later planned to take place in the Residency garden with coloured lights being introduced to 'add to the scenic affect'.¹⁰⁹ In his study of Aboriginal corroborees, Michael Parsons writes that by the 1850s in Melbourne, the commercial corroboree was a theatre of spectacle and settlers began to 'perceive Aboriginal performance through their own theatrical experience, which at that time included a great emphasis on spectacular effects'.¹¹⁰ Parsons argues that these 'command performance' corroborees for visiting dignitaries were 'orchestrated by the new occupiers as a joint act of homage to the Crown'. These were a 're-framing of the corroboree as a traditional act of welcome, but also functioned for settlers as a handy piece of ready-made uniquely local pageantry that could be included on the program for notable official visitors'.¹¹¹ That this occurred in Darwin is obvious from the telegram sent to Government Resident Dashwood by the Captain of the *SS Australian* in

¹⁰⁶ The Diary of GP Deane, 7 June 1870, Mortlock Library, D2875 (L).

¹⁰⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 February 1891, *Northern Territory Times*, 3 April 1891.

¹⁰⁸ *South Australian Advertiser*, 25 April 1891.

¹⁰⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 July 1891.

¹¹⁰ Parsons 1997, p52.

¹¹¹ Parsons 1997, p47.

November 1900, 'Lord Buchanan aboard, would much like corroboree, please arrange'.¹¹²

In July 1893, a corroboree was performed for the passengers of the *S.S. Chingtu* while that steamer was in harbour and the following March about 'thirty globetrotters' from the *SS Guthrie* 'bound for the Orient' were entertained by a corroboree performed by 'the Aboriginal section of our community' on the cricket oval and 'great was the joy of the visitor thereat'.¹¹³ Again in 1899, a number of Aboriginal people 'took advantage' of the tourists visiting Darwin from the *SS Australian*. The performers dispersed to their respective camps 'after a good deal of shouting and prancing about' and the spectators seemed 'very well satisfied with the show'.¹¹⁴ In March 1900, a 'corroboree on rather a big scale was inaugurated on the cricketing Oval' for the 'benefit of curious sightseers' on the *SS Eastern*:

But although three or four different tribes were represented, the spectacle cannot be described as a very brilliant success. In the first place there was no moon, and in the second place there seemed to be a great dearth of firewood; the only light shed on the performers came from a few smoky, sickly little fires which seemed perpetually on the point of dying away altogether; consequently a good many of the details were but indifferently visible. But perhaps, after all, this prevailing gloom only added to the fantastical weirdness which is supposed to constitute the chief charm of the corroboree, and if some of the rhythmical evolutions of the dancers were lost to view in the darkness, enough was to be seen to give the visitors some rough idea of the North Australian savage as he appears during his festive relaxations.¹¹⁵

Again in September 1901, the newspaper opined that the tourists from the *Australian* who had visited the Palmerston Oval on Friday evening to witness an 'an alleged native corroboree, must have looked in vain for the weird attractiveness usually associated with this display'. The corroboree was 'about the tamest exhibition of its kind ever seen here, due to the fact that very few blacks are at present in town - and those the laziest and least energetic of their kind'. Even so, the editor believed that the 'fire-lit darkness,

¹¹² Captain of the *SS Australian* to Government Resident Dashwood, NTRS F790 A10095/1900.

¹¹³ *Northern Territory Times*, 21 July 1893, *Northern Territory Times*, 30 March 1894.

¹¹⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 14 April 1899.

¹¹⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 30 March 1900.

with the motley and half savage and very dirty crowd of natives squatted within the circle of light, may have possessed a certain charm of novelty for some of the city-bred sight seekers'.¹¹⁶ The *Northern Territory Times* was again critical of a corroboree performed on the Palmerston oval for the entertainment of the passengers on the steamer *Eastern* a few years later. The corroboree was described as a 'practical failure' because:

performers were scarce, and those who did put in an appearance were lazy, and lacked the barbaric adornments of pipeclay and feathers and little else which constitute the Aboriginal 'full dress', and without which stage accessories the native corroboree loses most of the little dramatic merit or attractive features it may otherwise possess.¹¹⁷

In March 1908, an 'impromptu native corroboree' took place on the railway jetty in the 'full glare of a 100 candle power electric light' with a dozen Aboriginal performers taking part. These Aborigines lacked in 'paint and feathers and spears and nudity' and together with 'prosaic railway goods trucks scattered around in place of trees and the dim mysterious background of the wild bush' the corroboree was deemed 'very much of a farce'.¹¹⁸

Such comments in the local newspaper, together with suggestions of what might improve these performances, suggest that the colonisers had so thoroughly appropriated aspects of Aboriginal culture to suit their own entertainment needs that they could consider themselves authorities on what was 'good', 'appropriate' and genuine displays of Aboriginal culture. The northern settlers complacently assessed Aboriginal performances and were condescending towards their southern visitors who were impressed by such performances. Incorporating Aboriginal corroborees into the cultural life of the white settlement was an appropriation of their prior meaning. By decontextualising these ceremonies into tourist performances, the colonisers were asserting their rights to determine the nature and temporality of Aboriginal cultural activity in the new social landscape.

¹¹⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 September 1901.

¹¹⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 April 1906.

¹¹⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 March 1908.

The fact that the colonisers could at one and the same time suggest that corroborees could be impromptu and, entirely without irony, complain that cultural displays were ruined by the presence of prosaic railway goods trucks suggest that they could not conceive that Aborigines held such ceremonies at particular times and for well defined reasons. Descriptions of corroborees as ‘farces’ by the colonisers obscures the fact that Aboriginal people also considered them a farce. They were not part of Aboriginal ceremonies as demanded by Aboriginal law. They were appropriations of ceremonies demanded by the colonisers and performed by Aborigines who had an economic stake in carrying out these ‘farces’. These tourist corroborees represent something more complex than solely entertainment. Rather than seeing them as a prostitution of the ‘real’ corroboree, Parsons sees them as valid expression of a ‘new cultural artefact’ which was ‘jointly negotiated between two cultures’.¹¹⁹

That Larrakia people were immediately aware of the economic benefits from their participation in white settler ceremonies is indicated by the *Northern Territory Times* editor who wrote in 1873, that he had had repeated inquiries from local Aboriginal people as to, ‘[h]ow many day Christmas come on, big one tum tum, that one very good’. Following their involvement in the 1873 Christmas celebrations, the Larrakia gained not only in curiosity and fun but also from the various prizes offered, such as blankets, tomahawks, knives, flour, tea and sugar.¹²⁰ An 1893 corroboree ‘cost Lord Jersey a “fiver” in food and tobacco for Aboriginal Australia’.¹²¹ After the 1894 performance on the Cricket Oval described above, the paper described the ‘joy of the visitor’ and ‘also ... of the darkies when they subsequently raked in the flour, tobacco and sundries, which Messrs Cook & Co., and the E & A S.S Company conjointly give as a quid pro quo for these (to a great many southerners) unique exhibitions’.¹²² Following the corroboree arranged for Lord Buchanan in 1900, Aborigines were paid in flour, sugar, wool, clay pipes and tobacco.¹²³

As Aboriginal access to their own economic capital, that is their land and its resources, was significantly altered or progressively denied to them, local Aboriginal people seized the ‘opportunity to market their cultural knowledge and skills, their symbolic capital

¹¹⁹ Parsons 1997, p46.

¹²⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 26 December 1873.

¹²¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 March 1893.

¹²² *Northern Territory Times*, 30 March 1894.

¹²³ Captain of *SS Australian* to Government Resident Dashwood, NTRS F790 A10095/1900.

and convert it, not just into hand-outs of odd foodstuffs and token goods, but hard currency'.¹²⁴ Parsons explains how the tourist corroboree in Melbourne was an 'Aboriginal initiated and organised cultural performance' and a 'significant and successful attempt to use symbolic goods to engage in the settler economy throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth century'.¹²⁵ While many of the official corroborees in the period under study were organised by the white settlers, descriptions of Darwin corroborees as 'impromptu' and Aboriginal people 'taking advantage' of the presence of tourist ships suggest that it was Aboriginal people who were responsible for organising at least some of these performances.

Apart from economic gain, it is likely that Larrakia people asserted their right to be the correct group to dance corroboree in the changing cultural space of the town. A corroboree organised in Darwin for the South Australian Governor was to have been a 'grand affair' but, according to Will Jefferson, was 'spoiled by some busy person trying to make two hostile tribes corroboree together and that they will never do'.¹²⁶ It was at this 'spoiled' corroboree that the Larrakia man, Bubs Mananilla played the didjeridu. Given Jefferson's comment regarding the two hostile tribes, it is likely that the Larrakia were successful in asserting their right to perform the corroboree on their country.¹²⁷ It is significant that the Larrakia were asked to 'open' particular events and to participate in corroborees. Such inclusion was because of the alliance referred to in previous chapters and the acknowledgment by the colonisers that the Larrakia, as the prior occupants of this area, should have this distinction. No doubt the Larrakia also understood that their engagement with such things would encourage their privileged status and ensure their access to the commodities about the new settlement.

The representations of 'motley', 'half-savage' and 'dirty' Aborigines performing 'lazy', 'tame' and inauthentic corroborees reflect broader ideologies about the increasingly degenerate character of Aboriginal people residing in town areas compared to those in areas more remote from settlement.¹²⁸ When GR McMinn visited Melville Island in the 1880s, he was interested to see 'for the first and only time a real genuine corroboree, not

¹²⁴ Parsons 1997, p48.

¹²⁵ Parsons 1997, pp47-8.

¹²⁶ Correspondence from Will Jefferson to his mother, 9 May 1905, Mitchell Library, MSS623.

¹²⁷ The Journal of LCE Gee, 1905; *Northern Territory Times*, 12 May 1905.

¹²⁸ See JR Beckett (ed), 1988. *Past and Present. The Construction of Aboriginality*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

one got up by promises of tobacco and other luxuries possibly to please some high official'. This corroborree was deemed even more genuine as none of the Aboriginal participants 'came near us to beg or for any other purpose, and this was the cheapest entertainment I have ever known to be given by natives in Australia'. However, even 'real genuine corroborrees' were still described by McMinn as 'entertainment'.¹²⁹ That these characterisations of 'town' and 'bush' people were arbitrary and changed over time is apparent in the way that the Larrakia were initially lauded as friendly and civilised and those Aborigines on 'the back blocks', who were responsible for killing cattle and sometimes whites, were described as 'inhuman monsters, whose cowardly and murderous nature renders them unfit to live'.¹³⁰ It is also useful to contrast the descriptions of the above corroborrees with those that were performed for the reasons initially intended. Parkhouse describes how, in the early 1890s, some 200 Larrakia men, women and children travelled with the Wulna headman, Emu, to a place near Burrundi, 125 miles from Port Darwin (near Pine Creek), to participate in the 'man-making' ceremony of an 'Aggrakundi youth'. Parkhouse described the Larrakia's part in this ceremony:

It took the form of a drama, and the admiration of the Aggrakundi at the representation was unbounded. The story played was a true one, of a Larrakia boy of three or four years of age who had strayed along the bush and was lost. The boy (L'uerdwoa) who represented the child wandered here and there, at times lying down in weariness, and then, although exhausted, again striving to find his people. They on their part seek him in one direction and another, and the incidents of the day are reproduced – here they see an emu, there a snake, at another place a kangaroo has crossed, until at last they find the dead body of the child. A blackfellow mimicked the appearance, the cry, and gait of the emu to perfection; the snake, for a human being, wriggled and darted wonderfully here and there as it was headed off, until it bounded into the bushes, and the kangaroo was seen hopping in the distance. The ever-present power of Evil was there, now worming himself along the ground, anon towering aloft in exultation; skurrying rapidly along, his body almost touching the earth, lying down, rolling and grovelling.

¹²⁹ GR McMinn Papers 1864-1907, SA State Records, GRG 35/650.

¹³⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 October 1884.

Larrakia women surrounded the performers in a semi-circle and made the ‘familiar music, singing the weird chant and producing an accompaniment by slapping their hands upon the thigh in admirable rhythm’.¹³¹ Parkhouse’s description of this corroboree shows the importance of ceremony practiced for Aboriginal cultural reasons and also the way the Larrakia managed to juggle work commitments with their ongoing autonomous cultural lives, ‘heedless of the impatience of the Aggrakundi’ the Larrakia spent a fortnight of the time at Glencoe cattle station doing fencing work.¹³²

The first part of this chapter looked at how Larrakia people facilitated the colonial settlement of their country by engaging with the local economy through their labour. Larrakia people also contributed to the emerging social and cultural life of the new community by participating in hunting expeditions, sport exhibitions and carnivals and public corroborees. The Larrakia benefited from their participation in these activities economically but their involvement also augmented their distinct niche within the town. What is also evident is that Aboriginal people exercised some control over the amount and time of their participation.

Even though the colonisers were watching Aboriginal fights, organising and sanctioning Aboriginal corroborees and spear throwing exhibitions, and encouraging Aborigines to participate in hunting expeditions, it is apparent that they were also determining the nature and timing of what was appropriate practice and behaviour in the changing space of the town. The following section looks at the way that the persistence of particular aspects of Aboriginal people’s lifestyles were deemed by the colonisers inappropriate within the town area and, increasingly, became a source of contention between the Aborigines and white settlers.

Contesting the changing landscape

In 1874, a correspondent complained to the local paper that, the ‘black brother may be very good in his place’ but ‘I prefer him at a respectable distance’. A week later, Aboriginal people were ordered by the Government Resident to ‘move a little further away’ from the township and it was reported that they had gone to Peel’s Well and

¹³¹ Parkhouse 1895, p644.

¹³² Ibid.

Fannie Bay, deemed by the newspaper as a ‘much more suitable place for them’.¹³³ The following section looks at how the colonisers strove to define what was a ‘suitable place’ for Aborigines and how, given the lack of legislative power to control the lives of Aboriginal people, enforced evictions from the town area and gaoling became a common way of dealing with behaviour deemed inappropriate in the town.

The previous section of this chapter looked at the way that local Aborigines assisted in clearing the landscape, hunting and tending the settler’s gardens. However, it is also apparent that Aboriginal people offered some resistance to the colonisers’ presence on their landscape through their petty thieving, raiding of gardens and spearing of European livestock. In 1874, Aboriginal people ‘attacked’ the government garden, stole the fruit and dug up the sweet potato before they ‘surrounded’ the gardener’s hut. A ‘little ammunition ... made them fly’ and the Aborigines were later expelled from the town. In a report on this incident, a southern newspaper commented that too much sympathy had been shown to Aborigines in such a ‘wild and distant country’ and that, as a collision was ‘bound to take place’, the ‘natives’ should be taught a ‘salutary lesson in cases of depredation, before European blood is shed’.¹³⁴ The language used in this report is the language of warfare and indicates the importance the colonisers attributed to this kind of behaviour.

In 1875, Aborigines were discovered trying to spear some domestic poultry and then ‘showed signs of fighting’ when the owner challenged them over it.¹³⁵ ‘Native curs’ were also reported to be ‘prowling the township committing thefts of geese which had been hung up over night’.¹³⁶ After a visit to Fannie Bay, Reverend Bogle found on his return that ‘the blacks had got in by a window and helped themselves to some ammunition emptying my shot pouch, powder flask and taking half box caps’.¹³⁷ The local paper also reported that a ‘good deal of pilfering in a small way is going on, and no one can grow a melon in his yard except he is always on the spot to keep the niggers off’. The town baker also lost twenty-one loaves of bread although, the paper admitted that it was unclear ‘whether the blacks, Malays or hard up white fellows’ were

¹³³ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 February 1874.

¹³⁴ *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 July 1874.

¹³⁵ *South Australian Register*, 14 October 1875.

¹³⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 16 October 1875.

¹³⁷ The Diary of Reverend Archibald James Bogle 1875-77, Mitchell Library, C663/CY1187.

responsible.¹³⁸ That Aboriginal thieving was a significant issue is evident in the proclamation published by Government Resident Price:

As the Aborigines having lately been guilty of several thefts in the Town of Palmerston, instructions have been issued to the Police that for the future idle Aborigines will not be permitted to wander about the Town either during the day or night. Those only who are regularly employed by the Residents can remain during the day-time, but they must leave the Town at sunset unless their employers provide sleeping accommodation for them on their premises. This rule will be strictly enforced by the Police, and the Government Resident trusts that the inhabitants will give their assistance in this matter.

The Aborigines will be informed through the Protector that if they will not work they must keep away from the Town, or they will be arrested and punished under the Police Act.¹³⁹

That this 'rule' was already being strictly enforced by the police is evident in the 'extreme vigour' used by the police in their expulsion of Aborigines from the town two days before the notice appeared in the paper. Protector of Aborigines Sturt claimed that one Aboriginal man had to carry an old man on his back to Fannie Bay and that another who was forced to move was ill.¹⁴⁰ At this time, Larrakia and Wulna people outnumbered non-Aboriginal people in the township. This raises the question of how much Price's proclamation was about controlling the behaviour of a numerically stronger population and showing the Aborigines that the colonisers had control over the settlement. Such an order also points to employment being the key to the accepted presence of Aboriginal people in the town area.

While the measures used to remove Aborigines may have been forceful, they did not last. In February 1877, a number of complaints were made to the local paper regarding the 'row made by Aborigines first thing in the morning to the great annoyance of the inhabitants'. As the main offenders were generally 'lubras and piccaninnies who are not employed in the township' it was suggested that it would be 'a great benefit if the police

¹³⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 March 1876.

¹³⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 28 October 1876; Report from Government Resident, EW Price, to the Minister for Agriculture & Education, 6 March 1877, SA State Records, GRS1 155/1877.

¹⁴⁰ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines Sturt, 26 October 1876, NTRS F790 A1749.

were to enforce the prohibition issued by the Government Resident a short time since'.¹⁴¹ That the prohibition was ineffective, misunderstood or flouted by Aboriginal people is demonstrated by the 'Wagites' visit to the Larrakia in May 1877. They commenced holding their 'corroborees' but their 'demonstrations were so ostentatious that the police had to request them to remove further from the township'.¹⁴² The police again requested Aboriginal people to move away from the town in August 1877, following a complaint from 'Mr Fisher' to the Government Resident regarding the 'hundred or so' Aborigines who came into town every morning, made a 'tremendous row' and located 'themselves nearly in front of our place to our extreme annoyance' and interfered with Mrs Fisher's rest.¹⁴³ A few months later, Aboriginal people were again 'threatened' by a police trooper with being 'driven from the neighbourhood of the township' if they were not quiet.¹⁴⁴

Protector of Aborigines Morice took offence at this last threat. Morice agreed that it was sometimes 'advisable to persuade the Aborigines to hold their corroborees at a distance from the Township', but argued that he should have been informed of any such orders. However, a far more important issue for Morice was that the threat to drive Aborigines from the township and destroy their 'whurlies' had actually been used by the police to induce Aboriginal people to give up the person who was responsible for the recent spearing of a horse. Morice could not see what right the police had to make the Aborigines 'do their work for them' and, in reference to his official instructions regarding Aborigines, asked 'how can the Aborigines be made to comprehend as clearly as possible that they are British subjects, and that, as such, they are amenable to and subject by our laws if they are to be bullied by the Police in this way'.¹⁴⁵ Inspector Foelsche justified his actions by claiming that the 'blacks had devoted two nights to howling, on the third night it commenced at 7 pm. I was ill, suffering from headache, a lady at the Residence was also ill; and having not had any sleep for two nights I thought it time to stop it and directed a trooper to be sent to request the blacks to be quiet and to inform them that if they wished to yell they must camp further away'. As the person charged with the responsibility of preventing any disturbance of the peace, Foelsche

¹⁴¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 February 1877.

¹⁴² *Northern Territory Times*, 5 May 1877.

¹⁴³ Correspondence from Fisher to Government Resident Price, 14 August 1877, NTRS F790 A2264.

¹⁴⁴ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines, Robert Morice, to Government Resident, EW Price, 28 November 1877, SA State Records, GRS10/1877/2514.

could see no reason why he should have informed Morice of his actions. Regarding the claim that the police should not use Aboriginal people to do their work, Foelsche advised Morice that when he had had '17 years experience of the blacks he will find out that the police took the best method of discovering the offender'.¹⁴⁶ Morice rejected this method and claimed that it was 'harsh and arbitrary, if not illegal' and also unreliable. Morice also thought that the threat of driving the Larrakia from the town was one of the cruellest measures that could have been taken because if the 'weaker' Larrakia had attempted to capture the offender who came from the 'larger and more warlike' Wulna, there may have been a great deal of bloodshed.¹⁴⁷ Such argument perpetuates the characterisation, earlier discussed, of the Larrakia as weak and the Wulna as strong and fearsome.

In July 1880, a Chinese gardener, Ah Ling, shot three 'blackfellows' for 'robbing his garden'. One of these men was not expected to recover and Ah Ling was charged over this incident.¹⁴⁸ The local paper reported this incident and repeated a litany of the recent offences committed by Aborigines. They had raided the Government gardens for sweet potato; waylaid the Matron from the Hospital and demanded money; 'stuck up' a Chinese man 'near the school house, levelled a couple of spears at him, and 'appropriated' some of his vegetables; and stolen a bag of flour from a white resident as well as her saucepan and its boiling contents. To 'avoid unpleasant consequences ... our troublesome neighbours were, last Sunday morning, relegated to a spot some two or three miles away', a place the newspaper deemed 'hardly a sufficient distance for people of a raiding disposition'.¹⁴⁹ The newspaper was right. Five months later, the paper described the 'intolerable evil' represented by Aborigines thieving rice, tea and other things from the white settlers. Complaints to the press regarding Aborigines being allowed to remain in the vicinity of the town particularly when orders had been issued to the contrary were allegedly 'rife'. Rhetorically, the paper asked 'why these people are allowed to frequent the town at all hours, skulking about the dwellings of honest, hard-working men, when they are known to be a useless, rascally, thieving class, is a

¹⁴⁵ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines, RJ Morice, 4 December 1877, NTRS F790/1877 A2556/1877.

¹⁴⁶ Correspondence from Inspector of Police, Paul Foelsche, 5 December 1877, NTRS F790 A2556/1877.

¹⁴⁷ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines, Morice, to Government Resident Price, 7 December 1877, NTRS F790 A2537/1877.

¹⁴⁸ *South Australian Advertiser*, 9 July 1880; *Northern Territory Times*, 31 July 1880.

¹⁴⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 31 July 1880.

puzzle to most people ... It is to be hoped the authorities will take a note of the matter, for it is a permanent menace to the welfare of honest people'.¹⁵⁰

A newspaper correspondent also suggested that if the Government would not do anything to 'keep the niggers further afield', perhaps the District Council could 'at small cost provide an officer to purge this small community from the pollution complained of and by so doing will earn the thanks of all good citizens and of yours'.¹⁵¹ The District Council took heed and approached Police Inspector Foeslche on the matter who 'promised to send a trooper with anyone the Council might appoint to accompany him'. However, the Council resolved to leave the matter 'in abeyance for a while'.¹⁵²

Another correspondent recommended whipping as the punishment for the two youths who had broken into Solomon and Co.'s store and stolen some brandy. The Protector of Aborigines protested against the youths being whipped and they were consequently sentenced to six month's imprisonment with hard labour, and one month in solitary confinement.¹⁵³ While whipping may not have been favoured in this case, in 1885 the Aboriginal man, Slocum was subjected to a 'whipping of twenty-five strokes with a birch'.¹⁵⁴ Given that the expulsion of Aborigines from town was not having the desired effect, Aboriginal people were increasingly incarcerated for any misdemeanours. An Aboriginal man named Harry (alias Nim) was sentenced to six months gaol with hard labour for stealing a pair of trousers.¹⁵⁵ The 'Larrakeyah King', Miranda, was sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour for assaulting a police constable 'while in the execution of his duty'. It is not said what his 'duty' was but the incident occurred on the Cricket Ground.¹⁵⁶ The Larrakia man, 'Mr Squire', was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for being unlawfully on the premises of 'the Club'.¹⁵⁷ Two 'savages' were gaoled for fourteen days for stealing potatoes from a Chinese garden. 'Paddy' was gaoled for six months for stealing alcohol from Mr Parkhouse's residence on Mitchell Street.¹⁵⁸ 'Peter' was sentenced to six months gaol

¹⁵⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 11 December 1880.

¹⁵¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 December 1880.

¹⁵² *Northern Territory Times*, 9 February 1881.

¹⁵³ *Northern Territory Times*, 5 March 1881.

¹⁵⁴ Report on the Palmerston Labour Prison and Gaol, 14 January 1886, *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1885*.

¹⁵⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 12 June 1886.

¹⁵⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 11 June 1887.

¹⁵⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 8 May 1891.

¹⁵⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 8 May 1891.

with hard labour for stealing from a government garden at Doctor's Gully and resisting arrest.¹⁵⁹ As late as July 1903, complaints of 'petty pilfering at various gardens' by Aborigines continued to be made.¹⁶⁰

Many of the thefts that Aboriginal people committed were for food. Although the local newspaper acknowledged that goats running through the bush unshepherded would 'probably prove a severe temptation to a hungry native', the punishment for killing European livestock or raiding gardens was severe.¹⁶¹ In pastoral areas Aboriginal people were sometimes shot if they were suspected of spearing cattle. In the town area, the raiding of gardens and the spearing of livestock and poultry resulted in Aborigines being expelled from the town area, whipped or gaoled. The harshness of this punishment for such offences needs to be understood in the context of the potential development of the Northern Territory. As discussed previously, colonial projections of the agriculture and pastoral prosperity of the Northern Territory relied on plants flourishing in the government nurseries and livestock surviving. The colonisers needed to conquer Aboriginal people's thieving or raiding 'propensities' to ensure their own survival and expansion in the Northern Territory.

The offences committed by Aboriginal people as described above indicate that colonisation was not as uncomplicated as is often depicted. The digging up of survey pegs, spearing or attempting to spear surveyors and early settlers and exhibiting threatening behaviour are very obvious ways that local Aboriginal people resisted the colonisation of their lands. Thieving from gardens and the spearing of European livestock were less overt ways of offering some resistance to colonisation. It is also plausible that this action was about Aboriginal people's survival. The colonisers had disrupted the Larrakia's traditional economy through the changes to the landscape and their hunting practices. It is probable that the Larrakia considered European livestock and plant resources recompense for the destruction of their own resources.

Another way that Aborigines resisted colonial attempts to order and redefine the town landscape was by adhering to autonomous lifestyles. Much of the hostility from the colonisers towards Aboriginal people was because of Aboriginal people's lifestyles and

¹⁵⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 23 March 1900.

¹⁶⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 July 1903.

¹⁶¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 11 December 1903.

practices of which the colonisers had little understanding. Noisy ceremonial activity, burial practices, living spaces, Aboriginal people's dress codes, standards of cleanliness, morality, communication styles, the large number of dogs they kept, their failure to keep to regular work schedules, their continued movement to and from the township and sometimes their very appearance challenged colonial expectations of ways of living about the township. Many of these cultural differences were highlighted in colonial justifications of removing Aboriginal people from the town area.

In February 1874, 'JNW' aired his grievances regarding Aboriginal people in a letter to the local paper under the title, 'The Nigger Nuisance'. JNW recounted the 'unpleasing manners and customs' of Aborigines, their 'simply disgusting habits', the 'hideous yells and war whoops' which emanated from their camps during ceremonies and the associated 'noise and riot' which made it impossible for the white settlers in Darwin to 'obtain any rest'. It was these things, together with the 'accumulations of filth' around their living areas, the fear of an epidemic being created through their 'filthy habits' and their 'unhealthy and intolerable' burial practices, which ordained that Aboriginal people be kept at a distance from the town.¹⁶²

Other colonists were also disturbed by the Larrakia's grieving rituals.¹⁶³ When the Larrakia man Mat Davis was accidentally killed during a 'sham fight' the paper described the displays of grief 'by the women in howling and beating their heads and backs and the ground with heavy sticks; and some of the men by their grotesque actions in running, walking, and brandishing their spears'.¹⁶⁴ When Nalunga was killed during the March 1876 dispute, Reverend Bogle described it as a 'most miserable sight to see the five lubras and children who all used to seem so fond of him, in frantic grief'. Bogle felt 'quite sad ... to see the fine strong man whom we used to admire so much, stretched cold in death and to see the helpless sorrow of these poor people'.¹⁶⁵ Larrakia grieving rituals were also carried out when Tom Cherry's five year old daughter was killed in an accident. Cherry was reported to begin 'the native way of showing his grief by beating himself about the head with a stick until he bled freely, when he passed the stick (a pick

¹⁶² *Northern Territory Times*, 13 February 1874. JNW wrote, 'As their babies and gins shuffle off this mortal coil they are carefully stowed away in trees, and with a burning February sun the stench arising from human decomposition is unhealthy and intolerable' (*Northern Territory Times*, 13 February 1874).

¹⁶³ *Northern Territory Times*, 8 & 15 May 1874.

¹⁶⁴ *South Australian Register*, 7 August 1875.

handle) over to his lubras, who followed suit in turn'.¹⁶⁶ In 1909 a 'grand aboriginal ceremonial' took place at the Larrakia's 'King camp' where the participants were rigged out in 'full dress regalia of paint, feathers, and necklets of kangaroo teeth'. They enacted a 'Paint Corroboree' in honour of the recently deceased 'Elbow Davie' and Maggie.¹⁶⁷ Not long after this, the local paper reported that an 'Aboriginal king' had died at the King Camp. During the days and nights following his death 'there was sound of weird wailing betokening grief for the death of the Larrakeyah potentate and the carrying out of certain funereal ceremonies in accord with native tribal customs'.¹⁶⁸ Colonial depictions of grieving rituals as 'grotesque', 'frantic' and 'weird' contrast sharply with the somber mourning of Christians and are indicative of the colonisers inability to accept different cultural practice. However, the level of detail used to describe the grieving rituals and funeral ceremonies suggests a certain amount of voyeurism on the part of whites to Aboriginal cultural difference.

An extract from a letter sent to the local paper in 1874 under the heading, 'Mrs Brown on Northern Territory Matters' demonstrates, in a satirical way, some white settlers' fear and incomprehension of Aboriginal difference. Following her arrival in Darwin, 'Mrs Brown' described her encounter with the people delivering her luggage:

I tore to the door, I mean the piece of canvas, to keep the man from coming in. 'Oh my grashus!' sais I, 'whoever have you got with you?' for just at that very moment, I seed a great wooly head, with three whitey shinen places in the face. These was the two eyes and the teeth of a blackfeller. Well, jest then the other man moved a one side a bit to put my box down, and there was the black' and you shud had seed him and his toilet; why nuthen but a little bit of a apern, an a bit ov string tied round one of his rists ... and nuthen else in the world else! An the apern esn't bigger n' your babby's bib! 'I want ten bob', says the man with the box. 'Larry Keear!' sais the nigger. 'What's that', sais I, 'I don't keep no 'larry-keearars'; and, my dear Mrs Burt, you shud a seed that blackey smile. You ca'dn't compare et weth enything but Tim Murphy's sign of the Bull and Mouth. 'Bacca, plower, tum-tum' sais the mouth. So I found out that the man with my box was called Tom, and though I thoft that his 'ten

¹⁶⁵ The Diary of Reverend Archibald James Bogle 1875-77, 25 March 1876, Mitchell Library, C663/CY1187.

¹⁶⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 29 September 1888.

¹⁶⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 22 October 1909.

¹⁶⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 10 December 1909.

bob' was a raather high charge, I paid et down in two new half-crowns and five shillin', so that he cud take away the mouth, the bib and the bit ov string. I was goin' to take up my boxes and carry them into my bedroom when, 'Larry-Keeur, 'bacca, tum-tum' sais the nigger; and leaving Tom to give him some 'bacca I got out ov site behind the pieve ov canvas like a shot. Well, I lide down in my close, and I spose as I was very tired, went to sleepe, but, there was the room rolling an' pitchin about, and every now and then the great wooley head, with the three white places in the face, and the bib, and bit ov string round the rist, and Larry Keeur, berry good, baccy, tum-tum, wud be maken me jump in my trubled slepe all though that hot, sweating, miserable nite.¹⁶⁹

Aboriginal people's blackness, nudity, dirtiness and language differences were consistently highlighted in colonial depictions of Aboriginal people and in justifying why Aboriginal people should not be allowed in the town area. On Christmas day 1880, the day Christians reserved for sharing goodwill, a local solicitor complained of the way that several of Darwin's 'principal streets' were 'periodically infested by gangs of unkempt, jabbering niggers - loathsome in aspect, scab-stricken in body'. Burrst also found their 'unearthly yells and shrieks ... most grating, and interruptive to persons engaged in serious business and thought'. Burrst concluded his correspondence with the request, 'let them be kept out of ear-shot and eye-sight of all the principal streets of Palmerston - within a radius of three hundred yards or so'.¹⁷⁰ Colonisers like Burrst could not conceive that Aboriginal people may have been engaged in serious business or thought. Aboriginal people yelled or war whooped, shrieked, jabbered and quarrelled. They were often referred to as 'nuisances' and sometimes represented as a 'useless, rascally, thieving class', 'incorrigible beggars and panderers' or engaged in 'play' or 'quarrels'.¹⁷¹ According to the colonisers, Aborigines were unkempt, scab-ridden, unsightly and covered with sores, so much so that one commentator found it 'quite disgusting to look at them'.¹⁷² Aboriginal people's living places were 'stinking quarters' surrounded by 'quantities of filth and rubbish' and capable of spreading disease. The number of dogs Aboriginal people kept was also cause for colonial complaint. While Europeans had to pay a dog tax, Aborigines were exempt and allowed

¹⁶⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 29 May 1874.

¹⁷⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 December 1880.

¹⁷¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 11 December 1880; *Northern Territory Times*, 17 November 1883.

¹⁷² *Northern Territory Times*, 19 March 1881.

to ‘keep dogs for the chase’. This was deemed ‘well enough for natives in the bush or away from the haunts of civilised beings but in towns they should not be allowed, the only game they are set on is the domestic fowl yard’.¹⁷³ On one occasion, four Aboriginal women were ‘observed sauntering calmly along one of our main thoroughfares, followed by no less than 17 dogs, all more or less diseased’.¹⁷⁴

Aboriginal people themselves were described as ‘sweet smelling cusses’ and while the domestic work of women may have been praised, one correspondent found the smell that ‘proceeds from two or three of them together’ unpleasant.¹⁷⁵ It was also the scant ‘habiliments of these sable nymphs of the forest’ which challenged the sensibilities of the colonisers.¹⁷⁶ Aborigines were described ‘prowling the street in a semi-nude state’ and ‘caricaturing the decencies of civilised citizens by an ostentatious display of semi-cinctures almost as repulsive as nudity itself’.¹⁷⁷ Unable to tolerate this state of undress, Protector of Aborigines Wood requested in 1889 that Aboriginal women who were employed in the town, be given ‘some form of gown, simply but strongly made’ and after they had been given it ‘not be allowed in the streets unless decently dressed’. Wood also recommended that men not be allowed in the town ‘unless decently dressed’.¹⁷⁸ Depictions of Aboriginal nudity contrasted sharply with the conventions of petticoats, bodices, starched white suits and sola topees which constituted European tropical dress at that time – at least for the wealthy sectors of the community.

There was another matter which tried the moral conventions of the white settlers. In June 1881, the local paper described the ‘Annual Visitation’ of ‘blacks from the Adelaide and Alligator Rivers’ who arrived on the outskirts of the township for the purposes of prostitution. Two days later, ‘a general clearance of them was made by the police’.¹⁷⁹ This issue generated great controversy in the pages of the local press. Several subscribers, including prominent townsfolk like Inspector Foelsche, Protector of Aborigines Morice and businessman VL Solomon, withdrew their subscriptions to the newspaper because ‘of the disgraceful articles and indecent allusions’ in the paper as

¹⁷³ *Northern Territory Times*, 3 September 1881.

¹⁷⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 14 December 1900.

¹⁷⁵ See *Northern Territory Times*, 17 November 1883; *Northern Territory Times*, 12 January 1884; *Northern Territory Times*, 23 February 1884.

¹⁷⁶ *South Australian Advertiser*, 3 July 1874.

¹⁷⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 12 January 1884; *Northern Territory Times*, 25 December 1880.

¹⁷⁸ Report of Percy Moore Wood, 8 March 1889, *Government Resident’s Report on the Northern Territory, 1888*.

well as its ‘general mismanagement’.¹⁸⁰ The newspaper justified its ‘plain speaking’ by arguing that ‘desperate diseases require desperate remedies’ and that it was their duty as journalists ‘when any glaring evil occurs in our midst to throw off all squeamishness and false delicacy and to call a spade a spade’ even if it offended the ‘nice sensibilities’ of some ‘highly virtuous people’.¹⁸¹ Other correspondents supported the newspaper’s actions, claiming that most of the township were ‘greatly pleased at the plain way in which you drew attention to the scandalous proceedings which took place last week’. They also offered to furnish the paper ‘with particulars of the vilest conduct on the part of some of those who signed the document sent to you’ and claimed that the ‘signatories’ were ‘all aghast at what they believe is in store for them’.¹⁸²

Although the newspaper advised that the best course of action was to give those Aborigines involved in this activity ‘a few bags of flour and some tobacco’ and ‘start them for their own country’, further correspondence suggests that it was not just visiting Aboriginal people who engaged with the economy in this way.¹⁸³ ‘Pro Bono Publico’ apologised for writing ‘on this nauseous subject’ but argued that, although the ‘strange blacks’ had been driven away, ‘there still remains much to be done to eradicate the degrading vice which we all know is rife in our midst’. Pro Bon Publico raised the point that it was only when Aboriginal people conducted this business in broad daylight on the town streets that an objection was raised. This suggests that it was the style of the business rather than the type of business which offended the sensibilities of the colonisers.

The newspaper blamed Aboriginal people for ‘sorely trying the morals of our young men’ and Inspector Foelsche argued that it was the disproportionate number of ‘male inhabitants of European and other nations to that of females’ which had been the ‘means of converting the greater portion of the aboriginal women of the settled districts into prostitutes’.¹⁸⁴ This disproportion may have explained non-Aboriginal men’s involvement but not that of Aboriginal women. What is more likely is that Aboriginal people understood the economic benefit of their engagement with this business. The

¹⁷⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 June 1881.

¹⁸⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 2 July 1881.

¹⁸¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 2 July 1881.

¹⁸² *Northern Territory Times*, 2 July 1881.

¹⁸³ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 June 1881.

newspaper did acknowledge that the Aborigines engaging in prostitution were ‘hungering after tobacco and money’ and questioned whether they would come into town ‘unless they received some remuneration’.¹⁸⁵ In 1886, Protector of Aborigines Wood wrote that, although Aboriginal women had previously been of great assistance to European women as domestic servants, many now earned money through prostitution with the Chinese and ‘Malays’. It is Wood’s observation that makes it possible to see the way that Aboriginal people calculated which type of work offered the best remuneration.¹⁸⁶ Subtle allegations in the local newspaper that the Protector of Aborigines had ‘advised the Alligators to come to Darwin for a blowout’ and that the police had been tardy in removing them, suggests that neighbouring Aboriginal groups were aware that their engagement in this business would bring them not only economic benefits but also a foothold in the town.¹⁸⁷ How local Larrakia and Wulna people responded to this ‘annual visitation’ from the Alligator Rivers people and whether it threatened their own business or rights is unclear.

There is some evidence that local Aboriginal people were not prepared not to be exploited in this particular business endeavour. In 1882, two ‘Waggites’, Benema and Arabillamunga, assaulted the Chinese man, Gee Long, who had made ‘improper proposals to the blackfellow’s lubra’. Ned’s wife allegedly went with Gee Long in exchange for some promised rice. However, the rice was not forthcoming the following morning and Gee Long was assaulted.¹⁸⁸ Benema and Arabillamunga were subsequently gaoled for twelve months for the assault. Larrakia men also made complaints to the Protector of Aborigines that the ‘Malay’ pearlers took Aboriginal women away in coasting boats for weeks or months at a stretch and that they were also responsible for increases in sexually transmitted diseases. Whether the women made similar complaints is unclear. Wood explains how the Malays had previously been prosperous and paid the women *and* their husbands well for the women’s service. Now that they were not so prosperous, it was only the Aboriginal women who gained from this economic engagement. The strained relations between ‘Aborigines and Malays’

¹⁸⁴ ‘34 to 1 according to last census of 1881’. Inspector of Police Foelsche to Government Resident, EW Price, 15 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882.

¹⁸⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 June 1881.

¹⁸⁶ Report from Protector of Aborigines, Percy Moore Wood, 8 January 1886, in *Governments Resident’s Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory, December 1885*.

¹⁸⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 June 1881; *Northern Territory Times*, 11 December 1880.

¹⁸⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 11 March 1882. Benema and Arabillamunga were otherwise known as Ned Tuckwell and Frank. Ned Tuckwell has been elsewhere identified as a Larrakia man.

made the Protector of Aborigines fear ‘that there may be some bloodshed before long unless we have power to make the lubras keep to their own camp’.¹⁸⁹

Pro Bono Publico recommended that Aboriginal women engaged in prostitution be treated in the same way as ‘their fairer but equally frail sisters’ in larger towns and cities, ‘that is, lock them up and charge them with soliciting’.¹⁹⁰ Protector of Aborigines Wood also placed the full responsibility of dealing with this issue on Aboriginal people, women in particular. He suggested that no Aborigines be allowed in town unless registered as servants to Europeans and that Aboriginal women be excluded from the town at night-time or from going on long boating trips and that all Aborigines, when in town, be ‘decently’ dressed.¹⁹¹ Unlike Wood, Inspector Foelsche did recognise that there was more than one party to these exchanges and suggested that a clause be inserted in the ‘Social Purity Bill’ so that non-Aboriginal people could be fined or imprisoned for ‘illegally cohabiting’ with Aboriginal women.¹⁹²

Aboriginal people’s ways of inhabiting the town space constituted an ongoing problem for the white settlers who were trying to order and define the town in line with a preconceived image of what a town and society should be like. In 1900, the editor of the local paper argued that Darwin was ‘the only town in Australia we know of (outside of the Northern Territory) where the blacks are allowed the same amount of freedom they enjoy here’. The editor complained of the ‘crowds of loafing, lazy, opium-smoking and grog-drinking natives’ who formed ‘camps as near to the town as possible’. The Aborigines ‘infernal everlasting singsong’, the ‘barking and howling of the hordes of dogs’, their ‘dismal chants’, ‘warlike whoops’ and the ‘incessant din’ made the editor advise the authorities to ‘keep the blacks who do not belong to the local tribe out-side the town’.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines Wood, 6 August 1885 to Government Resident Parsons, CRS A1640/1 1885/995. See also a 1909 report from WG Stretton regarding the Larrakia’s complaint about the pearlers taking women away (WG Stretton to Government Resident Herbert, 17 September 1909, SA State Records, GRS1 566/1909).

¹⁹⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 16 July 1881.

¹⁹¹ Report from Protector of Aborigines, Percy Wood, to Government Resident, JL Parsons, 6 August 1885, CRS A1640 1885/995.

¹⁹² Report from Inspector of Police, Paul Foelsche, to Government Resident, JL Parsons, 18 August 1885, CRS A1640/1 I 1885/995.

¹⁹³ *Northern Territory Times*, 14 December 1900.

These negative representations of Aboriginal people and their lifestyles are evidence of the colonisers' rejection of Aboriginal cultural difference. The colonisers could not understand Aboriginal languages or styles of communication and therefore represented this communication as war whoops, shrieking, quarrelling and an 'incessant din'. Lengthy, noisy ceremonial activity conducted in open spaces perhaps contrasted with colonial ceremonies. The colonisers were, however, willing to incorporate Aboriginal 'corroborees' into their own ceremonial life, so long as it was on the coloniser's terms, as entertainment but when local Aboriginal people conducted their own ceremonies, they were outlawed for being too noisy or not taken seriously. In May 1881, the paper described how the 'niggers' had been 'very busy of late in the performance of the ceremony of "making young men"' and hoped that 'the whites could follow the blacks example and make young women by squatting down in a ring and howling aboriginal melodies'.¹⁹⁴

At the same time that the colonisers were determining what was inappropriate behaviour in the town area, they were quite certain about what was acceptable behaviour. Nude, lazy, noisy, diseased, scab ridden Aborigines were to be run out of town. However, those who were 'useful and inclined to work' or who belonged to the 'local tribe' were permitted (and required) to remain.¹⁹⁵ For many colonisers, the answer to Aboriginal people's 'unsightly sores', absence of clothes and so on was not to try and improve the living standards or health of local Aboriginal people but to remove them from view. That not all the colonisers agreed with such assessment and action is evident in Protector of Aborigines Morice's response to a suggestion from the local District Council in 1883, that another location be found for the 'nuisance' Aborigines living on Lameroo Beach. Morice argued that there was 'no other camping ground so suitable' for them and criticised the council for trying to 'hound the unfortunate natives from the only place where they can get their water and beach their canoes'.¹⁹⁶ Benevolent paternalism aside, Morice's comments highlight the fact that some people continued to attribute rights to Aboriginal people as prior occupants of the land and were also aware of Aborigines negotiating changes in their landscape. The distinction of being Larrakia or employed as the necessary preconditions to remaining in the town was a significant

¹⁹⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 28 May 1881.

¹⁹⁵ See *Northern Territory Times*, 25 December 1880; *Northern Territory Times*, 19 March 1881.

¹⁹⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 15 December 1883.

part of an increasing debate over the presence of Aboriginal people in the town area and is discussed in the following chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter shows the various ways that the Larrakia resisted, negotiated and lived with the colonial experience. The first part of this chapter is about inclusion and shows the many ways that the Larrakia included themselves and were included by the colonisers in the changing space of the town. In many ways Larrakia people facilitated the settlement of their country through their labour, by contributing their local knowledge and by engaging with the new changing cultural and social processes taking place within the township. The reasons for Aboriginal people doing this are manifold and can broadly be defined as negotiating an altered landscape and economy and changing demographics and working out how best they were going to survive. That they attempted to do this on their own terms as far as was feasible is also evident, particularly in the way that they worked when they wanted, for whom they wanted and in the occupations they most enjoyed or deemed the most lucrative. It is no coincidence that the saltwater people were readily engaged on the pearling boats.

The last part of this chapter is about exclusion. Aboriginal people's actions like raiding white settler's gardens, spearing European livestock, petty thieving, failure to keep to regular work schedules, opium and alcohol use, prostitution, dispute settlement, the keeping of large numbers of dogs, dress codes, funerary practices and 'noisy' ceremonial activity were aspects of their lifestyles deemed inappropriate by the colonisers in the redefined space of the emerging township. It was also this behaviour which increasingly provided the colonisers with the justification to forcibly exclude Aboriginal people from the town area. The following chapter looks further at the way that the position of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory began to be constructed as the 'Aboriginal problem' and how a significant part of the debate over this 'problem' concerned Aborigines within the town area.

Chapter Five: Reserves and Rations

This chapter looks further at the debate, conducted in the white arena, about the presence of Aboriginal people and aspects of their behaviour in the town area. However, unlike the previous chapter, this one is interested in the way in which Aboriginal people were seen as not necessarily bad for the town, but how the town began to be constructed as bad for Aborigines because of the ready accessibility of alcohol and opium and the practice of prostitution used to obtain these substances. As early as 1874, the Protector of Aborigines, Dr Ellison, advised that ‘it would be far more beneficial to the Aborigines if their encampment was a little farther from the Township of Palmerston’.¹ By the turn of the century, the ‘Aboriginal problem’ or the ‘Aboriginal question’ was being debated at length in the pages of the local press. Much of this debate about this ‘problem’ or ‘question’ concerned Aborigines within the town area. This chapter looks at the way that some colonists acknowledged the importance of land to Aboriginal people’s survival and accepted responsibility for destroying their livelihood.² Many solutions were proffered as a means of atoning their invasion. These included the declaration of inviolable reserves for Aboriginal people and the distribution of government rations of food and blankets. Other colonists advocated the complete segregation of Aborigines from the European and Asian population in Darwin. With this as their aim the Jesuit missionaries established a mission (which I will discuss later in the chapter) on the banks of Rapid Creek, some twelve kilometres from the town, in 1882. The chapter concludes by looking at the tensions within the white settler population regarding Aboriginal people’s presence in the township. This tension became particularly evident once the police began to evict Aboriginal people from the township and burn their belongings.

In 1905, the Governor of South Australia visited the Northern Territory and delivered several ‘homilies’ to Aboriginal people. The Governor assured the Aborigines of ‘redress for any wrongs [they had] suffered’, advised them that the Government Resident was there to hear their complaints and afford them protection and appealed to them ‘to forego the use of alcohol and opium, and the immorality, rottenness and

¹ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines, Dr Ellison, 17 January 1874, NTRS F790 A362/1874.

² For an exploration of this theme see Henry Reynolds, 1998. *This Whispering in our Hearts*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney.

destruction which follow in their train'.³ The editor of the *Northern Territory Times* described these 'kindly homilies' as 'farcical' and argued that:

All history teaches that the contact of savage people with our so-called civilisation entails the moral and physical ruin and degradation and ultimate extermination of the savage sooner or later. Drunkenness and immorality, disease and suffering and death, appear to be the inevitable and fatal outcome of such intercourse so far as the wild man is concerned.⁴

This chapter first considers these projections of an Aboriginal population decline in Darwin during the period under study and how the notion of the Aboriginal population as a 'doomed race' gained ready acceptance in the Northern Territory.

Aboriginal health and population decline in the town area

Russell McGregor has traced the evolution and path of the 'doomed race theory' in regards to Australian Aborigines in *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*. McGregor explains how the 'stadial' theory developed during the Enlightenment, posited that 'savagery' (as represented by Aborigines) would give rise, through a natural sequence of progressive development, to 'civilisation' (as represented by Europeans). However, the acceptance of this theory changed in the early 1800s. From this time on, phrenological studies deemed Aboriginal peoples brains to be 'distinguished by great deficiencies in the moral and intellectual organs'. This contributed to beliefs that Aboriginal people's prospects for improvement, that is their entry into civilisation, were slight. A concurrent view held that Aboriginal society was not the original condition of 'man' but represented 'man' having fallen to the ultimate depths of human degradation. Either way, McGregor argues that this ultimate pessimism about Aboriginal people's capacity for advancement found expression in the idea that Aborigines were bound for inevitable extinction.⁵ Australian Aborigines were also seen to be in serious danger of extinction

³ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 August 1905.

⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 August 1905. The editor did suggest that an 'island be set aside specifically for the task of 'evolving' a race of 'intelligent, practical and self-reliant Aboriginal citizens'.

⁵ Russell McGregor, 1997. *Imagined Destinies. Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, p16.

from the introduced diseases and vices of Europeans, the practice of infanticide, inter-tribal disputes, white settler violence against them and the changes in their natural environment and hence their subsistence. However, physical causes alone were inadequate to explain such an awesome process as racial extinction, so some people argued that the agent responsible for this catastrophe was 'the hand of God'.⁶ McGregor argues that, by the 1830s, the doomed race theory had gained a secure place in the colonial imagination. As the 'Enlightenment vision of universal human progress faded, as attempts to civilise and convert failed, and as racial attitudes hardened, it came to be considered that the best that could be done for the Aboriginals was to protect them from overt injustice and brutality - for the short time they had left upon this earth'.⁷

The link between the invasion and alteration of indigenous people's lands and the resources on it and the 'extinction' of Aboriginal people was recognised when the Northern Territory was initially being colonised. In 1879, JD Woods wrote:

The process of extermination, in fact, began as soon as the white men took possession of the soil. The fencing in and occupation of the territory deprived the natives of the wild animals which constituted part of their daily food. Kangaroos, emus, & c., were killed and driven further back into places where they could remain undisturbed. The wild-fowl were scared away by the fire-arms of the settlers. The destruction of the trees consequent upon the clearing of the ground for tillage, drove away the opossums, and left little shelter for parrots and other winged creatures which resorted to them, and the people who had been disappointed were thrown back on the hunting grounds of their neighbours, or compelled to become dependent on the bounty of the white men ... Each tribe had its own country distinct from that of any other tribe. Its boundaries were known, and could have been accurately defined. The right of occupying, parcelling out and disposing of the soil, was asserted as the first principle of the colonisation of the country, without the slightest regard to any rights, except those which were exercised by the Crown. Without the

⁶ McGregor 1997, pp14-5.

⁷ McGregor 1997, p18.

land the aboriginal native could not exist; the land was taken from him and he ceased to exist.⁸

Woods attributed Aboriginal people's demise to changes to their country and natural resources and the colonisers' inability to incorporate indigenous people's land rights in the colonial plan. However, for others it was the violence between Aborigines and whites on the Northern Territory's pastoral and mining frontier which would bring about the ultimate end for Aborigines. Following the spearing of four miners at the Daly River Copper mine in 1884, the editor of the *Northern Territory Times* argued:

our European settlers must be allowed to till the soil and extract the wealth from the land which they have made their home, free from the murdering raids of these savages. Backward the natives must move before the tide of civilization, or, if they will not give place peaceably, and show that their natures are as dangerous as the venomous serpent, even, as every man will crush a snake under his heel, so must the hand of every man be raised against a tribe of inhuman monsters, whose cowardly and murderous nature renders them unfit to live.⁹

Not all commentators accepted that the Aboriginal population had to move backward before the tide of civilisation. GH Bright wrote at length to the *Northern Territory Times* arguing that the cause of such 'outrages' may be 'found to rest with ourselves in a great measure, and the unjust way in which we as a stronger, more civilised and enlightened race have treated the aboriginals of the vast Continent'. Bright described the way that the colonisers 'came to these shores, and found a country which we saw as desirable as a possession, suitable as a home for our race, and rich in commercial prospects, so we occupied it'. 'Herds of cattle, horses and sheep' occupied the grasslands and encroached upon the 'domain of the aboriginal' who was 'driven from his favourite haunts and hunted from the water-holes which slaked his thirst'. Whichever way they turned, the Aboriginal was 'a trespasser on the very land which the Almighty gave him as a birthright from time immemorial, and as a set off against

⁸ JD Woods in GS Taplin 1879, *The Native Tribes of South Australia.*, ppxxiv-xxv. The Northern Territory remained a part of South Australia until 1911. Therefore this book includes a vocabulary of the Wulna people from the Adelaide River region collected by JWO Bennett between 1865 and 1869 before he was fatally speared.

⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 October 1884.

this loss what have we given him in exchange? Nothing! If he were to ask such a thing he would only be laughed at.¹⁰

Bright then outlined three possible courses of action to counter ‘all this injustice and greed for land’. The first was to ‘abandon the country’, a course Bright dismissed as ‘impossible’. The second was to grant large reserves of land complete with fresh water and game so that Aborigines ‘might follow their natural instincts in hunting and fishing for a living’. If this was not possible, Bright argued that the Government should provide a ‘sufficient portion of the revenue to feed them’. Bright continued, ‘Having taken by force the aboriginal’s land, his game, his fish, his very birth right’, it was ‘simply an act of justice to keep him free from care for the rest of his days, in return for the wealth we make at his expense’. The final course of action was to ‘wipe the whole race from off the earth’ which Bright thought was possible ‘under the present system of mismanagement’. However, Bright ultimately believed that it was the ‘decree of the Almighty’ that Aborigines should perish and that ‘no power can save them’. Therefore, he advised that action must be taken to extend ‘his lease of life’ through the provision of food.¹¹

The editor of the *North Australian* also believed that, ‘before many years’, the Aborigines would ‘be extinct’. Nevertheless, he argued that ‘history should [not] have to record that they were downtrodden by a more intelligent race’ and recommended that the South Australian government provide ‘reserves whereupon the remnants of a once powerful race may end their days’.¹² Another correspondent agreed that it was an ‘indisputable fact that as the white population increases the blacks become scarce, until in another fifty years, we presume, it will be as difficult to find a live nigger as it is now to secure the remains of an ichthyosaurus’. The correspondent lamented that the colonisers never worried about protecting Aborigines when they were in the ‘zenith of their power’ but waited until they were ‘squeezed up in a corner’ by settlement ‘and ‘he is harmless except to himself, and the camp consists of not more than a dozen decrepit old ex-savages’.¹³ By the late 1890s, Government Resident Dashwood claimed that the low proportion of Aboriginal children compared to adults in Darwin left ‘little room for

¹⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 March 1886.

¹¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 March 1886.

¹² *The North Australian*, 8 November 1889.

doubt in my opinion that the advent of the white race in the Territory will, in course of time, result in the total extinction of the black race, as has been the case in the Southern Colonies'.¹⁴

Various population figures and accounts of Aboriginal health in the historical record show that projections of a diminishing Aboriginal population, at least in the settled areas around Darwin, were a real concern. As seen in chapter two, Stokes had observed the ill-health of Aborigines in Port Darwin in 1839. So too did Stephen King and Paul Foelsche some thirty years later. Even so, Government Resident Price remarked in 1878 that, 'Contrary to the usual experience of the aboriginal disappearing before the white man the tribes near this [town] are increasing and the number of children to each lubra greater than when the whites first landed'.¹⁵ This view was repudiated a few years later by Protector of Aborigines Morice who had no doubt that the Larrakia and Wulna were diminishing in number. The highest mortality in these tribes was amongst infants and children under seven years old and Morice argued that, given the large number of children over the age of eight, it was extremely likely that the coming of Europeans was responsible for this high infant mortality rate. The infants died chiefly of diarrhea and other complaints which also proved fatal to European infants. The deaths of older children were mostly caused by 'a complaint ... peculiar to the natives' which Morice described as a persistent 'alleviative skin disease' which caused the child to gradually waste away.¹⁶ Police Inspector Foelsche did not agree with Morice, arguing that any pronouncement regarding the increase or decrease in the Aboriginal population was a 'mere matter of conjecture' because of the absence of records of Aboriginal deaths and births. Even so, Foelsche did believe that the time was 'not far distant when the vices acquired from Europeans and others [opium and alcohol] will

¹³ *Northern Territory Times*, 2 January 1891.

¹⁴ Correspondence from Government Resident Dashwood to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 12 July 1898, SA State Records, GRS1 333/1898.

¹⁵ Report from Government Resident, EW Price, on the state of the Northern Territory, 8 March 1878, SA State Records, GRS1 178/1878. In January 1877, Price had been informed that the 'large numbers of [Aboriginal] children of all ages' indicated that the Aboriginal population was 'increasing in numbers' something which Price thought 'no doubt owing to food being easily obtained' (Author's name is illegible. Addressed to Government Resident EW Price, 16 January 1877, SA State Records, GRS1 81/1877).

¹⁶ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines, RJ Morice, to Government Resident, EW Price, 21 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882.

slowly but surely undermine the constitution of the natives, and their number will decrease the same as it has in other colonies with the advancement of civilisation'.¹⁷

When Darwin was first colonised, the early ethnographers estimated the Larrakia population as numbering between three hundred and five hundred people.¹⁸ It is likely that the upper figure is a more accurate representation as it was recorded by Paul Foelsche ten years after settlement and with enough time for him to be aware of the distribution of the Larrakia around their entire country rather than just those residing in the immediate town area.¹⁹ In an 1899 census conducted at the distribution of government rations of blankets and flour to Aboriginal people in Darwin, the Larrakia numbered ninety-nine.²⁰ By 1905 this had decreased to seventy-eight.²¹ At the 1911 distribution in Darwin, around two hundred Aboriginal people were arranged in seven tribal groupings comprising the 'Darwin Larrykeeah', 'Woolnas', 'Alligator Rivers', 'Borrooloola', 'Tanami', 'Waggites (Daly River)' and 'Cherites (Daly River)'. The two largest groups were said to be the 'Larrakeeahs' and 'Woolnas', each containing over fifty representatives.²² Fifty people in 1911 compared to the upper estimate of 500 people in 1882 shows that if these figures are at all reliable, the Larrakia population may have decreased by around ninety percent within forty years of colonisation. Compared with the lower limit, the Aboriginal population of the Darwin region may have decreased by around eighty percent.

The historian, David Ritchie, argues that it was the epidemics of malaria, small pox and influenza together with the debilitating affects of narcotics, alcohol and poor diet which

¹⁷ Correspondence from Police Inspector, Paul Foelsche, to Government Resident, EW Price, 15 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882. Government Resident Price agreed with Foelsche that 'on the whole' there had not been 'any decrease amongst the tribes surrounding Palmerston, there are a greater number of children to be seen every year' (Correspondence from Government Resident, EW Price, to Minister for Education, 21 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882).

¹⁸ See WB Wildey, 1876. *Australasia and the Oceanic Region with some notice of New Guinea. From Adelaide – Via Torres Straits – To Port Darwin Thence Round West Australia*, George Robertson; Paul Foelsche, 1886. 'Port Darwin. The Larrakia Tribe' in EM Curr, *The Australian Race*, Melbourne.

¹⁹ For example, in 1894 the lighthouse keeper from Point Charles, across the harbour from Darwin, requested blankets for the sixty or so Aborigines camped near the Point Charles Lighthouse who were 'nearly all Larrakeeahs' together with a few 'Wogites from the Daly' (Correspondence from Pt Charles Lighthouse Keeper, Hugh Christie, 25 May 1894, NTRS F790 6100/1894).

²⁰ This included 'Larrakeeahs', 'Half-caste Larrakeeahs', 'Southport Larrakeeahs' and 'Half-caste Southport Larrakeeahs'. See Census of Natives at Annual Distribution of Blankets 1899-1905, NTRS F790 A8842.

²¹ Census of Natives at Annual Distribution of Blankets 1899-1905, NTRS F790 A8842.

²² *Northern Territory Times*, 21 May 1909 and 26 May 1911 respectively.

resulted in the devastating decline of the Aboriginal population of the Darwin region.²³ It is also likely that the introduction of sexually transmitted diseases impacted on the fertility of local Aboriginal people which would have had an enormous impact on their population viability. The above discussion highlights the belief of many colonisers that Aborigines in the Northern Territory were a doomed race and that something should be done to either prevent or ease this situation. One of the most often expressed measures to do this was to reserve land specifically for Aborigines.

Reserves

As seen above, JD Woods highlighted the unwillingness of the South Australian colonisers to identify and define Aboriginal districts and boundaries and instead wrote that the first principle of colonisation was the ‘occupying, parceling out and disposing of the soil’ which paid scant regard to the territorial rights and boundaries of Aboriginal groups. However, it is not clear from the historical record whether Surveyor-General Goyder was instructed to reserve land for Aborigines or not. On his ‘General Plan showing Natural Features of the Country, Towns, Reserves, Roads and Sectional Lands at, and in the vicinity of Port Darwin, Northern Territory of South Australia’, drafted in 1869, Goyder located the ‘districts’ of four ‘native’ groups, the ‘Woolner-Larrakeeyah, Woolner, Larrakeeyah and Warnunger’.²⁴ While these ‘districts’ are identified on the map there is no obvious provision for Aboriginal reserves. Goyder recognised that as colonisation progressed it would be ‘impossible for their [Aborigines] former mode of life to be continued’ because of the ‘absence of game, which previous to settlement was their only means of sustenance’ and therefore recommended that they be provided with food and clothing. Goyder recognised the importance of country to Aboriginal people’s survival but did not recommend that land reserves be set aside or try and negotiate a land deal with the people he identified as having particular tracts of land.²⁵

Even if Goyder did not reserve land for Aborigines, point eleven of the official instructions issued to the Protector of Aborigines in 1870 specified that the government

²³ David Ritchie, 1998. *A Painful Wrench for a European Mind: Land Claims and Representations of History and Aboriginal Tradition in the Darwin Hinterland*, PhD Thesis, La Trobe University.

²⁴ Surveyor-General’s Report on Survey of Northern Territory, Fort Point, 27 September 1869, SAPP No. 157/1869.

²⁵ GRG35/12 27/1869.

surveyors would be 'instructed to leave reserves of lands for the use of the aborigines so as to secure them free access to water and an ample supply of wood for canoes, implements of the chase etc'. The 'knowledge of the habits of the aborigines' which the Protector was to acquire would assist him in selecting the 'best sites for these reserves'.²⁶ If there were any reserves granted to Aborigines in the initial years of the Territory's colonisation, it is extremely difficult to find any correspondence about them in the early historical record. An almost illegible memorandum from the Northern Territory Government Resident to the Commissioner for Crown Lands, dated 2 June 1873, specified that the lands north of the parklands at Port Darwin and lands across the harbour from Darwin on each side of the Blackmore River from Southport to the Tumbling Waters had been 'left for the use of the aborigines'. Whether the land was *officially* alienated for Aboriginal use or not is unclear. However, in later correspondence regarding the enlarging of an Aboriginal Reserve which had been granted at Rapid Creek so that the Jesuit Missionaries could establish a mission, Surveyor McMinn wrote that a 'much larger area was originally set apart for the use of the Aborigines but it was disposed of by the Govt. Resident'.²⁷ When and why is not made clear. The lack of information in the historical record regarding Aboriginal reserves suggests that prior to the mid-1880s there was no priority given to Aboriginal reserves in the Northern Territory. This changed following increasing numbers of reports regarding violence between Aborigines and whites on the mining and pastoral frontier and a backlash by southern humanitarians against the measures used by Northern Territory settlers to conquer Aboriginal people's resistance to the invasion.²⁸

In 1884, the Commissioner of Crown Lands requested a report from the Northern Territory Government Resident on the condition of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. The Government Resident subsequently asked Police Inspector Foelsche and Protector of Aborigines Wood for their views on the question of 'how to treat and deal with the Aborigines of the Northern Territory and to legislate on the subject'. Wood's recommendations regarding legislation for Aborigines were almost entirely geared towards preventing the liaisons between Aboriginal women and 'Malays' discussed in

²⁶ Instructions to the Government Resident, Northern Territory, SA State Records, GRS1 NT194/1872.

²⁷ Correspondence from Surveyor General McMinn, 20 May 1885, CRS A1640 1885/310.

²⁸ See Tony Austin, 1992. *Simply the Survival of the Fittest: Aboriginal Administration in South Australia's Northern Territory 1863-1910*, Historical Society of the NT, Darwin; Gordon Reid, 1990. *A*

the previous chapter. He recommended that no Aborigines be allowed in town unless registered as servants to Europeans with an agreement signed by the Protector of Aborigines who would monitor the terms of this agreement; that Aboriginal women be excluded from the town at night-time and from going on long boating trips and; that all Aborigines, when in town, be 'decently' dressed. He also drew attention to the need to regulate the pastoral employment of Aboriginal people and suggested 'a few rules' to prevent drovers abandoning their Aboriginal employees in Darwin or 'kidnapping' Aboriginal women and children and taking them droving.²⁹

Police Inspector Foelsche considered the question of legislation a 'most difficult one to solve'. '[P]ossession' had been taken of Aboriginal people's 'country' and they had 'been placed under the protection of the laws which govern this colony'. However, Foelsche argued that 'aborigines being savages, governed in their native state by their own tribal laws' were not ready for the same 'laws which control and regulate the most advanced stages of civilisation'. It was his 'humble opinion' that separate laws suitable for 'governing the aborigines until they are reclaimed from savage life, manners and customs' be devised. Such legislation would aim to 'civilise savages, protect them from the evil influences of people with whom they come in contact, and punish them effectively for offences punishable by the laws of the colony'. Foelsche made a number of recommendations for any proposed legislation, 'from a police point of view'. These included that all offences committed by Aborigines (except murder) be summarily dealt with by a Local Court of Full Jurisdiction and that the Courts in all cases have the power to award corporal punishment. All Aborigines, except those in regular employment authorised by the Protector of Aborigines, were not to be allowed within a town between sunset and sunrise, except by a pass from the police authority. No Aborigines within a town were to be allowed to remain on any person's premises during the night unless regularly engaged as a servant. Any person found harbouring an Aboriginal should be subject to a penalty. No Aborigines were to be taken away on

Picnic with the Natives: Aboriginal-European Relations in the Northern Territory to 1910, Melbourne University Press, Carlton Victoria.

²⁹ Report from Protector of Aborigines, Percy Wood, to Government Resident Parsons, 6 August 1885, CRS A1640 1885/995.

any boat or ship without the permission of the protector and the Protector was to have jurisdiction for all Aborigines from other states who were in the Northern Territory.³⁰

Government Resident Parsons forwarded Wood's and Foelsche's reports to the Minister responsible for the Northern Territory. In doing so, Parsons stressed the 'great importance' of enacting legislation for Aborigines and, like Wood and Foelsche, emphasised that this legislation would restrict and control the presence of Aboriginal people in towns and would prevent 'coloured' men from keeping Aboriginal women or taking them away on boats.³¹ Neither Wood, Foelsche or Parsons suggested that reserves be granted for Aboriginal people. Even so, a short time later, the Minister responsible for the Northern Territory informed Government Resident Parsons that he 'wished Aboriginal Reserves to be declared for the different tribes of natives in the Territory' and asked for a report on 'what tribes' there were to be provided for in this manner' and where were the 'most suitable localities for reserves?'³² The Northern Territory's Senior Surveyor, GR McMinn, subsequently identified the best 'localities for procuring game and having good supplies of water' as reserves for the 'Larakeeahs', 'Woolners', 'Wangites', 'Woolwongas', 'Mallac Mallac' and the 'Manassie'. McMinn recommended that the Larrakia be granted a reserve at Mosquito Pass, believed to be in the 'neighbourhood of favourite resorts for this tribe', and also at Manton's Gap in the Daly Ranges given that the amount of land available at Mosquito Pass was limited. Both reserves were located a considerable distance from the Port Darwin township.³³

No immediate action was taken by the South Australian government on McMinn's recommendations. Its consistent failure to grant reserves or formulate specific

³⁰ Foelsche recommended corporal punishment because, according to Foelsche, 'Sending uncivilised natives to gaol for any length of time does not deter them from committing crime, for they get well fed and clothed, and any person visiting our gaol will easily perceive how happy and content the Aboriginal prisoners are; but they have a dread of the lash which would have a [illegible] effect and save the expense of feeding them for a number of years'. Wood also cited these reasons but suggested that short terms of imprisonment 'on bread and water, and a flogging would have more influence with them, than these long terms of imprisonment' (Report from Inspector of Police, Paul Foelsche, to Government Resident Parsons, 18 August 1885, CRS A1640/1 1885/995; Report from Protector of Aborigines, Percy Wood, to Government Resident Parsons, 6 August 1885, CRS A1640 1885/995).

³¹ Correspondence from Government Resident Parsons to the Minister for Education, 19 August 1885, CRS A1640 1885/995.

³² Correspondence from the Minister for Education to Government Resident Parsons, 21 May 1886, SA State Records, GRS1 442/1886.

³³ Report from Senior Surveyor, GR McMinn, 3 June 1886, SA State Records, GRS1 95/1891.

legislation for Aboriginal people infuriated Government Resident Parsons who began writing at length about the needs of Aborigines in his progress reports on the Northern Territory.³⁴ In 1886, Parsons invoked the doomed race theory, describing the Northern Territory as being a 'racial frontier' and advising that the 'existence, numbers and character of these natives' were 'so important a factor in the settlement of the Northern Territory [that] the facts must be looked in the face, and the natives must be looked at as a real, though perhaps a vanishing element of our national life'. Parsons pondered the future for Aborigines, wondering whether their 'inveterate nomadism' could be 'eradicated', whether they could be 'civilised' and become labourers for 'squatters, agriculturalists, and miners' or 'industrious cultivators of the soil and so produce the food they require when their game preserves are gone, and the white man's herds and flocks have possession of hill and plain and river-side?'³⁵ In recognition that the white legal system was inappropriate for Aborigines, Parsons advocated the passage of legislation which would proscribe methods for Aborigines giving evidence in court or for those who had been brought to trial. He also recommended that legislation be introduced to define the conditions under which Aborigines were to be employed and paid by Europeans and the circumstances under which Aboriginal people were to be allowed into the town.³⁶ Parsons reiterated these recommendations in 1887, adding that reserves should be 'laid out in each tribe's country of sufficient size with sufficient water for the tribes use'.³⁷

The following year, Parsons wrote that there had been 'no incidents of note in connection with the native tribes in the settled country of which Palmerston is the centre' with no 'serious tribal quarrels' or 'attacks upon Europeans'. This was in strong contrast to Aborigines whose lands were being taken for 'pastoral settlement' and who were being 'pressed away from their favourite haunts'. Parsons regarded it as 'humane to proclaim a reserve in each tribe's country, and to frame an Act which should specially define aboriginal rights and protect the aborigines' and argued that 'some effort should be made to preserve the black population of Australia'.³⁸ The contrast in experiences of colonisation by Aborigines in Darwin and those on pastoral areas was

³⁴ JL Parsons was Government Resident of the Northern Territory between 1884 and 1890.

³⁵ JL Parsons, *Government Resident's Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory*, December 1886.

³⁶ JL Parsons, *Government Resident's Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory*, December 1886.

³⁷ JL Parsons, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1887* reprinted in *The Adelaide Advertiser*, 17 May 1888.

highlighted more strongly the following year. While the Larrakia were allegedly ‘peaceful’ and ‘maintaining their numbers’, reports from the ‘outside country’ (that is, pastoral and mining lands outside towns) indicated that:

the blacks are beginning to understand the conditions under which the white man holds the country of which they consider they have been robbed ... this is the attitude of the aborigines towards the Europeans. Entrance into their country is an act of invasion. It is a declaration of war, and they will halt at no opportunity of attacking the white invaders ... The primary fact which philanthropists must accept is that the aborigines regard the land as theirs, and that the intrusion of the white man is a declaration of war, and the result is simply ‘survival of the fittest’.³⁹

Parsons believed that pastoral occupation of the country and ‘peaceable relations with the native tribes’ was ‘hopelessly irreconcilable’ and lamented that his previous recommendations had ‘passed without much attention from either Parliament, press, or pulpit’. He again stressed, ‘that the first duty of the State is to declare reserves, and within these reserves to give the native tribes absolute rights and sole control’. If this did not happen, Parson’s warned:

the inevitable result of a white race intruding itself into a country occupied by blacks must follow. We have the teachings of history before us. Tasmania has civilised the native race off the island. In New Zealand, the Maoris, with all their magnificent bravery, are perishing before European settlement. In South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales, the blacks have almost died out. Rum, the bullet, and syphilis have mowed them down ... there is an ethnological necessity which clamours for and must have Government consideration.⁴⁰

Parsons ‘submit[ted] again to the Government of South Australia that they must take some decisive action and state a policy for the aborigines of the Northern Territory’.⁴¹ In 1890, Parsons ran for election as the Northern Territory member of South Australia’s House of Assembly. Parsons included in his election platform the need to introduce an

³⁸ JL Parsons, *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1888*.

³⁹ JL Parsons, *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1889*.

⁴⁰ JL Parsons, *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1889*.

Act which would regulate Aboriginal settlement on reserves and their employment. If Parsons was elected, he promised, 'at the earliest opportunity [to] introduce a Bill so as to do justice to all concerned'.⁴² Parson's election campaign was successful and he was elected to South Australia's House of Assembly. His campaign promises did not come to fruition although he continued to press for the creation of reserves for Aboriginal people while he was a Member of Parliament.⁴³

JG Knight replaced Parsons as Government Resident of the Northern Territory. Knight did not maintain Parsons' enthusiasm for the creation of Aboriginal reserves. He did not think that they would result in much 'practical good' and believed that Aborigines preferred the vicinity of white settlements. However, he considered the 'experiment harmless so worth a try'.⁴⁴ The South Australian government finally authorised the creation of five Aboriginal reserves in the Northern Territory in April 1892. In the creation of these reserves, the colonisers did not recognise the full extent of Aboriginal estates and the seasonal movement of Aborigines around these estates to access resources. They also failed to understand the spiritual connection of Aboriginal people with the land. The 'Larakeah Reserve' occupied twenty square miles of country around the junction of the Manton and Adelaide Rivers. This land was marginal Larrakia land, was far from the sea for a saltwater people and far from the town for those who were employed. It was by far the smallest of any of those granted:- 20 square miles compared to the Woolner Reserve of 366 square miles, the Monassie Reserve of 115 square miles, the Wangites Reserve of 388 square miles and the Woolwonga Reserve of 160 square miles.⁴⁵

The provision of this small reserve of land to the Larrakia is indicative of the colonisers' perception that the land needs of the Larrakia were different to the land needs of Aboriginal people in the less settled areas of the Northern Territory. On the pastoral frontier, the initial interactions between Aborigines and white pastoralists was marked by intense conflict and referred to as 'war'. In the town area, the Larrakia were

⁴¹ JL Parsons, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1889*.

⁴² *The North Australian*, 28 February 1890.

⁴³ Austin 1992, p70.

⁴⁴ Correspondence from Government Resident, JG Knight, to Minister for Education, 29 May 1891, SA State Records, GRS1 95/1891. JG Knight was Government Resident of the Northern Territory between 1890 and 1892. CJ Dashwood took Knight's place and held the position until 1905.

⁴⁵ *Acting Administrator's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1919-20*.

‘peaceful’, they ‘appeared’ to be maintaining their numbers and they could sustain themselves by working for the settlers. Having taken and changed their land, the colonisers now determined that the Larrakia’s land needs were different. If land was only useful for resources for sustaining Aboriginal people, then the Larrakia, having ‘lost’ their land would have to be compensated through the provision of government rations of food and blankets.

‘four fellow bag pflour’

As seen in chapter one, items of food, clothing, tobacco and blankets were part of the largesse distributed to Aborigines by white settlers intent on colonising Aboriginal lands. Indeed it was an expectation of both the colonisers and the colonised that goods would be exchanged as part of the initial encounters. The Northern Territory Government Resident was also officially instructed to provide food, clothing and blankets to elderly or needy Aborigines. ‘[A]ble-bodied’ Aborigines were, however, only to be ‘rewarded’ such things if they worked for them. In 1875, the Government Resident distributed flour and tobacco to 150 ‘Aborigines accompanied by a number of their guests - the Woolners’. Blankets were given to elderly Aborigines.⁴⁶ The following year, on the Queen’s birthday, a little over ninety-four kilograms of flour and twenty blankets were distributed to Aboriginal people in the town.⁴⁷ The distribution of rations on the Queen’s birthday became cemented in the mental calendar of the colonisers and in the seasonal calendar of the Aborigines receiving them since blankets were distributed just before the onset of the cooler Dry season. Just prior to this date, Aborigines from surrounding districts would come in to Port Darwin to collect the rations. In April 1877, the Protector of Aborigines wrote with some concern to the Government Resident that ‘the Waggites are now here for their annual visit’. The previous Government Resident had distributed flour and blankets to them but there was none in the store at present.⁴⁸ Although distributing rations to elderly or needy Aborigines was part of the official instructions, it was not until the late 1880s that a semi-formal system of rationing began.

⁴⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 29 May 1875.

⁴⁷ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines Sturt to Government Resident Price, 16 January 1877, SA State Records, GRS1 81/1877.

⁴⁸ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines Sturt to Government Resident Price, 28 April 1877, NTRS F790 A2048.

As mentioned above, the practice of supplying rations, particularly blankets, to Aboriginal people on the Queen's birthday was timed to coincide with the onset of the Territory's Dry season. However, this official date also suggests that rationing was an instrument of colonial control.⁴⁹ This was openly acknowledged in the pages of the local press, where the paucity of the rations being distributed was often criticised. In May 1890, the editor of the *North Australian* wrote:

It seems to us that with all the South Australian cry for protecting the poor nigger, the Government of the south is remarkably stingy in the way of providing the blacks with this cold weather comfort. Who has a better right to set an example of generosity to the savage than the Government itself? It would be quite safe to wager that the number of blankets distributed in the Territory wasn't enough to wrap up the limbs of a quarter of the natives who had a fair claim on this annual outburst of Government generosity. A waggish native's version of this blanket dole is apt enough for anything – 'Too much God save the Queen! No more blanket! No good that one!'⁵⁰

The dearth of blankets induced Government Resident Knight to advise the South Australian government that, if it couldn't afford a more 'tangible inducement [to] keep natives quiet', it was better to 'strike off [the] vote altogether'.⁵¹ The government did not take heed and the following year the paper reported, 'judging from the complaints that have reached us, there were evidently more darkies on hand than blankets'.⁵² Again, in 1892, 'Queen's Blanket Day' was described as an 'annual farce' and 'about the meanest advertisement the Queen gets'. It was 'altogether a fine burlesque of charity' as the 'supply of blankets is not half what it should be, and if there's an object at all in giving out these warm coverings it is surely worth doing generously'.⁵³ Yet again, in 1893, the blanket supply was short and the 'pleasure of those who received was counter-balanced by the chagrin of those that were neglected; and so many had to

⁴⁹ See Tim Rowse, 1998. *White Flour, White Power. From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, for a thorough examination of this complex practice.

⁵⁰ *The North Australian*, 30 May 1890.

⁵¹ Telegram from Government Resident, JG Knight, to Minister for Education, 14 November 1890, SA State Records, GRS1 743/1890.

⁵² *Northern Territory Times*, 29 May 1891.

⁵³ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 May 1892.

go without that we fear very much for the strength and constancy of native Australia's loyalty to our illustrious sovereign'.⁵⁴ The hypocrisy inherent in the paucity of the distribution and the Government's motives for distributing the rations was even more explicitly stated by the press the following year when it was reported that many Aborigines 'had to go without their share of the "blood money" which 'we pay out annually as a tribute for robbing them of their territory'. The newspaper remonstrated, 'The Protector's allowance goes around about a third of them; the other two thirds have no business to feel cold in a season when white men, well clothed, can scarcely keep themselves warm. We hate farces, but more particularly that kind, which parades under the name of "imperial generosity"'.⁵⁵ Additional blankets were subsequently distributed amongst 'local natives' by the Government Resident.

The local newspaper kept making suggestions on how to 'prevent the ebullition of aboriginal profanity and sarcasm which has so often followed the economic feat of attempting to make four feet of blanket cover six feet of shivering humanity'. However, the government still did not take heed and both Aborigines and non-Aborigines continued to criticise the distribution of inadequate rations.⁵⁶ In March 1900, a deputation of Larrakia men visited the offices of the local paper to 'make public through the columns of the public print' several of their grievances, a principal one being that at the recent distribution of rations elderly Larrakia men and women had 'on several occasions recently been refused a share in the free dole of Government rations, etc., on the ground that there was none to spare'.⁵⁷ Publicising this complaint had the desired affect. The following month, blankets, flour and tobacco were 'liberally' distributed in Port Darwin. This caused one Aboriginal to remark:

My word, that one good feller gov'ment this time. Him give it blanket all about - old man, young man, old lubra, young lubra, all about 'im get 'em ... Larrakeyah 'im get 'em four fellow bag pflour, Woolna two feller, Waggite two feller, Alligator two feller - tobacco, blanket, plenty!⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 26 May 1893.

⁵⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 May 1894.

⁵⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 22 May 1896.

⁵⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 16 March 1900.

⁵⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 27 April 1900.

The distribution of more flour to the Larrakia than to other Aboriginal groups is significant. While the distributors of the rations may have been responding to the Larrakia's public complaint it is also likely that the Larrakia were pursuing their particular rights to receive rations as the prior occupants and therefore rightful recipients of compensation paid for their colonised lands. This notion of providing rations to Aborigines because their country could no longer sustain them was expressed by FD Holland who argued that it was the 'moral duty of the public to feed the poor unfortunate wretches, whose country we have taken and whose hunting grounds we have despoiled, and whose morals have been degraded by the advent of the white race'.⁵⁹ An indication that the resources on Larrakia country were being compromised is demonstrated by the provision of a greater quantity of rations to Aborigines in the town area than elsewhere.⁶⁰

In *White Flour White Power*, Tim Rowse argues that the rationing of goods by government, missionaries, miners and pastoralists to Aborigines in central Australia was an 'ideologically fruitful practice; that is, it seems to have been a site of rich meanings, a central generator of colonial ideologies'.⁶¹ The colonists rationed goods to Aborigines for a variety of reasons 'with varied expectations about the mentality and behaviour of recipients'.⁶² This was true further north in the Territory where, apart from compensating Aboriginal people for the invasion and alteration of their country, rations were also issued to Aborigines as a means of encouraging particular kinds of behaviour. After some Larrakia people had assisted in the search for some white men lost in Bynoe Harbour, AD Gore suggested that their selfless generosity be rewarded by the distribution of blankets. Gore advised that this distribution should happen annually on May 24 and that it not be confined to the 'Port Darwin tribe - the 'Larrakeyah's' - but extended to every Aboriginal attending the 'sable levee' as it would 'help to keep

⁵⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 9 March 1900. Holland also argued that it was an injustice to the 'upcountry Aborigines' that they were not distributed with rations like the 'town habitues' and also an injustice to the 'whites, who have often to feed a hungry crowd of natives at their own expense' (*Northern Territory Times*, 9 March 1900).

⁶⁰ In the 1899 government estimates it shows that rations were distributed to specific regions in the following way:- Roper River and Borroloola were issued with 20 pairs blankets, 5 lbs of tobacco and 200lbs of flour. Victoria River was issued with half a ton of flour and 15 lbs of tobacco; Daly River mission station was issued with 15 pairs of blankets and 5 lbs of tobacco; Pine Creek received 10 pairs of blankets, Adelaide River 5 pairs of blankets and the Charles Point lighthouse 20 pairs of blankets. Aborigines in Palmerston were issued with 100 pairs of blankets, 10 lbs of tobacco and 250 lbs of flour.

⁶¹ Rowse 1998, p4.

⁶² Rowse 1998, pp3-4.

up friendly relations with the natives at a distance, and, I have no doubt, would be the means of saving many a valuable European life in the future'.⁶³ In 1889, the Protector of Aborigines, similarly suggested that blankets be distributed further afield 'as in case of any accident, if they recognise that we are friends, they may be very useful or the reverse'.⁶⁴ In the pastoral districts in particular, rations were provided to Aborigines in the hopes of instilling better relations between them and the white pastoralists and for aid in the prevention of cattle killing. In 1898, Sub-Collector of Customs, WG Stretton, distributed flour and tobacco to about one hundred Aborigines at the mouth of the McArthur River and while doing so 'impressed upon them the great advantage it would be to leave alone the property of the white people'.⁶⁵

While some colonisers accepted that they were morally obliged to provide sustenance to the people whose country they had invaded, others raised concerns over the distribution of these rations. A common argument against ration distribution was that the provision of rations to Aborigines made them 'lazy' and unwilling to hunt for food which was abundant in 'their own country' and that it encouraged Aborigines from outlying areas to come to and remain in Darwin. It was easier to 'to go to town and beg food than to spear kangaroos or kill other game'.⁶⁶ In response to these charges, Government Resident Dashwood argued that 'different tribes of blacks have been in the habit of visiting Palmerston from the commencement of settlement and if perhaps they remain longer, it is not to be wondered at when it is realised that the settlement of the country has to a certain extent restricted the source of their food supply. While Dashwood understood the vast impact that settlement was having on the availability of bush and sea resources for Aboriginal people, he also acknowledged the Aborigines 'craving for tobacco and predilection for "white mans" food'.⁶⁷

⁶³ Letter to the Editor, *South Australian Register*, 13 February 1888.

⁶⁴ Report from Protector of Aborigines, Percy Wood, 8 March 1889, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1888*.

⁶⁵ Report from WG Stretton, 17 November 1898, NTRS F790 8859/1899.

⁶⁶ Report from Protector of Aborigines, FE Goldsmith, to Government Resident Dashwood, 12 March 1898, SA State Records, GRS 1 333/1898; see also editorial *Northern Territory Times*, 16 March 1900; *Northern Territory Times*, 16 March 1900; *Northern Territory Times*, 20 April 1900. Police Inspector Foelsche also argued that to distribute rations to Aborigines living in 'the northern portion of the Territory, especially all round the coast and on the numerous rivers and lagoons [where] there is an abundance of fish and game of all description and to supply those able to secure it, only encourages laziness' (Report from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 14 February 1898, SA State Records, GRS1 333/1898).

⁶⁷ Correspondence from Government Resident Dashwood to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 24 March 1900, SA State Records, GRS1 190/1900.

Hand in hand with the argument that supplying rations to Aborigines made them ‘lazy’ was the argument that Aborigines should have to work for their rations as the ‘best civilising agency for use on the Australian aborigine is to educate him to be a worker; and the worst is to encourage him to the cities to be a loafer and a cadger’.⁶⁸ Many commentators argued that rations be specifically distributed to elderly or destitute Aborigines and condemned the way that rations were taken to the Aboriginal camp where ‘a large proportion of it goes to the maintenance of the young and healthy’.⁶⁹ Dashwood was concerned that able bodied Aborigines were receiving a share of the government rations but thought that the only way to prevent this was to ‘stop the supply altogether’ which was not a course of action he supported as he preferred that the ‘wretched half-starved creatures get something though a portion benefits the able-bodied members of the tribe no doubt able to work for a living’.⁷⁰ The way that Aborigines distributed government rations amongst themselves in accordance with traditional custom led to the argument that the ‘excessive liberality on the part of the Government’ was ‘pauperising’ and ‘demoralising’ local Aborigines and destroying their ‘usefulness and respectability’ by rendering them ‘unwilling to assist in housework and other like labour’.⁷¹

The notion that supplying Aborigines with rations made them unwilling to make up the domestic and menial labour force required by the town’s European houses and stores was expressed many times during this debate.⁷² One correspondent wrote of the way that Aboriginal men looked ‘disdainfully at the white lubra who dares to ask their spouses to come and work when “him can go alonga Guvment and catch ‘em ticket for nothing”’.⁷³ Another correspondent similarly described the way that one of the ‘sable beauties remarked to me the other day when I remonstrated with her for not coming to work (offering her food and tobacco as remuneration) “What for me work? All day me catch ‘em plenty tucker along GR!”’. This correspondent blamed the rations distributed

⁶⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 22 July 1898.

⁶⁹ Report from Protector of Aborigines, FE Goldsmith, to Government Resident Dashwood, 12 March 1898, SA State Records, GRS 1 333/1898.

⁷⁰ Correspondence from Government Resident Dashwood to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 24 March 1900, SA State Records, GRS1 190/1900.

⁷¹ Editorial *Northern Territory Times*, 16 March 1900; *Northern Territory Times*, 20 April 1900.

⁷² See letter from ‘Nin’ *Northern Territory Times*, 16 March 1900.

⁷³ *Northern Territory Times*, 6 April 1900.

by a ‘far-too-liberal Government’ for the ‘inconvenience’ that ‘wives of taxpayers’ suffered in ‘doing their own rough work because the wage-earner cannot afford to employ a China-boy, and the lubras are too well treated to think of working for their sustenance’.⁷⁴ The Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 (the ‘White Australia Policy’) virtually ended Chinese immigration to Australia and impacted on numbers of Chinese people in the Northern Territory.⁷⁵ The above correspondent highlights the way that those Chinese remaining in town and who were available for domestic service and other duties could demand more for their services.

Suggestions that rate-payers were funding Aborigines to loaf about town is not substantiated by a consideration of the quantity of rations actually distributed at the time. Drawing on the above figures, if ninety-four kilograms of flour was spread amongst one hundred and fifty Aboriginal people, this would provide each Aboriginal with about 600 grams of flour, basically enough to make a large damper. Government Dashwood also told an 1899 inquiry into Aborigines that government rations by themselves were not enough to sustain Aboriginal people. Dashwood rejected claims that it was difficult to obtain Aboriginal labour ‘if they are well and liberally treated by their employers’. He argued that the distribution of rations was ‘raised by the desire on the part of some people that the natives should be forced to crave for employment so that their services could be obtained at the employers own price - some flour and a bit of tobacco’.⁷⁶ While the above correspondent had been willing to pay an Aboriginal woman in food and tobacco for her domestic service, it is apparent that this remuneration did not equal the amount she could receive in rations. What Dashwood makes clear in his defence of ration distribution is that Aboriginal people understood the value of their labour and were not prepared to work for inadequate remuneration or under poor working conditions. Claims that distributing rations made Aborigines unwilling to work are not supported by various reports in the historical record which showed the willingness of Aborigines to work, as discussed in the previous chapter.

⁷⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 16 March 1900.

⁷⁵ Even so, in 1910, the Chinese continued to outnumber Europeans in the Northern Territory by 1352 to 1182. Various Government Resident’s Reports on the Northern Territory; Alan Powell, 1988. *Far Country. A Short History of the Northern Territory*, 2nd Edition, Melbourne University Press, Victoria, p97.

⁷⁶ Correspondence from Government Resident Dashwood to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 24 March 1900, SA State Records GRS1 190/1900.

A person corresponding with the local newspaper using the pseudonym 'Truth', claimed that Aborigines spent their rations or wages in the 'network of opium dens on the outskirts of town' and that 'black nurse-girls' left 'white babies' down in the Aboriginal camps 'in charge of dirty children and diseased lubras' while they 'run in to have a smoke of the pipe'. 'Truth' advocated the appointment of an officer who would ensure that Aboriginal camps were not be set up near the 'opium dens'; that the 'diseased mongrels' belonging to the Aborigines be destroyed and that the town's white residents be supplied with labour. It was also suggested that the officer pay a 'little attention at times to some of the poor dying wretches lying in the camps'.⁷⁷ Further accusations that Aborigines about Darwin were bartering their rations with 'certain low-class Chinese' in the 'back slums of China Town' for 'opium and other like luxuries', provoked Government Resident Dashwood into ordering a police inquiry into the matter.⁷⁸ Sergeant Waters consequently reported that the police had watched Aborigines after they received their rations and noted that they usually returned to their living places. Waters believed there was 'no truth' in these claims, but nevertheless reported that he was 'continuing the inquiry'.⁷⁹

The Member for the Northern Territory did not agree with the distribution of government rations to Aborigines and tried, without success, to have the South Australian government condemn it.⁸⁰ The Palmerston [Darwin] District Council took up the issue and requested the police to prevent Aboriginal people from 'congregating in the settled parts of the district ... particularly those who gather in large numbers, almost daily, at the end of Mitchell Street, opposite the Government offices', that is, where the government rations were distributed.⁸¹ Police Inspector Foelsche was informed by Government Resident Dashwood that the Aborigines were on Government land to obtain rations and 'had a perfect right to be there for that purpose'. The police subsequently replied to the Council that they were unable to comply with the Council's

⁷⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 6 April 1900.

⁷⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 30 March 1900.

⁷⁹ Report from Sergeant Nicholas Waters to Police Inspector Foelsche, 4 April 1900, NTRS F790 A9688. Aborigines were also said to be catching live ducks and geese from Knuckey's Lagoon and bartering them for opium (*Northern Territory Times*, 6 April 1900).

⁸⁰ Correspondence from the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory to Government Resident Dashwood, 24 July 1900, NTRS F790 A9787.

⁸¹ Correspondence from District Council of Palmerston to Police Inspector Foelsche, 9 February 1900, NTRS F790 A9501; Correspondence from Police Inspector Foeslche to Government Resident Dashwood, 10 February 1900, NTRS F790 A9501; *Northern Territory Times*, 4 May 1900.

request because the Aboriginal people obtaining rations were not obstructing thoroughfares or interfering with traffic and were on land over which the Council had no control. Dashwood did, however, instruct the police to 'use all their powers' to prevent Aborigines from congregating on one of the main streets of the town, in other parts of the town, and on the premises of 'the Chinese and other coloured races'.⁸²

While many commentators urged that the colonisation of the Northern Territory be different from the south and that something be done to protect Aborigines or, at the very least, the government should ease their demise through the distribution of rations and the allocation of reserves, there were others who advised that the best course of action was to do nothing. In May 1900, an editorial in the *Northern Territory Times* entitled, 'The Aborigines Question' criticised the 'excessive expenditure' on government rations and recommended that: 'all aborigines outside the local Larrakeyah tribe - unless able to show they are in regular employ - should be ordered to retire to their own districts'; 'it be distinctly understood that only aged, sick, or otherwise distressed aboriginals are to participate in the free distribution of rations' and; 'no blacks be permitted to congregate in camps within the precincts of the town'. It was in the editor's 'humble opinion' that 'the blacks are far better off in every way in their native wilds than when brought in contact with the degrading influences of our boasted civilisation, and until the extension of settlement compels interference, we should say they would be far better off alone'.⁸³ Similarly, 'Plain Truth', wrote to the newspaper that he was sickened by the 'goody goody trash emanating from the feeble minds' of those who sought to improve conditions for Aborigines but who 'never saw an aborigine without clothes'. 'Plain Truth' acknowledged that 'We have stolen their country, and taken away their birthright' but criticised 'atoning [for] our crime' by 'forcing upon them favours that only transform them from their native simplicity into cunning thieves and criminals'. The 500 pounds a year the Government 'wasted' on Aborigines was only 'proving a curse' to them and 'an annoyance to the public at large'. If Aboriginal people were troublesome in the town, 'Plain Truth' recommended that the police 'clear them out'. Otherwise, the greatest kindness that could be shown

⁸² *Northern Territory Times*, 4 May 1900.

⁸³ *Northern Territory Times*, 18 May 1900.

to them was to 'leave them alone' where the 'natural course of events will wipe them out'.⁸⁴

The belief that Aborigines should be removed from the town for their own good was the prime motivation for the Jesuit missionaries, in 1882, establishing a mission for Aboriginal people on Rapid Creek, some twelve kilometres from the town centre.

The Rapid Creek Mission

In June 1882, Father Anthony Strele wrote to the Minister in charge of the Northern Territory of the difficulties of 'reducing' Aborigines to settled habits and asked whether any Aboriginal reserves had been set aside where Aborigines could be brought into 'habits of industry, and induced to settle down and turn the soil to useful account' - two notions which accorded with the development hopes of the Northern Territory by stressing that both the land and Aboriginal people could be made 'useful'.⁸⁵ Strele's request generated reports from Protector of Aborigines Morice and Police Inspector Foelsche on the current condition and position of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, specifically in Darwin. Morice provided extensive detail about Aborigines' traditional practices while Foelsche focussed on the way that Aborigines had been 'demoralized' by contact with Europeans who had taught them 'vices previously unknown to them'. In summing up the reports, Government Resident Price accepted that a mission to Aborigines might be useful in teaching the Aboriginal children 'industry and morality' rather than becoming a 'troublesome class, with all the vice of the Europeans, and those of their aboriginal parents as well'.⁸⁶ The Jesuits subsequently proposed establishing the mission's head station near Darwin, with a fishing station close to Nightcliff, an

⁸⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 May 1900. In 1911, JH Blair continued to argue that it was 'very important' that Aborigines be left 'entirely alone' and we must 'make them keep away from us. It is the only chance we have of doing them any permanent good'. Aborigines were 'too tender and sensitive to dose with either religion or civilisation; they can stand the fires of neither'. Left 'entirely alone, they will go on for all time'. Blair asked, 'Where now are the Larakeeah and other tribes near Palmerston? They have been almost exterminated by civilisation and religion combined' (*Northern Territory Times*, 19 May 1911).

⁸⁵ Correspondence from Anthony Strele to Minister for Education, 20 June 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 368/1882.

⁸⁶ Correspondence from Inspector of Police, Paul Foelsche, to Government Resident, EW Price, 15 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882; Correspondence from Government Resident, EW Price, to Minister for Education, 21 August 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 579/1882.

orphanage for the children and a hospital for the ‘old and infirm natives’.⁸⁷ The missionaries’ intention was to ‘draw the blacks away from the town, as that place is very hurtful to them, and the blacks on their side may turn troublesome to the Palmerstonians as they fear’. The missionaries meant to direct their attention first to the ‘young and old people, and the stronger be brought to work’.⁸⁸

Initially, land in the Darwin hinterland was proposed for the mission but the missionaries thought that this was too far from the town. They also thought that it was too expensive to begin their operations on and instead requested that land at Nightcliff, about 12 kilometres north of the Darwin township, be reserved for them.⁸⁹ This land had been originally reserved for Government paddocks but was not taken up as such. Government Resident Price consequently recommended that Section No. 18 at Nightcliff, which comprised 320 acres and had Rapid Creek running through it, would be sufficient for the Jesuit’s purposes.⁹⁰ In recognition of the importance of land to Aborigines in the town, the *Northern Territory Times* commented that the granting of this land on the beach near Shoal Bay was a ‘wise provision’ as it would ‘secure to the station natives a portion of the beach where they can at all times fish without being interfered with’.⁹¹

The Jesuits fixed their camp at Nightcliff on 10 October 1882 and immediately began clearing the ‘thickly timbered’ land and building a large wooden building.⁹² Some local Aborigines initially gave the missionaries some assistance. By mid-January 1883, a ‘greater number’ of Aborigines were camped at the Mission and ‘were willing to work and continued on with greater constancy than was expected’.⁹³ By September that year, there were between thirty and forty Aborigines at the mission with nearly half

⁸⁷ Correspondence from Father Anthony Strele to Minister for Education, 10 October 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 707/1882.

⁸⁸ Correspondence from Father Strele, 12 October 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 810/1882.

⁸⁹ Correspondence from Father Strele to Minister for Education, 10 October 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 707/1882. The land at Nightcliff comprised Sections No. 17, 18 and 19.

⁹⁰ Correspondence from Government Resident Price, 11 October 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 707/1882.

⁹¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 18 August 1883.

⁹² This was prior to the land actually being granted as an Aboriginal reserve and permission given to the Jesuits to work from it. The missionaries consequently hoped that they would not be ‘obliged to abandon it’. The land was ultimately created as an Aboriginal reserve and the missionaries given permission to utilise it as a mission on 24 February 1883 (Correspondence from Father Strele, 12 October 1882, SA State Records, GRS1 810/1882).

that number being children under five years old.⁹⁴ The Jesuits called the mission St Josephs but the Larrakia and Wulna called it *Gorumbai* meaning ‘elbow’ which referred to the shape of the creek’s course.⁹⁵ The missionaries set the Aborigines’ work schedules – from 8 until 11 in the morning and then from 3 until 6 in the evening – and issued them with rations of rice or potatoes, tea, sugar, flour and tobacco. Aboriginal people supplemented these rations with kangaroo, bandicoots, birds, fish, shells and ‘native fruits’. The missionaries distributed Aborigines with fish hooks and sometimes lent them guns to go hunting.

During the mission’s first year, the Aboriginal residents and missionaries cleared and fenced an eight acre paddock and two five acre gardens. The Aboriginal workers brought in huge quantities of mangrove wood and made outhouses and fences. They also dug two wells – one over forty feet deep and five feet wide - through hard and rocky ground. In keeping with the attempted conversion of Aborigines to Christian farmers, the missionaries proposed that once they were accustomed to a ‘domestic settler life’, each Aboriginal family would be allocated a piece of land which they would cultivate themselves’.⁹⁶ Within three years, the mission garden had tripled its area under cultivation, a four room house surrounded by verandahs had been built for the missionaries, an instruction/school house for the Aborigines, sleeping quarters, a store and a twenty-five foot long bridge had been constructed across Rapid Creek.⁹⁷ During the first few years there were about fifty Aboriginal people at the mission and they were mainly Larrakia and Wulna people. Religious instruction was initially kept to a minimum because of language difficulties but also because of the need to establish the mission’s infrastructure.⁹⁸ By December 1884, the missionaries had translated some hymns into the Larrakia language and Aborigines were receiving instruction in their own language and this, according to the missionaries, ‘delights them exceedingly’. Whether it was the translated hymns and religious instruction or the fact that the

⁹³ Correspondence from Father Strele to Minister for Education, 28 September 1883, SA State Records, GRS1 642/1883.

⁹⁴ Correspondence from Father Strele to Minister for Education, 28 September 1883, SA State Records, GRS1 642/1883.

⁹⁵ GJ O’Kelly, 1967. ‘The Jesuit Mission Stations in the Northern Territory’, Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Thesis, Monash University.

⁹⁶ Correspondence from Father Strele, 12 July 1884, NTRS F790 A6974.

⁹⁷ *South Australian Advertiser*, 24 December 1884; *Northern Territory Times*, 10 January 1885.

⁹⁸ Correspondence from Father Strele to Minister for Education, 28 September 1883, SA State Records, GRS1 642/1883.

missionaries had been willing to learn their language which most delighted the Larrakia is unclear. Over the next couple of years, Aborigines continued to work at the mission clearing and tilling the land, erecting a wire fence a mile long in an attempt to prevent the gardens being destroyed by kangaroos and horses, constructing a dam in the creek, making a rice field and assisting in the building of a kitchen, store room and three houses for themselves. The missionaries celebrated their achievements, proclaiming that the Aboriginal residents now ate in a common room, sat at tables and used cutlery and plates. The children were schooled in numbers and figures and given religious instruction and the adults 'kept to regular work' about the station.

For a time the mission garden was productive, growing sweet potatoes, pineapples and bananas. However, the white ants destroyed the sugar cane and tapioca and kangaroos and horses ravaged the fields planted with maize, corn and sago.⁹⁹ The destruction and failure of these crops together with the shortage of provisions at the mission meant that during 1886 and 1887, some Aboriginal people were refused admission to the mission. During 1886, those Aborigines resident on the mission had to support themselves through hunting and fishing over several months.¹⁰⁰ The missionaries received an annual grant of 100 pounds from the government but this was not enough to keep the mission viable. However, the government did not support the allocation of further funds to the mission, fearing that it would set a precedent for other missions, and chose instead to assist the Jesuits by issuing them with rations, clothing and blankets.¹⁰¹

The Jesuit missionaries initially thought it better not to try and make the Aborigines at the mission 'give up all their old customs and manner of life at once'. This was probably just as well given the abovementioned shortage of rations and Aboriginal

⁹⁹ Report from Father Strele, 12 January 1886, *Government Resident's Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory to December 1885*; Report from Father Strele, 14 January 1887, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1886*.

¹⁰⁰ Correspondence from Father Strele to Government Resident, JL Parsons, 1 April 1886, SA State Records, GRS1 471/1886; Report from Father Strele, 14 January 1887, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1886*.

¹⁰¹ Correspondence from Government Resident Parsons to Minister for Education, 3 February 1887, SA State Records, GRS1 118/1877; Correspondence from Government Resident Parsons to Minister for Education, 5 December 1884, SA State Records, GRS1 1177/1884; Correspondence from Government Resident Parsons to Minister for Education, 15 April 1886, SA State Records, GRS1 471/1886. That the mission was a point for the dry season distribution of blankets to Aboriginal people is suggested by Father Mackillop's observation of a number of Aborigines coming to the mission in June to collect their blankets and who then 'cleared off again' (Report from Donald Mackillop, 20 January 1888, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1887*).

people's reliance on their traditional bush skills to get resources.¹⁰² However, the missionaries did attempt to alter Aboriginal lifestyles by prohibiting polygamy, restricting visits to the mission by non-mission Aboriginal people to a couple of days at a time, translating religious texts into the Larrakia language, ensuring that the Aboriginal residents of the mission 'complied with its regulations' and by trying to instill a European sense of time and space by determining hours of work, eating times and living arrangements.¹⁰³ In spite of these restrictions, Aboriginal people persisted in their own modes of living. Strele admitted that Aboriginal people 'had to be allowed ... to spend some days in their own way by going about and visiting their friends at some days' walk distant' and in, 1884, the Government Resident observed that there were few people at the mission as most had gone into town for a 'corroboree' with the 'Alligator blacks'.¹⁰⁴ Although Aboriginal people were required to ask for permission to leave the mission, one of the main obstacles to the mission's progress was the 'innate love of their parents to a wandering life', who took their children on yearly 'ramblings' in the bush.¹⁰⁵ This was considered a major set back to mission work as it was in the children that the missionaries placed their greatest hopes of spiritual conversion and education.

Following the May 1887 dispute at the mission discussed in chapter four, relations between the missionaries and the Larrakia and Wulna changed considerably. These Aborigines cited their fear of the 'Alligators' returning in 'greater numbers and tak[ing] vengeance' as their reason for refusing to sleep at the mission station and choosing instead to camp at night in the 'densest part of the bush'.¹⁰⁶ The Larrakia and Wulna may have been safeguarding their camp. However, early in the following year, Father Mackillop advised that the mission had a 'very poor hope of future' given its proximity

¹⁰² Correspondence from Father Strele to Minister for Education, 28 September 1883, SA State Records, GRS1 642/1883.

¹⁰³ Correspondence from Father Strele to Government Resident, JL Parsons, 1 April 1886, SA State Records, GRS1 471/1886; Report from Father Strele, 14 January 1887, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1886*.

¹⁰⁴ Report from Government Resident Parsons, 5 December 1884, SA State Records, GRS1 1177/1884.

¹⁰⁵ Correspondence between Father Strele and Government Resident Parsons, 27 November 1884 and 5 December 1884, SA State Records, GRS1 1177/1884; Report from Father Strele, 12 January 1886, *Government Resident's Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory to December 1885*.

¹⁰⁶ Annual letter of the Jesuit Mission in North Australia, May 1887, cited in R Levitus, 1982. *Everybody bin all day work: a report on the social history of the Alligator Rivers Region of the Northern Territory 1869-1973*, Report to the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, p73.

to Palmerston and the ‘evil influences of the white man’s presence’, the mission’s ‘limited means’ and their ‘up-hill [fight] against lust and grog and opium’.¹⁰⁷

Rather than seeing the proximity of town and its associated evils as the key reasons for the Larrakia and Wulna leaving the mission, Government Resident Parsons suggested that the Larrakia were rejecting the missionaries attempts to substantially alter and control their lifestyles and making a pragmatic decision about their continued involvement with the mission. Parsons wrote that the Larrakia appeared to be ‘utterly unaffected by the efforts for their evangelization by self-denying fathers and brothers’ and told how, at a recent ‘corroboree of the old men ... the attitude of the Larrakeeyahs to Christianity was discussed’:

Whatever may have been the aspects in which it was viewed, whether it was too much work and too little tobacco, too much morality and too few shillings, or not, the decision arrived at was – ‘Religion along Rapid Creek no good’ ... For months none of the Larrakeeyahs have gone near the mission station.

Parsons believed that the only hope for the mission’s success was the withdrawal of children from their parents and ‘camp life’ which might cure them of their ‘inveterate nomadism’ and allow them to be ‘trained to be a very successful and useful element of population in the Territory’. Parsons did, however, acknowledge that the parents would not part with their children and the elders of the tribe would ‘hear of no change which will lessen their authority or take away any of their privileges in the tribe’.¹⁰⁸

By August 1888, the missionaries had turned their attentions to a small number of Aboriginal men from the Daly River who were at the mission and whom they were training for a new missionary enterprise on the Daly River.¹⁰⁹ The missionaries

¹⁰⁷ Report from Father Mackillop, 20 January 1888, *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1887*.

¹⁰⁸ *Government Resident’s Report on the Northern Territory 1887*.

¹⁰⁹ Report from Father Strele, 9 March 1889, *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1888*. In hoping for better things for the Daly River mission, Strele is damning of the impact of whites on Aborigines and the lack of reserves set aside for Aborigines, ‘The land, our share of it at least, is very poor, but game abounds. The uninviting character of the soil may prevent the only thing we fear - the occupation of the country by our white brethren. However loyal to what is held to be the good of Australia, in the interest of the natives whom Australia dispossesses, and to whom out of her abundance she cannot afford even one small native territory, we do fear this’.

continued to hope that the Larrakia and Wulna would return to the Rapid Creek Mission, but by 1891, Father Mackillop reported that they had not responded to the missionaries efforts and that as missionary work required ‘virgin soil - the free savage with all his vices, but with *his* only’, doubted whether the station could be maintained.¹¹⁰ St Josephs was closed the following year and the buildings and livestock transferred to the Daly River Mission.¹¹¹

There are many probable reasons why local Aboriginal people chose to go to the mission in the first place and then chose not to remain there. The Jesuits established the mission at the same time as a large influx of Chinese people arrived in Darwin. The Chinese worked on the goldfields during the Wet season panning for alluvial gold and, during the Dry season, sought work in Darwin.¹¹² The influx of another cheap labour supply meant competition for employment and this may have influenced the local Aborigines’ decision to take up employment at the mission. It is probable that local Aborigines considered work at the mission as an opportunity to engage in an economic activity for which they received the same or better compensation than elsewhere. This contrasted with the missionaries’ hopes that Aborigines would understand that their labour and presence on the mission was for their spiritual and moral benefit. If Aborigines were at the mission primarily for economic gain, it is unlikely that they would have remained there once the mission’s resources were depleted and the workers no longer paid. However, if local Aborigines were drawn to the mission for protection from the ‘evils’ of town life, the rules and lifestyles imposed on them by the missionaries may have conflicted too much with their traditional way of living. The missionaries’ identification of the Larrakia and Wulna’s dispute against the Alligator Rivers Aborigines as the turning point for the local Aborigines leaving the mission also suggests that the Larrakia and Wulna were rejecting the missionaries’ attempts to undermine their traditional authority.

¹¹⁰ Report from Donald Mackillop, 2 February 1891, *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1890*. See also *Northern Territory Times*, 27 November 1891.

¹¹¹ The Daly River mission folded in 1899 after several floods devastated the mission, its buildings, the stock and the lands they had cultivated. Blame was also attributed to the ‘influence of the elders’ on young peoples minds and the way in which the young, rather than being left in school, were taken into the bush periodically and returned ‘dense as ever’ (*Northern Territory Times*, 14 July 1899).

¹¹² In July 1879 there were 1200 Chinese people in Darwin, 800 of whom were employed by the Government in clearing and trenching land for the Experimental Nursery at Fannie Bay (Report from Government Resident, EW Price, to the Minister for Education, 30 July 1879, SA State Records, GRS 1 395/1879).

For what were no doubt a number of reasons, the Larrakia rejected the rules and ideology of the missionaries and asserted their economic autonomy by moving away from the mission and back into the town. While the Rapid Creek mission was only short lived, its legacy is apparent in the numbers of catholic names that upper generations of Larrakia people adopted or were given, for example ‘Solomon’ and ‘Benedict’.¹¹³

Running ‘them’ out of town

Although reserves had been granted, rations distributed and the Jesuits had attempted to draw Aborigines away from the town, the presence of Aborigines in the town area continued to be a feature of the debate about the ‘Aboriginal problem’ at the turn of the nineteenth century. Debate over the presence and control of Aborigines in the immediate town area reached a climax in April 1898 when the local police, irrespective of the lack of legislative authority, began to forcibly remove Aboriginal people from Darwin and systematically destroy their camps. The local newspaper described how a ‘well-known policeman’ visited an Aboriginal camp at the rear of the school house, ‘routed the blacks, danced a war dance on their humpies, and generally scattered the paraphernalia of the camp in all directions’. The Aborigines were then ‘driven to the camp near the Gardens’.¹¹⁴ The reasons for such action concerned the proximity of Aboriginal people to the ‘opium dens of the Chinese’ and increases in Aboriginal substance abuse and prostitution.¹¹⁵

The tension caused by this action between white settlers in the town was highlighted, two years later, when the police again ‘clear[ed] out the blacks from Palmerston and its environments’ by pulling down their camps within the town radius and burning them.¹¹⁶ The editor of the *Northern Territory Times* argued that ‘this appears to be the only solution to the black problem, as the natives want something more than a hint ere they

¹¹³ One way that local Aboriginal children put to economic use the teachings of the missionaries was by singing songs learnt at the mission to the customers at various hotels in the hope of attracting some ‘stray coins’ (*Northern Territory Times*, 21 January 1888).

¹¹⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 8 April 1898.

¹¹⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 8 April 1898. See detailed reports written in 1898 by Protector of Aborigines Goldsmith and Police Inspector Foelsche in SA State Records, GRS 1 333/1898.

¹¹⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 14 December 1900.

will consent to leave' and advised the authorities to 'keep the blacks who do not belong to the local tribe out-side the town'.¹¹⁷

However, the burning of Aboriginal people's camps in a bid to oust them from the town resulted in an angry response from Paddy Cahill, a buffalo hunter who worked mainly in the Alligator Rivers region. Cahill described the act of burning Aboriginal people's blankets and other goods as a 'dastardly outrage', demanded that the incident 'be probed to the bottom' and took the matter to the Minister so that the offenders might be 'punished'.¹¹⁸ Cahill also reported the response from one of the Aboriginal men whose camp had been burnt. This man claimed that he 'bin work alonga white pfeller house' and that he had left his 'blanket, musketeer net, and all about little pfeller bag alonga camp'. He looked and saw a 'big pfeller smoke' and ran 'hard pfeller back to camp' where he 'bin see 'im p'liceman burn 'im house b'longa me'. He wanted to know why the policeman burnt his house when he worked all day for the 'whiteman' and received 'tucker' which he took back to the camp to feed his 'piccaninny'. As he explained, 'me got one pfeller baby, and black pfeller baby all same white man's baby - spose no more catchem tucker 'im die, quick pfeller'. He could not 'clear out' and go back to his own country as demanded by the policeman and government because of the approaching Wet season, 'jus' now big pfeller rain come on, make 'im wet all about, little boy no more can walk'. This man also pointed out the injustice of the colonisers trying to tell Aborigines where they could and could not live, 'White pfeller him bin come on 'longa my country, me no more bin tell 'im clear out, me bin let white pfeller stay 'longa my country, shoot 'im buffalo. Black pfeller work hard help 'im white pfeller all time'.¹¹⁹

Police Inspector Foelsche dismissed these complaints and suggestions that any wrongdoing had taken place. He argued that the 'real facts of the case' were that, in the months preceding this incident a number of Aborigines, mainly from the Alligator Rivers region, had congregated 'in and near the town'. They were not 'interfered with' so long as they 'behaved' but 'as is usually the case when different tribes meet ... fights and quarrels' ensued and 'resulted in several of them getting wounded'. Although the police tried to stop these 'play' fights and 'did their best to persuade the visiting natives

¹¹⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 January 1901, *Northern Territory Times*, 14 December 1900.

¹¹⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 January 1901. See correspondence from Cahill in NTRS F790 A10173.

¹¹⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 January 1901.

to go to their own country', they had little success and were left with no other course than 'to adopt more stringent measures to compel them to shift away from the town'. On December 29, all the Aborigines except the 'local "Larrakeah" tribe were notified that if they did not clear out by the 31st their camps would be destroyed'. The Aborigines did not leave by the requisite date and their camps were consequently burnt. Foelsche claimed that no blankets or clothing were burnt and stressed that with the exception of one camp at the 'two and a half mile', all the camps were 'in and near the settled portion of the town' and no Aborigines 'of any tribe' employed by Europeans had been told to go away.¹²⁰ The Mounted Constable responsible for destroying the camps was also unaware of any Aboriginal people's property being burnt, 'all that was destroyed by me and the blackboy assisting me was the wurlies and a lot of stinking debris which was literally crawling with vermin'. For Mounted Constable Keau, 'stinking debris ... crawling with vermin' did not constitute 'property' of any value. Keau unintentionally undermined Foelsche's assertions that the Aborigines had been adequately forewarned of the police's actions by describing how, while he was destroying the 'wurlies, several boys and lubras complained to me about their houses being destroyed and I *then* told them the reason why'.¹²¹ If the intention of destroying the huts was to remove Aboriginal people from the town, this was in fact ineffective as is evident from Mounted Constable Keau's report which claims that he had been 'amongst the blacks who lived in the destroyed huts *every day since it occurred*, and have heard no complaints'.¹²²

As the above protest from the Aboriginal man shows, Aboriginal people found it very difficult to get back to their own country, since, with the onset of the wet season, this entailed crossing several major rivers. Resources were also more difficult to get at this time and would have influenced Aboriginal people's decisions about the best and safest time to travel. Even so, Foelsche argued that 'no hardship' was inflicted on the Aborigines who, in their 'own best interest', were better off in their 'tribal country' where 'an abundance of native food of all descriptions is easily obtainable'. In Darwin, they were dependent on 'what they can beg and steal or obtain by prostitution'.

¹²⁰ Correspondence from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 9 January 1901, NTRS F790 A10173.

¹²¹ Emphasis added. Report from Mounted Constable Keau to Police Inspector Foelsche, 5 January 1901, NTRS F790 A10173.

Besides that, the presence of the Aborigines with their ‘dirty habits and filthy camps’, their ‘mangy dogs’ and the ‘well known fact of leprosy existing in the neighbourhood of the Alligator Rivers makes their presence here very undesirable if not dangerous to the inhabitants of Palmerston’.¹²³ Foelsche does not mention that the police’s action occurred at a time when the presence of Aboriginal people in the township was being challenged by sections of the white community who were making strident demands that action be taken to remove Aborigines from the town.

While Foelsche and Keau justified their actions to the Government Resident and the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, Paddy Cahill and a person using the pseudonym ‘Majority’ debated the issue over several weeks in the pages of the local press. ‘Majority’ claimed that the blacks had been given ‘ample warning’ and that those warnings had been ‘entirely disregarded’ with the ‘inevitable result’. In what is a fine example of the appropriation of space by both Aborigines and non-Aborigines, ‘Majority’ complained that ‘the blacks have been camped all over the town blocks, and the people in the township have often been subjected to the (to us) dismal howl of the native corroboree, even the Cricket Oval not being exempted’. ‘Majority’ claimed that it was ‘unsafe to walk past the ‘black’s town residences’ because you never knew when a spear or some other missile was going to come flying from the bush’. Finally, Majority argued from ‘a moral standpoint’ that, ‘for the well-being of the morals of the youth of the place’, Aborigines ‘ought to be ejected after dark’.¹²⁴ To which Paddy Cahill replied, ‘small spears would be just the thing for a man that pokes about a black’s camp after dark’. Cahill defended Aboriginal people’s rights to come into Darwin whenever and for however long they pleased and claimed that the action taken by the government of burning ‘a man’s house’ amounted to arson and that ‘the culprit ... should be made to bear the consequences of his act’.¹²⁵

‘Majority’s’ contention that the Aborigines were run out of town to ‘protect’ the whites from the ‘nuisance and danger’ directly contradicts Foelsche and Dashwood’s argument that the Aborigines were burnt out of their camps because they were better off in their

¹²² Emphasis added. Report from Mounted Constable Keau to Police Inspector Foelsche, 8 January 1901, NTRS F790 A10173.

¹²³ Correspondence from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 9 January 1901, NTRS F790 A10173.

¹²⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 11 January 1901.

own country.¹²⁶ Either way, ‘Majority’ felt that the action was ‘by far the best for the majority of both blacks and whites’ and although he/she agreed that the burning of the camps was cruel, argued that ‘little of any value was destroyed’. Majority argued further that the destruction of the camps by burning was necessary to ‘improve sanitary conditions’ because the country from which the ‘ejected niggers’ came from ‘was greatly affected by leprosy’.¹²⁷ Majority also insisted that since ‘no employed blacks were turned out ... where is the injustice to any citizen?’, indicating the selectivity with which camps were burnt and who could be considered citizens.¹²⁸

In spite of the above-mentioned protests, the police continued to ‘persuade’ Aboriginal people to leave the town by destroying their camps. The police journals show the determination with which they tried to remove Aboriginal people from the township, without, as Foelsche acknowledged, any legislation authorising them to do it. During the month between 10 December 1900 and 11 January 1901, the police either ‘removed’, ‘told to clear out’, ‘dispersed’, ‘pulled down’, ‘destroyed’ and/or ‘shifted’ Aboriginal people and their living places on no less than thirteen separate occasions.¹²⁹ Official correspondence from Police Inspector Foelsche and extracts from the police journals also emphasized the selectivity of the police’s actions by stressing that it was *unemployed* Aboriginal people who were evicted from the town.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 18 January 1901.

¹²⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 15 February 1901.

¹²⁷ Foelsche also used the fear of the spread of disease as a reason for destroying the camps by fire (Correspondence from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 9 January 1901, NTRS F790 A10173).

¹²⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 15 February 1901. See also the correspondence regarding Aborigines from the Daly River camped on the beach below the Residency. Inspector Foelsche asked the Government Resident, ‘As those natives belonging to this tribe and not employed at the Residence are not working for any person and to my knowledge refused work, would it not be better to send them away to their own country’. Mounted Constable Strath visited these Aborigines and found that a man and three women from the group were working at the Residency. He asked the others ‘why they had not gone back to their own country’ and ‘they replied that they had not got a canoe’. They did, however, promise to clear away after they had received their blankets (Correspondence from Inspector of Police Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 10 June 1901, NTRS F790 10610/1901; Correspondence from Mounted Constable Strath to Inspector Paul Foelsche, 18 June 1901, NTRS F790 A10610/1901).

¹²⁹ Extracts from the Palmerston [Darwin] Police Journals and included in correspondence from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, NTRS F790 A10940A.

¹³⁰ For example see correspondence from: Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 28 February 1901, NTRS F790 A10307; Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 10 June 1901, NTRS F790 A10610.

The fear of the spread of disease, particularly leprosy, continued to figure largely in the argument concerning the presence of Aboriginal people in Darwin.¹³¹ As is made clear from the above discussion, the white settlers believed that Aborigines from the Alligator Rivers district, two to three hundred kilometres east of Darwin, were the main sufferers (and potential distributors) of this disease. In June 1893, the *Northern Territory Times* described the presence of allegedly ‘diseased’ ‘Alligator natives’ in the town as ‘a menace which cannot be too stringently guarded against’.¹³² A year later, the editor of the newspaper recommended the medical inspection of all Aborigines who potentially had leprosy and warned that leprosy was ‘rampant in this colony now, and gives great promise of becoming so firmly rooted in years to come that no settler, whether white, black, or yellow will be able to attest with any degree of certainty that he has not the germs of incurable leprosy within him’.¹³³

In March 1900, Government Resident Dashwood tried to appease concerned townsfolk by instructing the medical officer to examine the Aborigines from the Alligator Rivers district who were in Darwin, so that those with leprosy could be ordered away from the town. This task was made difficult by Aborigines who had the disease ‘invariably try[ing] to escape observation, having apparently a lively fear of being put out of the way or incarcerated’.¹³⁴ In December 1901, the Local Board of Health asked Government Resident Dashwood if the Government intended to ‘take any measures for

¹³¹ During the 1887 smallpox epidemic when Port Darwin was declared an infected port all the Aborigines were ordered out of the town by the police (*Northern Territory Times*, 6 August 1887).

¹³² *Northern Territory Times*, 9 June 1893.

¹³³ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 May 1894. It was not just Aborigines who whites feared would spread disease. The following article appeared in the *Northern Territory Times* on 26 January 1884: ‘Whilst speaking of disease, we may say that Palmerston offers special facilities for the propagation of any of the manifold Asiatic maladies by which we may be visited. Within a few yards of our main street, we have a horrible collection of noisome Chinese hovels, situated in the middle of open drains filled with liquid fever, on the surface of which floats every abomination which can be conceived, from decayed vegetable matter to putrid animal refuse and excrement. Perhaps when small-pox, cholera or typhus does put in an appearance we’ll endeavour to make these scum clear the scum from their dwellings. Government should pass an Act fixing the nearest limit at which the Mongolian lower class can live apart from Europeans at something over a mile. Don’t bother about legislating for their cleanliness; they like filth and foul smells, and revel, flourish and grow fat in the midst of them’.

¹³⁴ Correspondence from Government Resident Dashwood to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 24 March 1900, SA State Records, GRS1 190/1900. Protector of Aborigines Strangman also described the difficulties in medically treating Aborigines some of whom believed the ‘erroneous tales of the surgical gymnastics that are likely to follow their admission to hospital, [and] either go to the bush when ill, or are not heard of till their demise is reported’. This contrasts with the practice discussed earlier in this thesis when Aborigines went to the white doctors, possibly as a means of furthering their alliance. Aborigines may have been prepared to respect white medicine in the early days, but such reports indicate that, thirty years later, this was far from the case (Correspondence from Government

the prevention of Native lepers entering the town of Palmerston'. Dashwood subsequently advised that Police Inspector Foelsche was to 'apprehend all lepers, native or otherwise'.¹³⁵ In January 1902, the *Northern Territory Times* dictated that the large number of Aborigines 'who (so it is alleged) hail from the leprous Alligator Rivers district' had 'no right to be outside the bounds of their own district'. These Aborigines were 'trespassers' and because of the 'alleged prevalence among them of a horrible disease ... to permit their continued presence is to stupidly and wickedly subject this community to a most unnecessary and easily avoidable risk'.¹³⁶

The Local Board of Health and the 'North Australian League' urged the Government Resident to take some action over this matter.¹³⁷ Government Resident Dashwood subsequently asked Police Inspector Foelsche what measures were being taken to prevent Alligator Rivers Aborigines from entering the town and what instructions 'upcountry' police had been given to prevent Aborigines leaving their districts and coming into town. Foelsche replied that although 'continued efforts' were being made by the police to prevent Aborigines from 'outside districts', especially the Alligator Rivers, coming into town, their efforts were 'futile and without affect' because townspeople continued to employ them and 'encourage them and their hangers on to come into town'. There was no legal power that could be exercised by the police to prevent Aborigines from visiting the town and, Foelsche aired his frustration that, the coercive measures used by the police last year to prevent Aborigines remaining in the town, had been reported to the Governor of South Australia and had not received 'any encouragement or support' from the Local Board of Health, who now wanted the Aborigines removed from town.¹³⁸ Foelsche highlights the continued tension within the town as to how to deal with this vexed issue and also his discomfit in using measures to remove Aborigines from the town which he admitted, the police had 'no legal power to do'. Government Resident Dashwood agreed that there was no

Medical Officer, CL Strangman, to Government Resident Mitchell, 11 June 1910, NTRS F790 18914/1910).

¹³⁵ Correspondence from VV Brown, Local Board of Health Office to Government Resident Dashwood, 26 December 1901, NTRS F790 A11057.

¹³⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 10 January 1902.

¹³⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 10 January 1902; *Northern Territory Times*, 11 July 1902.

¹³⁸ Correspondence from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 14 January 1902, NTRS F790 A11112.

legislation dealing with the matter, and Aborigines, as ‘citizens of South Australia’, had ‘as much right to go where they chose as he had’.¹³⁹

In June 1905, Councilor Budgen protested at a Palmerston District Council meeting ‘against the presence of aboriginals in the streets of the town after dark, on the grounds that their presence was provocative of immorality and the spread of disease’. A meeting of the Board of Health followed the Council meeting and resolved that the Chairman should ‘wait upon the Government Resident and call his attention to the evils arising from the presence of large numbers of blacks in the town at night, with a view to some steps being taken to minimise the nuisance’.¹⁴⁰ In Dr William Ramsay Smith’s 1906 report on hygiene in the Northern Territory, he stated that the Northern Territory did not have conditions conducive to the spread of leprosy. He believed that, among the Aboriginal population, the ‘probability of one aboriginal giving the disease to another, under native conditions of living’ was ‘so small as to be negligible; and I would recommend that every blackfellow found to be a leper should be sent back to his tribe’. Smith was much more concerned with the presence of venereal disease and recommended ‘clearing away all the blacks within a specified distance of the habitations of the whites’, a move he considered neither ‘too drastic nor unnecessary’ and a ‘kindness to the natives’.¹⁴¹ Even so, fear of the spread of any diseases from Aborigines to whites continued to be reason enough to demand the exclusion of Aborigines from Darwin. In January 1907, the local newspaper claimed that Aborigines were full of the ‘malarial facility’ and the ‘unconscious but most active disseminators of the disease’. It was in the interests of Europeans and ‘common humanity’ that a law be enacted which would ‘relegate the natives back to the bush or to Reservations of their own’ unless they were employed under a permit and provided with ‘proper sleeping quarters’.¹⁴²

In Suzanne Parry’s study of health and medicine in the Northern Territory in the early twentieth century she discusses the way that ‘much illness was seen to stem from immoral, degenerate and careless living and from genetic weaknesses’. Consequently,

¹³⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 10 January 1902 & *Northern Territory Times*, 11 July 1902.

¹⁴⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 2 June 1905.

¹⁴¹ William Ramsay Smith, *Report on Hygiene in the Northern Territory*, Draft 1 November 1906, CRS A3/1 NT1919/2283 Local Health Board of Darwin.

¹⁴² *Northern Territory Times*, 4 January 1907.

‘Aboriginal people, and those who associated with them, were seen to be inherently subject to disease, a weakness intensified by their uncivilised life-style’. Aboriginal people were seen as ‘infectious and dirty, the harbourers of unknown disease’ and, as Parry ironically notes, ‘even those diseases passed to the Aboriginal population by whites were reputed to acquire increased virulence before being re-introduced to the white community’. This constituted ‘a danger from which the white moral majority needed the fullest protection’ and, as seen above, led to demands that the movement of Aboriginal people into the town area be controlled.¹⁴³

The debate over Aboriginal people’s presence in the town that has been discussed above occurred in the white arena. The notion that Aborigines had ‘rights’ or that they may have had opinions on the debate is difficult to find in the historical record created by the colonisers. However, Dashwood’s assertion above of Aborigines having rights as citizens suggests that some of the colonisers recognised Aboriginal people’s human rights. That Aboriginal people defended those rights is evident in the Alligator River man’s response to having his camp burnt. It is also evident in the police journals where it is narrated that, on a couple of occasions, Aborigines ‘when spoken to and told to clear out, some of them stood and refused to go’ and they were ‘very unwilling to leave their camp’. After a letter was sent to the local newspaper complaining of the ‘nuisance’ and ‘eyesore’ posed by the presence of Aboriginal people and their ‘diseased’ dogs in the township, the newspaper sought a reply from ‘King Miranda’ who asserted Aboriginal ownership of Darwin and highlighted the devastating impact of ‘whitefellers’ on Aboriginal people:

This one blackpfeller country ... Dog him stop long time no make whitepfeller sick - what for him now whitepfeller all day growl. Whitepfeller him plenty make it blackpfeller sick all about. Before whitepfeller sit down longa this country blackpfeller him strong clean pfeller, plenty lubra, plenty picaninny, plenty tucker. Now him blackpfeller poor pfeller - die all about every day.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Suzanne Parry, 1992. *Disease, Medicine and Settlement: the role of health and medical services in the settlement of the Northern Territory, 1911-1939*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, p 315-8.

¹⁴⁴ King Miranda is often identified as a Larrakia man. While this reply may have been constructed by the newspaper editors, it is likely that such sentiment was expressed by the Larrakia who were often employed in the newspaper office (*Northern Territory Times*, 25 September 1908).

The editor of the newspaper advised that this was King Miranda's 'personal attitude'. The editor agreed that Aborigines and their dogs were 'an eyesore from an aesthetic point of view' and that the Aboriginal camps around the town were 'hotbeds of disease and a source of contamination'. However, the editor nonetheless asked, 'whose fault is it that this is so?' and argued that a 'considerable share' of the Aborigines' 'degradation' was the 'result of contact with that civilisation of which we boast'. The editor described the 'whole native question' as a 'big one' and argued that the absence of any 'real attempt to grapple with it' was a 'crime against the natives and against society'.

Conclusion

In January 1874, the editor and various correspondents to the *Northern Territory Times*, highlighted the lack of attention being paid to the instructions issued to the Protector of Aborigines regarding Aborigines. One correspondence argued that the Aborigines were in a 'worse position physically than they were some time ago' and argued that 'they do not receive any attention from the Government with a view to their improvement'. The editor agreed, claiming 'it has never been the practice here to pay much attention to the medical wants of the aborigines, and they are certainly not worse off in this respect than they used to be. They have always been neglected and they are neglected now'.¹⁴⁵ However, this chapter has shown that some colonisers did accept responsibility for their invasion of Aboriginal lands and argued that Aborigines deserved to be compensated for having had their country taken and their lifestyles so dramatically compromised. In the colonial acknowledgement of the harmful impact of the invasion on Aboriginal people, rations were distributed, land reserves granted and the Jesuits tired to save the Larrakia and the Wulna from the iniquitous town by establishing the Rapid Creek mission. Even so, the debate over the 'Aboriginal question' continued and a constant feature of this debate was the undesirable presence of Aborigines in the town and the lack of legislation empowering the authorities to control this situation. There were however, always two exceptions to the call that Aborigines be excluded from the town.

¹⁴⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 January 1874. In his position of Medical Officer, Protector of Aborigines Millner was instructed to provide medical aid to Aborigines as 'Kindness and humanity in the discharge of this part of your duty may be attended with the most beneficial results, not only as a means of reconciling the two races, but of affording you an opportunity of studying the diseases which may be found endemic in the Territory.'

One was employed Aborigines and the other was Larrakia people. In the first exception, the colonisers acknowledged that Aborigines comprised a source of essential menial labour. In the second exception, the Larrakia were accorded special status within the town area because of their prior occupancy. 'Visiting' Aboriginal people could be 'removed' or ordered to leave the town because the colonisers believed they were able to return to their own country. However, the Larrakia presented a different issue since it was recognised that they were already in their own country. The following chapter examines further efforts to implement legislation in respect of Aborigines in the Northern Territory and shows how a focus of this legislation was controlling the movement, living spaces and behaviour of Aboriginal people in the town area.

Chapter Six: Legislation and Segregation

In December 1909, an article in *The Sydney Star* declared that the, ‘South Australian Government has always treated the question of the Aborigines in a nonchalant manner, and a shocking state of things exists in the Northern Territory’.¹ In 1915, Elsie Masson asked, ‘Must the native of the Territory die out as he has done in the South? So far the same conditions that led to his extinction there are to be found here. White man’s drink, white man’s diseases, neither of which he has the stamina to withstand, have already begun their work of degeneration’. Masson declared:

So far the white man has reached out no hand to help him, but only tossed across to him, from his side of the gulf, a stick of tobacco, a box of matches, and a bottle of grog. Now he has *suddenly realised* his duty towards the race whose land he has taken, and is doing his best to build a bridge for the black man by which he may cross in safety. It remains to be seen if it can be done.²

This chapter looks further at the debate over the presence of Aboriginal people within the town and suggestions by the colonists as to the main provisions in any legislation introduced in respect of Aborigines. As seen in the previous chapter, the colonial officials had no legislative authority to remove Aboriginal people from the town or prevent Aborigines from coming to the town. This was to be a feature of any legislation proposed for Aborigines. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the legislation that was introduced in 1910 in respect of Aborigines. While this legislation was posited as protecting Aborigines, in reality it became the means by which the white settlers could legally control Aboriginal people’s presence and behaviour within the town area. Tony Austin has examined the nature of the legislation introduced in respect of Aborigines in his complementary studies, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest* and

¹ WM Burton continued, ‘Of the children a large portion are half-caste, and of these the condition is even more pitiable than that of the blacks, for endowed with higher intelligence, they still have no means of rising from their barbarous state, and soon lose the desire to do so. One cannot help but feel a great pity for them, especially the females. Their fate is a fearful one. Some are nearly white, and yet they live in these wurlley abodes with the full black, until a certain age, when they will become the prey of depraved white men or Chinese’ (Article written by WM Burton in *The Sydney Star*, reprinted in the *South Australian Register*, 16 December 1909).

² Emphasis added. Masson cited in Russell McGregor, 1997. *Imagined Destinies. Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, p87.

*Never trust A Government Man.*³ There were many facets to this legislation that were significant for Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory. However, unlike Austin, I focus on the impact and consequences of the application of that legislation to the town Aboriginal population.

The push for legislation

As seen in the previous chapter, there was a lengthy debate in the pages of the local press about how to deal with what was depicted as an ever worsening situation for Aboriginal people. This chapter considers an aspect of the debate covered only briefly so far in this thesis, that is, the pressure from Northern Territory politicians and the public on the South Australian government to introduce legislation in respect of Aboriginal people and suggestions by the colonists as to the main provisions of that legislation.

As seen from the 1885 reports of Wood, Foelsche and Parsons discussed in chapter five, the main gist of any legislation which was to be introduced for Aboriginal people was that Aboriginal people's presence in the township be controlled and restricted. The determination to exert greater control over the town Aboriginal population – either for their own good or for the good of the town - was a feature of the debate about the 'Aboriginal problem' at the turn of the century in Darwin.

In 1897, the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory finally asked Government Resident Dashwood for a report on Aborigines and their relations with Europeans, Chinese and Asians as well as any recommendations regarding administrative or legislative changes that would result in 'a better state of affairs'.⁴ The Minister's request followed the recent drafting of 'protective' legislation for Aborigines in Queensland and restrictions on the sale of opium; reports of violence towards and ill-treatment of Aborigines in the Northern Territory; and increases in the local court

³ Tony Austin, 1992. *Simply the Survival of the Fittest: Aboriginal Administration in South Australia's Northern Territory 1863-1910*, Historical Society of the NT, Darwin; Tony Austin, 1997. *Never trust A Government Man. Northern Territory Aboriginal Policy 1911-39*, NTU Press, Darwin.

⁴ See Austin 1992, p87; Correspondence from Minister controlling the Northern Territory, FW Holder, to Government Resident Dashwood, 11 December 1897, NTRS F790 A8342.

appearances of Chinese, Europeans and Aborigines on charges relating to the sale, use and abuse of opium and alcohol.

Government Resident Dashwood forwarded the Minister's request to Protector of Aborigines Goldsmith and Police Inspector Foelsche for comment. Goldsmith's self-acknowledged limited experience with Aborigines is reflected in his report, particularly in his superficial observations that the Aborigines about Darwin seemed 'well fed and happy' and most were decently clothed. Those Aborigines who could be 'induced to stay' about their employment made useful servants, but Goldsmith characterised the remainder as 'habitually lazy and averse to work of any kind'. He also condemned the way that Aborigines, when 'the notion takes them that they want to get away into the bush again and resume their wild state', acted upon it 'without any regard to the convenience or otherwise of their employers'. Goldsmith outlined the problems in obtaining convictions for assaults on young Aboriginal girls because of the difficulty in proving their age and because of the unwillingness of juries to accept evidence from Aborigines against white men. Above all, Goldsmith believed that the greatest curse on Aboriginal life was alcohol and opium and the practice of prostitution in order to obtain these drugs. Goldsmith consequently recommended that legislation be introduced which prohibited Aboriginal camps within a mile of a European or Chinese township; that no Chinese person be allowed to have Aborigines on their premises; and that no Aborigines, apart from domestic servants, be allowed in a township after sundown, a regulation which was to be enforced by the police. Goldsmith further recommended that any 'Asiatic' who, after a sentence for any offence against the natives (including opium selling), was again brought to trial and convicted be deported.⁵

Police Inspector Foelsche believed that the condition of Aborigines in the less settled districts had undergone little change since colonisation. However, in the settled areas like Darwin, it had 'altered considerably but unfortunately not for the better'. This was readily seen in the changed attitude of Aborigines towards employment. In 1882, Foelsche wrote that the local Aborigines were 'good and useful workers'. By 1898, they were, 'with very few exceptions, quite the reverse and ladies find it difficult to get lubras to assist in household work ... and the men as a rule pass their time away in

idleness and very few will accept work when offered them'. The principle causes of this 'contaminated condition' amongst Aborigines in settled areas were 'their acquired fondness and craving for intoxicating liquor and opium and the women's encouraged inborn inclination to prostitution'.⁶ Foelsche advised that serious measures were needed to effect a desired change in the present state of affairs which had led to the tribes, in the more settled districts, showing 'unmistakable signs of decreasing in number'. Foelsche argued, 'desperate diseases require desperate remedies', and outlined legislation which would, firstly, prohibit Aborigines from camping within the boundaries of any town or township and would give the Police the power to remove them. Also, Aborigines should not be allowed in the towns between sunset and sunrise unless employed by residents. As well, he argued that Aborigines from country outside of Darwin, be prevented from coming to Darwin and remaining for great lengths of time. They could pay 'periodical short friendly visits to the Port Darwin or Larrakeah tribes' but otherwise the police should be given the authority to 'clear them out and keep them away'. Foelsche feared that unless something was 'done soon in order to bring about a better state of affairs, matters are likely to get much worse'.⁷

Government Resident Dashwood agreed with Foelsche that prostitution was carried on extensively by Aboriginal women in Darwin but found this unsurprising given the disproportion of the sexes in the resident European and Asian population. Some Aboriginal women lived openly with Europeans and Asians while others 'prostitute themselves promiscuously, with the consent and connivance of their husbands, for money, food, tobacco, opium, or other consideration'. Unlike Foelsche, Dashwood highlighted the economic transaction taking place rather than seeing Aboriginal women as innately addicted to prostitution. Dashwood argued that there were many Aborigines who visited Darwin and did not 'indulge' in alcohol or opium and he pointed out that, it was not the supply of alcohol and opium that was on the increase, but public attention on the subject. Dashwood acknowledged that the Aboriginal population was decreasing, not because of venereal disease, but because of influenza, malaria and 'pulmonary complaints'. He concluded his report:

⁵ Report from Protector of Aborigines, FE Goldsmith, to Government Resident Dashwood, 12 March 1898, SA State Records, GRS 1 333/1898.

⁶ Report from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 14 February 1898, SA State Records, GRS1 333/1898.

According to the views of many the Aboriginal native should be utilised and treated as a slave so long as he exists, and that the sooner he disappears from the face of the earth the better. I confess I am unable to regard the subject in that light. In my opinion he has a strong claim for consideration. The white man has appropriated his country without having given him any equivalent; taught him the vices, which unhappily the native is only too ready to learn, and when having once acquired he indulges in without any restraint to his detriment both morally and physically.⁸

After considering the recently passed Queensland legislation, Dashwood drafted a Bill called 'An Act for the Protection and Care of the Aboriginal and Half-Caste Inhabitants of the Province of South Australia, and for other purposes'. In this legislation, Dashwood was concerned to 'protect' Aborigines yet, 'at the same time afford him as much liberty and subject him to as little interference as possible'. The Bill contained provisions regarding the regulation of Aboriginal employment; Aborigines being on unauthorised premises; the unauthorised removal of Aborigines from their country; the determining of the age of a child before the court; increased penalties to those supplying Aborigines with liquor & opium; and prohibiting Aboriginal camps within two miles of any township.⁹

While waiting for the Bill to be presented to Parliament, the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory sent an undercover Special Police Constable to Darwin 'so that there need be no delay in doing all that can be done for protection of Aborigines against all evils from which they suffer'. The Minister was particularly concerned with Aborigines living arrangements 'in relation to people of other nations'.¹⁰ The Special

⁷ Report from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 14 February 1898, SA State Records, GRS1 333/1898.

⁸ Report from Government Resident Dashwood to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 12 July 1898, SA State Records, GRS1 333/1898.

⁹ Report from Government Resident Dashwood to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 12 July 1898, SA State Records, GRS1 333/1898.; see Austin 1992 for a broader discussion of Dashwood's Bill. The editor of the *Northern Territory Times*, although respecting Dashwood's authority and experience for drafting the Bill, doubted whether the Bill, if passed would 'materially alter the existing state of affairs'. It was not 'new or more legislation we want, or that will remedy the evil; it is a power and means to administer the same by the proper person to do so – the Protector of Aborigines' (*Northern Territory Times*, 1 September 1899).

¹⁰ Correspondence from FW Holder to Government Resident Dashwood, 19 October 1898, NTRS F790 A8662; Correspondence from the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory to Government Resident Dashwood, 13 March 1899, NTRS F790 A8681.

Constable collected details about the number and identity of children of mixed descent in the Northern Territory and the living conditions of Aborigines of mixed descent who lived with non-Aborigines. However, as Foelsche regularly remarked, any action the Special Constable may have taken was stymied by the lack of legislation which empowered the police to do anything in respect of Aborigines.¹¹

Dashwood's Bill was subsequently passed in South Australia's lower house but defeated in the upper house. Those against the Bill argued that the legislation was relevant to the Northern Territory and not to South Australia and that, while there was some cause for concern, in general the relations between the 'black labourer and the white settler were happy ones'. It was also thought that the Bill would also adversely affect both white employers and black employees.¹² The debate over the Bill resulted in it becoming the subject of a Select Committee of Inquiry of the South Australian Legislative Council in August 1899. Evidence to this inquiry focussed on employment regulations and Aborigines supposed inability to comprehend employment agreements; the taking by force of Aboriginal women in the pastoral areas; violence between whites and blacks and the inadequacy of current laws to give Aborigines a fair trial; the difficulty of proving the age of an Aboriginal child involved in sexual abuse cases brought before the court; and the work of missionaries and exempting them from the legislation.¹³

There was little discussion during the inquiry regarding the position of Aborigines within Darwin. Given that the majority of the witnesses were not from Darwin, it is hardly surprising. In terms of the congregation of Aborigines in town, Dashwood told the inquiry that Aborigines were better off in their 'own country' where they had plentiful access to bush and sea foods and 'away from civilisation altogether'.¹⁴ The Member for the Northern Territory, VL Solomon, was concerned that Dashwood's proposed employment regulations would 'do away' with the 'useful employment' of Aborigines in towns. Aborigines could not be 'indentured' for specific periods because their supply of labour was 'entirely of a spasmodic and casual nature'. The regulations

¹¹ See correspondence from Police Inspector Foelsche in NTRS F790 A8681/1989-99 and NTRS F790 A10441/1899.

¹² Austin 1992, p90.

¹³ For further discussion of the Inquiry see Austin 1992, p89-92.

could prevent the prostitution of young girls, ostensibly acting as domestic servants in homes, but Solomon believed that the legislation would disadvantage European women as well as men married to Aboriginal women. Solomon advocated alternate legislation which would facilitate the proof of age of Aborigines; a general licensing of employers and banning the sale of liquor and opium to Aborigines.¹⁵

The Select Committee endorsed the Parliament's previous decision and rejected Dashwood's legislation on the grounds that 'the Bill in its present form would be inoperative for any beneficial purpose and, in some respects, might be injurious to aborigines'. The Select Committee recommended the withdrawal of Dashwood's Bill and the introduction of a Bill which would:- allow for the issuing of employment authorisations to 'reputable persons' to employ Aborigines and 'half-castes'; prohibit 'illicit intercourse' with Aboriginal women; prohibit the removal of Aborigines from their own districts unless 'stringent provisions' were made for their return; increase the power of the Protectors of Aborigines to enable them to prosecute offenders against the law; provide 'effective means' to prohibit the sale of alcohol and opium to Aborigines; prevent the bartering of goods supplied to Aborigines by the Government; adopt measures for facilitating the proof of age; make it the duty of the government to care for 'helpless native or half-caste orphans'; encourage '*bona fide* mission stations'; and exempt 'certain half-castes and natives from the provisions of the Act'.¹⁶ The major difference to Dashwood's Bill was that it 'liberalised employment conditions in favour of employers'.¹⁷ However, instability within the South Australian government resulted in the alternate Bill being shelved.

In 1900, Dashwood again pressed upon the Government the 'absolute necessity' of introducing legislation dealing with Aborigines. The 'state of things' which existed regarding relations between 'the natives and the white and coloured races' in the Northern Territory continued 'most unsatisfactory' and Dashwood, again highlighted the lack of power the authorities had to do anything about this unless criminal offences

¹⁴ CJ Dashwood, Evidence to the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on The Aborigines Bill, 1899, SAPP No. 77/1899.

¹⁵ VL Solomon, Evidence to the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on The Aborigines Bill, 1899, SAPP No. 77/1899.

¹⁶ Recommendations from the Chairman, F Basedow, Select Committee of the Legislative Council on The Aborigines Bill, 1899, SAPP No. 77/1899.

¹⁷ Austin 1992, p91.

were committed.¹⁸ Various correspondents to the *Northern Territory Times* also began to make suggestions as to the main provisions in any legislation introduced in respect of Aborigines. Long term Northern Territory settler, AJ Giles, advocated the abolition of the current 'Protectorship of Aborigines', the creation of an Aboriginal Department under the control of an independent officer and responsible to the Minister and the passage of a short Act tentatively entitled, 'The Aborigines Control Act'. Under Giles' plan, Aborigines employed by the police would undergo 'strict barrack discipline' before being sent to their stations; employed Aborigines would wear a disc obtained from the Aborigines Department identifying them as employed; and all other Aborigines would come under the Supervision of the Aborigines Department.¹⁹ Giles advised those who recommended a policy of 'letting the poor black alone', that this had 'allowed him to roam about townships as he likes, acquiring lazy, loose and evil habits unchecked, preparing them to fill the gaols and early graves by crime and debauchery of all kinds'.²⁰

'A Citizen' wrote to the newspaper that the 'aborigines question' was a 'nuisance' which was 'easy to abate' by the passage of a short Act making it illegal for unemployed Aborigines to be in the township; that all Aborigines, employed or otherwise, be outside the township between 8pm and 6am; that it be illegal for Aborigines to be employed by or found on the premises of a Chinese person or other 'alien'; and for any European, Chinamen or other 'alien' to be in an Aboriginal camp.²¹ 'A Citizen' also recommended that Sub Protectors be appointed to various districts to 'look after the interests of the aborigines, and see the old and infirm get the rations'. 'A Citizen' supported Giles' suggestion that Aboriginal employees wear an identification disc to aid the enforcement of the Act and advised that since gaoling Aborigines did not 'deter them from committing petty crimes, summary jurisdiction in the shape of the

¹⁸ CJ Dashwood, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1900*.

¹⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 April 1900. Alfred Giles believed that such identification discs would be considered 'a mark of distinction' by Aborigines. Under Giles' scheme, Aborigines would not be allowed to 'loiter about whilst going or returning on any errand for his employer, and if found after sunset without such disc and without a permit giving such employee permission to visit any relative or friend, and specifying the term of absence, such employee shall be compelled by any police or departmental officer to return to his employer, or be locked up, and all unemployed natives to be dealt with by the local police officer, under the regulations of the Aboriginal Control Act, if so provided'.

²⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 April 1900.

²¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 4 May 1900.

birch ... would save the government a lot of expense, and create a much greater impression on the rogues, of whom there are many'.²²

Other commentators advocated the establishment of an industrial school for Aboriginal children and the development of an experimental farm where all Aborigines 'other than Larrakeeyas' told to go where they could obtain work. This plan would not interfere with the employment of Aborigines by private individuals, 'as there would always be sufficient Larrakeeyas for the purpose'.²³ A 'country correspondent' suggested that a public meeting be called for the purpose of hearing the views of the residents and electing a committee to frame an Act to put before the Parliament. For this correspondent, it was the 'intercourse of the blacks with Asiatics' that was the 'cause of the unsatisfactory state of things at present'. The current Opium Act failed in its object because it was only the suppliers who were punished. In the meantime, the Aborigines were 'daily getting more depraved, more criminal, less useful, and greater paupers!'²⁴ 'Advance' from Brock's Creek, south of Darwin, suggested that the Aborigines moral and physical condition could be improved by legislation, that they should be 'converted into industrious subjects of our Sovereign the King' and that Aborigines should not be permitted within five miles of a town unless employed by a European resident. Employers of Aborigines should have a 'certificate of contract' from the Protector of Aborigines and 'all Asiatics' should be excluded from employing Aborigines unless they could satisfy the Protector 'as to their legitimate duties'. If an Aboriginal person was found on the premises of a Chinese person without a 'satisfactory explanation', both parties were liable to a fine or imprisonment. Rations should only be distributed to Aborigines on their 'tribal lands' while Aborigines of an 'industrious inclination' could be given employment on Government works for a nominal sum in provisions. Under this scheme, Advance argued:

The objectionable lazy aboriginal would thus be taught his folly by being banished to the bush, and the tax-payer would be able to retain his servant, if such stringent measures of the law as suggested were enforced. Some such system would also tend

²² *Northern Territory Times*, 4 May 1900.

²³ *Northern Territory Times*, 20 April 1900; *Northern Territory Times*, 11 May 1900.

²⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 May 1900.

*to purify our towns from the scourge of the filthy, dishonest, indolent, and good for nothing opium smoking aboriginal.*²⁵

As seen in chapter five, Government Resident Parsons was primarily concerned about Aborigines on country remote from the settled districts. In strong contrast, the contributors to the *Northern Territory Times* focussed on local concerns and they argued that, an important part of any legislation introduced in respect of Aborigines was that their presence in the township be vigorously controlled, their access to alcohol and opium be severely curtailed and their relations with ‘Asiatics’ be restricted. What they also make clear is that to be ‘Larrakia’ or ‘employed’ remained the main criteria for being allowed to remain in the township.²⁶

Dashwood continued as Government Resident until 1905 but from 1900, no longer pressed for the passage of legislation in respect of Aborigines in his official communications.²⁷ Mention of Aborigines in official correspondence was left to a steady succession of Chief Medical Officers, who also held the position of Protectors of Aborigines, and who made well meaning, but nonetheless perfunctory, statements about Aborigines once a year in their annual reports.²⁸ Protector of Aborigines Goldsmith warned in 1902 that the leprosy prevalent amongst Alligator Rivers Aboriginal people would ‘in time be a menace to the white population’ and advised that leprosy should be taken in hand ‘before the disease has spread to those tribes that live in proximity to our white centres of population’.²⁹ In 1903, Protector of Aborigines Goldsmith made some disinterested comments about ‘matters’ being ‘very much as hitherto’, that blankets had been distributed to Aborigines and that nine Aborigines were admitted to the

²⁵ Emphasis added. *Northern Territory Times*, 22 November 1901.

²⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 18 May 1900.

²⁷ Dashwood was eventually removed from his position as Government Resident of the Northern Territory and reinstated as Crown Solicitor in Adelaide (Austin 1992, p92).

²⁸ An exception to this generalisation was Protector of Aborigines Seabrook who, in 1902, apart from reporting on the absence of sickness amongst the Aboriginal population and his distribution of blankets to Aborigines, wrote that the ill effects of long imprisonment on Aborigines were, ‘sometimes fatal to life, certainly a frequent cause of phthisis induced by the unusual confinement, the daily routine of prison life, the daily and nightly surroundings for years, so different to his normal life and nature, and, added to these his continual brooding desire and hankering to be with his tribe, his native soil, and environments: all these, known as ‘nostalgia’, affect his physical system deleteriously much more than they do the white man’ (Report of Acting Government Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines, TEF Seabrook, 30 January 1903 in *Government Resident’s Report on the Northern Territory, 1902*).

²⁹ Report from Protector of Aborigines, F Goldsmith, 3 January 1902 in *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1901*.

Palmerston Hospital, of whom three had died.³⁰ The following year, Kensington Fulton took up the position of Protector of Aborigines. His main concern was the spreading ‘curse of eating and smoking opium’ which reduced Aborigines to a condition which was ‘deplorable in the extreme’. Fulton asked that further ‘measures be taken to prevent the introduction and sale of this drug into the Northern Territory’ as the police had already made ‘strenuous efforts to suppress this illicit trade among the aboriginals and the Chinese’.³¹

Cecil Strangman was appointed to the position of Chief Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines in 1906. In late 1907, Strangman conducted an extensive medical examination of Aborigines across the Northern Territory. He argued that it was the ‘terrible and widespread ravages of disease amongst the natives in the settled districts’ which was the ‘saddest and most serious problem to be dealt with by those who wish to protect them and keep their race from extinction’. Strangman also emphasised that it was the high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases that was ‘gradually and insidiously leading to the extinction of the aboriginal race in the Northern Territory’. To counter this, Strangman advocated legislation that would lead to the better protection of Aborigines. He warned, ‘if matters are left as at present the problem will gradually solve itself by the practical extinction of this race in all but the unsettled districts of the Northern Territory’.³²

The 1910 Aborigines Act

Strangman’s advice regarding the need for legislation was soon to be realised. In 1905, Justice CE Herbert replaced Dashwood as Government Resident. In August 1905, the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory advised Herbert of his intention to prepare a Bill dealing with the Protection of Aborigines and the restriction of the sale of opium in the Northern Territory and asked him for a report ‘as to the best means ... to deal with the question’. Herbert subsequently emphasised his ‘absolute conviction’ that legislation in respect of Aborigines was needed and recommended that the main

³⁰ Report from Protector of Aborigines, F Goldsmith, 31 December 1903 in *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1903*.

³¹ Report from Protector of Aborigines, Kensington Fulton to Government Resident Dashwood, 23 January 1905, in *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1904*.

features of the proposed legislation be the ‘checking’ of the opium supply to Aborigines, which, if achieved, would ‘lessen immorality’, and secondly, the regulation of employment of Aborigines which would prevent their unauthorised removal from place to place and prevent ‘cruelties and forcible detention’.³³ Herbert was concerned about the number of European and Asian men who were living ‘a life of immoral intercourse’ with Aboriginal women as well as the ‘occasional prostitution’ that was carried out in the settled districts ‘by bribes of liquor and opium’. For Herbert, the most ‘harmful result’ of both scenarios was the ‘resulting progeny’, and in the second scenario this was combined with the ‘fearful effect of the bribe upon the unfortunate woman and her tribe, for they all participate with her in its consumption, so far as it will go around’. Herbert thought it was morally irresponsible not to try and check the opium trade, but he did point out the ‘great loss of revenue’ to the Northern Territory if laws prohibiting the trafficking of opium were enacted.³⁴ He therefore recommended extending the provisions of the Northern Territory’s own Opium Act and the deportation of international suppliers after serving a specified sentence of imprisonment – a stipulation Herbert believed necessary so that the supplier would not commit the offence in order to secure a free passage to their homeland. Herbert also advised that Aborigines needed better representation in the courts, particularly when charged with serious offences like murder.³⁵

³² Report from Protector of Aborigines, Cecil L Strangman, to Government Resident Herbert, 5 February 1908, SA State Records, GRS1 175/1908.

³³ Herbert supported most of the Queensland Act, except in one important respect – the conditions regulating Aboriginal employment. He argued that given the Northern Territory’s sparse and unpopulated districts and the limited number of protectors, it would be unfair on both pastoralists (who would find it difficult to travel long distances to find a Protector to register an Aboriginal employee every time they needed a worker) and Aborigines (because they might not get employment if the employment conditions were too onerous). Herbert recommended that proposed employers of Aborigines be registered by a Protector of Aborigines and that they fill in regular returns showing their employee’s details, conditions of service and remuneration. The Chief Protector of Aborigines should have the power to remove employer’s names from the register if there were claims of ill-treatment, inadequate wages or other reasons. Herbert thought that the ‘fear of losing the benefit of registration as an employer would be a great incentive to better treatment of Aborigines by all employers who may now incline to an opposite course’ (Correspondence from Government Resident Herbert to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 2 October 1905, SA State Records, GRS1 402/1905).

³⁴ In 1904, the duty on narcotics amounted to 9116 pounds – over one third of the NT Customs revenue and of this amount no less than 7185 pounds represents the duty collected that year on opium.

³⁵ As a Practitioner of the Courts, Herbert advised that crimes committed by Aborigines were principally due to three main causes – a) ‘Interference and immoral intercourse with lubras procured by force or voluntary prostitution’ b) ‘Detention of Aborigines in the unwilling service of the European employer – more particularly out of the employees own country’ c) ‘Cruelty practised by the employer to the Aboriginal employee’.

After considering Herbert's suggestions, the Queensland legislation, and draft Acts for both Western Australia and South Australia, the Governor of South Australia prepared 'A Bill for An Act to make provision for the better Protection and Care of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the State of South Australia and the Northern Territory' in March 1906.³⁶ The Bill defined who was to be deemed an 'Aboriginal' and set out the duties and responsibilities of an Aborigines Department and the Chief Protector and Protectors of Aborigines who staffed that Department. It made it an offence to remove Aborigines from one district to another without the written authority of a Protector. It authorised the Governor to proclaim, alter or abolish reserves for Aborigines and to lease crown lands to missions or other institutions for the benefit of Aborigines. Aborigines were to be permitted to continue hunting and gathering on 'waste lands of the Crown' and on Aboriginal reserves.

The Bill provided for the removal of Aborigines to reserves or institutions and made it an offence against the Act for any person other than an Aborigine to enter a reserve unless properly authorised. Herbert's recommendation regarding the registering of employers rather than individual employment contracts was adopted. A registration fee was payable for each employee and employers were expected to renew their registrations annually and submit returns every six months to the Protector listing their employees' names and the remuneration paid to each employee. The Chief Protector could, at his discretion, remove the name of an employer from the register. Aboriginal women and Aborigines under the age of sixteen were not permitted employment on boats. Unauthorised persons, without a lawful excuse, were not to enter an Aboriginal camp and cohabiting with Aboriginal women was an offence against the Act. The Chief Protector was required to give written permission for any person other than an Aborigine to marry an Aboriginal woman. Blankets and other articles issued to Aborigines by the Government were to remain the property of the Government and it was unlawful for Aborigines to sell or exchange these items without the permission of a Protector. It was illegal to supply Aborigines with alcohol or opium or to sell or deliver a firearm to an Aborigine who was not licenced to carry one.

³⁶ Draft Aborigines Protection Act, 1906 from George Le Hunte to The Honorable the Premier of South Australia, 21 March 1906 SA State Records, GRS1 402/1905.

Section 44 of the 1906 Bill is especially relevant to the argument of this thesis. It allowed a Protector to ‘cause any aborigines or half-castes who are camped, or about to camp, within the limits of any township or municipal district, to remove their camp or proposed camp to such a distance from such township or municipality as he may direct’. The police were empowered to assist the Protectors in this duty and Aborigines who resisted were deemed to have offended against the Act. The police and Justices of the Peace were empowered to order any Aborigine found loitering in the town or indecently clothed to leave the town. Refusal to obey such an order was an offence against the Act. The Governor was, ‘in the interest of the aborigine’, empowered to declare specific places prohibited to Aborigines without permission. The determining of an Aboriginal child’s age before the court, especially in cases of sexual abuse, was dealt with by the Justices who were empowered to use their own discretion in determining the child’s age. The Act also provided for the lawful arrest, without a warrant, of Aborigines for any offence against the provisions of the Act. The Act also ordered that, where proven, the father of any half-caste child, provide for part of the child’s upkeep if that child was being maintained in an Aboriginal institution.

Despite the dire warnings from the press that the South Australian government would ‘make the name of ‘South Australia’ the reproach it will deserve to be if the [Aboriginal] question continues to be ignored’ and a confidential letter from Government Resident Herbert urging that legislation be immediately introduced, the 1906 Bill was not presented in Parliament because of matters deemed more urgent.³⁷ However, an Opium Bill was introduced to control the supply and use of opium by

³⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 1 February 1907. Minister for the Northern Territory, L. O’Loughlin, *South Australian Register*, 17 December 1909. A *Sydney Bulletin* article published in 1905 presented Darwin as a ‘vile plague spot of rottenness and immorality which ought to be wiped off the face of Australia’ and referred specifically to the large number of Chinese in the town and the use and abuse of opium, alcohol and prostitution by the Chinese, ‘Malays’ and Aborigines (reprinted in *Northern Territory Times*, 29 September 1905). The following year a similar article listing ‘horrible particulars’ about relations between Aborigines and Chinese in the Northern Territory was published in the *Sydney Bulletin* (27 December 1906). Following the publication of this article, the *Northern Territory Times* warned that the ‘whole Native question is crying out for immediate attention and drastic action, and, unless such action is taken very soon by the South Australian Government, some journalist or other will be coming along one of these days and expose a state of affairs which will shock the world, and make the name of ‘South Australia’ the reproach it will deserve to be if the question continues to be ignored’ (*Northern Territory Times*, 1 February 1907). In Herbert’s confidential letter to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory he was specifically worried about the prostitution of Aboriginal women by persons in Government employ, the impact of sexually transmitted diseases on both the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal population and the future of children of mixed descent (Confidential correspondence from Government Resident Herbert to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 5 October 1907, SA State Records, GRS1 402/1905).

Aborigines and according to Protector of Aborigines Fulton, resulted in a ‘decided decrease with regard to [Aborigines] smoking and eating opium.’³⁸

In his 1907 annual report on the Northern Territory, Herbert again bemoaned the fact that the Northern Territory was the only part of Australia having a considerable Aboriginal population which possessed ‘no legislation worthy of a moment’s consideration’. Herbert argued that the decline in numbers of Aborigines in the settled districts could be observed year after year, and that ‘race extinction – due to disease and Aboriginal women living with non-Aboriginal men – was ‘slowly but certainly approaching’. Herbert also referred to the many times ‘during recent years it has been found necessary to take some action [in regards to Aborigines] for which no authority existed to back it’.³⁹ Herbert was specifically referring to the way he had, without legislative authority, prevented marriages between Aboriginal women and Asian men taking place. Herbert did this because he was concerned that such marriages would become ‘vogue’ and lead to the ‘tribes nearer to the larger settlements becom[ing] extinct’. Herbert chose to look at the subject in a ‘practical light’ and ‘even putting aside questions of humanity and sentiment’ argued that it was ‘better for the country to have full blooded natives in future years than half-caste Asiatics’.⁴⁰ Herbert may not have been acting entirely out of step with local Larrakia people’s wishes. In July 1903, a deputation of Larrakia were alleged to have visited the newspaper office to ‘invoke the aid of the press in laying certain grievances before the public’ which primarily concerned the lack of response from the Government Resident, the Police or the Protector of Aborigines regarding their complaints about Larrakia women going to or being taken to live with the ‘Malays and other coloured nondescripts floating around’.⁴¹

Herbert’s 1907 annual report caused debate in the South Australian parliament. The Honorable E. Lucas remarked that Herbert and his predecessors had frequently pointed out that the Aboriginal population was rapidly decreasing but the South Australian

³⁸ Report from Protector of Aborigines, Kensington Fulton, 16 February 1906, in *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1905*.

³⁹ CE Herbert, *Government Resident’s Report on the Northern Territory, 1907*.

⁴⁰ Herbert concluded his correspondence to the Minister by stating, ‘I shall be glad to have the benefit of the knowledge whether you agree as to the undesirability of mixed Asiatic and aboriginal marriages and if that be so I shall take it as an indication that I may continue to discourage and prevent them by all reasonable methods (Correspondence from Government Resident Herbert to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 22 January 1908, SA State Records, GRS1 166/1908).

⁴¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 July 1903.

government continued to neglect legislation for the protection of the Aborigines. Given that ‘white people had robbed the natives of their land and their hunting grounds, and driven them beyond the confines of civilisation’, Lucas argued that it was the coloniser’s ‘duty to place something on the statute books providing that protection which it was desirable to afford’. Lucas recommended that the 1906 Aborigines Bill be re-introduced and that, as the question was a non-party and a non-contentious one, ‘all sections of the Chamber would unite in passing legislation that would be best calculated to ameliorate the condition of the natives and protect them, not only from themselves, but from the vices of the baser men of all nationalities who frequented Palmerston and its immediate neighborhood’. The Chief Secretary assured the parliament that the Government had ‘every sympathy with the unfortunate natives’ and that the ‘Government had a Bill in type dealing with the issue’ which was expected to be presented in Parliament within the next two months.⁴² These were hollow assurances and Herbert was forced to again insist that ‘common humanity’ and ‘economic considerations’ necessitated legislation which would aid in the ‘the preservation of a people who have done much to aid, and comparatively little to obstruct, pioneering in this country, and who under a reasonable law will be of material assistance in furthering schemes for future settlement’.⁴³

A change that occurred at this time which had an impact on Aboriginal people within Darwin related to the position of Protector of Aborigines. Prior to 1908, the positions of Government Medical Officer and Protector of Aborigines were combined. Following 1908, the position of Protector of Aborigines became an independent one. WG Stretton, recently retired from a long career in the public service, took up the non-salaried role. As Deputy Protector of Aborigines at Borrooloola throughout the 1890s, Stretton had filed extensive reports about Aborigines in the McArthur River district and published an article about them in an academic journal. He was to be just as active as Protector of Aborigines in Darwin. Soon after his appointment, Stretton received instructions from the Government Resident to visit all the Aboriginal camps within the boundary of the township and warn the occupants that they must keep their camps clean ‘otherwise they would be sent out of the township’. Stretton did so and found it

⁴² Legislative Council debates reprinted in the *South Australian Advertiser*, 12 August 1908, SA State Records GRS1 402/1905.

⁴³ CE Herbert, *Government Resident’s Report on the Northern Territory, 1908*.

‘gratifying’ that within a few days of his warning a ‘great improvement was manifest’ at the camps. The Aborigines had even tried to dispose of the piles of rubbish surrounding their camp that had been ‘shunted there from the township’. Stretton believed that Aborigines who lived away from populated centres were ‘much healthier ... than those hanging about towns’ which influenced his recommendation that a ‘permanent camping ground’ be established ‘for the natives outside the boundary of the township’ and only those Aborigines who were employed be allowed in the town. Stretton did not think that this would ‘destroy the peaceful understanding that is so necessary should exist between the white settlers and the natives’.⁴⁴

Stretton was not the only one at this time who promoted the idea that Aborigines be removed from the township. In October 1909, the local District Council asked the Government Resident to remove the Larrakia from their ‘ancient tribal camping place’ at Lameroo Beach ‘in order that this might be converted into a cool retreat and place of recreation for sun-baked residents - particularly the ladies and children’.⁴⁵ Government Resident Herbert replied that ‘no sufficient reason has been advanced for acting upon this suggestion at the present time’. Furthermore:

The Larrakeyahs stood upon a different ground from the other strange tribes camped in the neighbourhood of Palmerston. The Lameroo beach had been their traditional camping ground ever since the whites first came here, and probably for long prior to that date, and to summarily eject them now - without good and sufficient reason or some satisfactory compensation - would be an arbitrary and unjust action.⁴⁶

Herbert’s reply provoked a cynical response from the Council who, ‘thank[ed] His Honor for the fullness of his reply in respect of the Council’s suggestions’ and assured him that the ‘council fully appreciated the strength and justice of the arguments used in respect of the tribal rights of the natives to Lameroo beach’.⁴⁷ The Larrakia remained on Lameroo Beach and were regularly visited by Protector of Aborigines Stretton who remained concerned with the sanitary aspects of the camp and ‘made it quite clear to

⁴⁴ Report from Protector of Aborigines, WG Stretton, 14 January 1909, *Government Resident’s Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1908*.

⁴⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 22 October 1909.

⁴⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 5 November 1909.

⁴⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 5 November 1909.

the natives that cleanliness must be strictly observed'. Stretton was also concerned with the 'number of ill-fed mangy dogs in each native camp' and while he did not want to make enemies of the Aborigines by 'indiscriminate destruction of their dogs', nevertheless recommended that the 'loathsome, ill-fed brutes ... should be put out of their misery and a better chance given to the few good animals remaining to keep in better condition'.⁴⁸

Stretton was also concerned about the increasing number of Aboriginal children of mixed descent in the Northern Territory. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the idea that Aboriginal children of mixed descent be removed from their mothers and families gained momentum. In 1898, Police Inspector Foelsche recommended that the mission stations who received financial support from the Government be compelled to take in children of mixed descent and 'civilise' them. These children would then 'make excellent servants and thus be raised above the ordinary condition of an Aboriginal'. Foelsche did not anticipate much difficulty in getting the mothers to 'give up their half-caste children for I believe any of them may be had for a bag of flour'.⁴⁹ Government Resident Dashwood agreed with Foelsche's suggestion of removing Aboriginal children of mixed descent to a mission, but doubted 'very much' whether 'the mothers of these children would willingly part with them for even a bag of flour'. Dashwood argued that even 'if they were induced to do so for that consideration, so soon as they had consumed the flour they would want the child back again'.⁵⁰ In 1902, Protector of Aborigines Goldsmith lamented that there had not been any 'effort [made] towards the improvement in the condition of the numerous half-caste children now growing up amongst us'. The following year he suggested that rather than allowing these children to 'run wild in the native camps' where they 'may in time become a danger to society', they 'be removed from their surroundings to an institution where they could be taught

⁴⁸ Report from Protector of Aborigines, WG Stretton, 21 January 1910, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1909*. In 1911 a correspondent to the local paper criticised the number of 'mangy dogs' about the town owned by Aborigines and called for their surveillance claiming that Aborigines slept with the dogs who passed on their mange and ringworm and 'when we realise that some of these blacks wash our clothes, nurse our babies, and do many other domestic duties, is it not time that someone be granted power to cull out these creatures - a mercy to the dog, and protection to human beings' (*Northern Territory Times*, 7 July 1911).

⁴⁹ Report from Police Inspector Foelsche to Government Resident Dashwood, 14 February 1898, SA State Records, GRS1 333/1898.

⁵⁰ Report from Government Resident Dashwood to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 12 July 1898, SA State Records, GRS1 333/1898.

trades and household work'.⁵¹ Government Resident Herbert also advised the Minister controlling the Northern Territory that, in any legislation enacted for Aborigines, the 'local Protector should be empowered to take if necessary forcible possession of children of mixed descent'.⁵²

Protector of Aborigines Stretton, as did many others at this time, classified Aborigines of mixed descent as a distinct race, as 'half-castes'. Although he believed they were 'a race more difficult to manage', he argued that 'every endeavour should be made to ameliorate the condition of this coming race'.⁵³ In order to monitor this 'coming race', Stretton opened a register of Aboriginal people of mixed descent which showed their 'age, sex, and extraction'. During 1909, he registered forty-eight male Aborigines and fifty-one females aged between one and twenty-five years. This he estimated to be about two thirds of the 'half-caste' population in the Northern Territory. Seventy-six percent of those registered were of European-Aboriginal descent.⁵⁴

Stretton was particularly concerned with the welfare of Aboriginal girls of mixed descent who he thought 'too good for the full-blooded native and not good enough for the white man'. Consequently, they were 'driven to seek shelter and food in the black's camps' or 'live with white or coloured men, and submit to any degradation to attain that end'.⁵⁵ Stretton appealed for 'protection and a home' for these girls which was answered, in July 1910, by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Darwin opening a 'Half-caste Orphanage' in Darwin. The Sisters offered to school the girls and teach them housework, cooking, sewing, washing and ironing. Girls could be permanently adopted or deposited at the orphanage for short periods which would entail a small fee for their upkeep. The local newspaper applauded the Sisters undertaking this 'big responsibility, and attempting a task of moral and physical regeneration and preservation which should have the sympathy of all decent-minded people of every

⁵¹ Report from Protector of Aborigines, F Goldsmith, 3 January 1902 in *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1901*; Report from Protector of Aborigines, F Goldsmith, 31 December 1903 in *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1903*.

⁵² Confidential letter from Government Resident Herbert to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 5 October 1907, SA State Records GRS1 402/1905.

⁵³ Report from Protector of Aborigines, WG Stretton, 21 January 1910, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1909*.

⁵⁴ Report from Protector of Aborigines, WG Stretton, 14 January 1909, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1908*.

creed'. With this home available, the newspaper argued that 'no half-caste girl should be permitted to grow up amidst the animal surroundings of a native camp'.⁵⁶ At this time, some Plymouth Brethren missionaries also established a home for Aboriginal children of mixed descent in Darwin.

Following the publication of a number of newspaper articles regarding 'criminal intercourse with young native girls' in Darwin and complaints from local Aboriginal men that the women were being taken away without their permission by the divers on pearling luggers, Stretton advised Government Resident Herbert of the need for the passage of an Act dealing exclusively with the protection of the Aborigines.⁵⁷ Herbert subsequently recommended to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, that he specially consider the 'question of protective legislation for Aborigines', as the Protector of Aborigines was already exerting 'all his influence to allay the trouble and remove the difficulties of the aborigines, but without legislation it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so with success'.⁵⁸

After many years of urging from politicians and the public, an Act to make provision for the better protection and control of Aborigines was read for the first time in the South Australian Parliament on 12 October 1909.⁵⁹ While this legislation was going through due parliamentary process, the Palmerston [Darwin] District Council complained to the police of the 'nuisance' caused by the 'presence of unemployed blacks in the town'. Although the Police were doing 'all in their power in rendering assistance to abate the nuisance complained of', three weeks later, the Government Resident had to use the Police Act to order 'all the male adult Aborigines about

⁵⁵ Report from Protector of Aborigines, WG Stretton, 21 January 1910, *Government Resident's Annual Report on the Northern Territory, 1909*.

⁵⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 1 July 1910.

⁵⁷ See *Sydney Star* article reprinted in the *Register*, 16 December 1909; Report from Protector of Aborigines, WG Stretton, 21 January 1910, *Government Resident's Annual Report on Northern Territory, 1909*; Correspondence from WG Stretton to Government Resident Herbert, 19 August 1909, SA State Records, GRS1 566/1909.

⁵⁸ Government Resident, 22 September 1909, SA State Records, GRS1 566/1909.

⁵⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 7 January 1910. Two Bills were introduced to the South Australian Parliament in respect of Aborigines – one was for South Australia and the other was for the Northern Territory. In response to these Bills the *South Australian Advertiser* (11 October 1910) argued that the time was now 'more than ripe for humane and effective legislation on behalf of the races who were the first inhabitants of the area now embraced within the State' and believed that it would be 'regrettable' if the administration of the Northern Territory was transferred to the Commonwealth without any legislation being introduced as the 'duty which the white men owe to the first owners of the soil cannot be lightly set aside'.

Palmerston who were not in employment that they must either obtain employment or leave the town.⁶⁰

On 7 December 1910, 'An Act to make Provision for the Better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Northern Territory, and for other purposes' was enacted - only a few weeks before the Commonwealth Government assumed responsibility for the Northern Territory.⁶¹ This legislation signified an abrupt end to the chronic political inaction which characterised the South Australian government's treatment of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. This legislation finally legally empowered the colonial authorities to take control of Aboriginal people's lives which had significant consequences for the town Aboriginal population – particularly in terms of controlling their living places, their movement about the township and their interactions with each other and their European and Asian associates.

The Act contained almost identical provisions to those in the 1906 Bill discussed previously. While the intention of the legislation remained the same, the wording of the title of the Act was crucially different in one respect. The 1906 Bill was for the better protection and *care* of Aborigines while the 1910 Act was for their better protection and *control*. The Act contained provisions for establishing an 'Aboriginals Department' charged with the seemingly contradictory tasks of 'controlling' and 'promoting' the welfare of Aborigines. The Act and the Department were to be administered by a specially appointed Chief Protector who automatically became the 'legal guardian of every aboriginal and half-caste child, notwithstanding that any such child has a parent or other relative living, until such child attains the age of eighteen years'. Under the Act, any Aborigine could be removed to or kept within the boundaries of any reserve or institution - refusal to be moved was an offence against the Act; unauthorised persons could not enter a place where Aborigines were camped and Crown lands could be reserved for the use of Aborigines. It became illegal to remove Aborigines from one district to another without the Protector's authority. The Protector had to give permission for marriages between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men. The Act contained similar employment regulations to those discussed in the 1906

⁶⁰ See *Northern Territory Times*, 20 May 1910 and Correspondence from Acting Government Resident, 2 June 1910, NTRS F790 18937/1910.

⁶¹ Austin 1992, p93.

Bill. Blankets, bedding, clothing and other property issued by the Government to Aborigines were to remain the property of the Government and it was an offence to sell or dispose of this property without the sanction of a Protector. In terms of the impact of the Act on Aboriginal people within the town, protectors, assisted by police, could prevent the formation of Aboriginal camps or direct Aborigines to move their camps to a certain distance from a township; the Governor could declare towns prohibited areas for unemployed 'aborigines and half-castes'; and the police could order any 'aboriginal or half-caste' found 'loitering' or 'not decently clothed' to leave the town⁶² Any persons convicted of offences against the Act were liable to a fine not exceeding twenty pounds or to imprisonment with or without hard labour for up to six months. Aborigines of mixed descent were subject to all the regulations detailed above. Specific regulations regarding 'half-castes' were solely concerned with ensuring that, where paternity could be proved and where the defendant was financially viable, the father of any 'half-caste' child in a Government institution was financially responsible for the child.

The passage of this legislation and the plans of the Commonwealth to create the infrastructure necessary to implement the legislation generated further debate about the 'Aboriginal problem' in the pages of the local newspaper.⁶³ 'New Chum' wrote to the newspaper demanding to know what the 'Blackfellow's Act' was all about because, there was 'such a lot of talk about it all over the country just now, but nobody seems to have the proper hang of it'.⁶⁴ 'Evol' criticised the proposed appointment of southerners to the new positions in the Aborigines Department, claiming, 'we can get the right men for the right place right here every time – honest, sober, sunproof, married men'.⁶⁵ Even so, the Aborigines Department was made up of 'southerners'. The Chief Protector was Herbert Basedow and his staff comprised Medical Officers, R Burston and MJ Holmes and Inspectors, JH Kelly and JT Beckett. When the steamer carrying the officers of the Aborigines Department arrived in Darwin harbour, most of the unemployed Aborigines allegedly hurried out of town while those who remained 'kept

⁶² See CD Rowley, 1970. *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, Aboriginal Policy and Practice - Volume 1*, ANU Press, Canberra and Austin 1992 & 1997 for further discussion of the provisions and exemptions under this Act.

⁶³ See *Northern Territory Times* on the following dates 24 March 1911, 7 April 1911, 14 April 1911, 21 April 1911, 28 April 1911, 5 May 1911, 30 June 1911, 21 July 1911, 22 December 1911.

⁶⁴ See *Northern Territory Times*, 28 April 1911.

⁶⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 2 June 1911.

well out of the way, and regarded the newcomers with suspicion and openly expressed disfavour'. 'Wild rumours' had apparently been circulated in Darwin regarding the work of the Aborigines department. The Inspectors would round up all Aborigines, employed or unemployed, and the 'doctors would cut them open to see what was inside of them' before 'driving them off into the bush'.⁶⁶

The new Chief Protector of Aborigines was not completely devoid of experience with Aborigines in the Northern Territory. Basedow had previously assisted the Government Geologist, HYL Brown, on geological explorations of the Northern Territory coastline and recorded ethnographic information, particularly about the Larrakia people, during these explorations.⁶⁷ Following his appointment as Chief Protector, Basedow recognised that in order to prepare a scheme for the protection, systematic employment and medical supervision of Aborigines, he needed his officers to conduct an immediate investigation into the condition of Aborigines in Darwin.⁶⁸ The resulting reports from the inspectors and protectors offer a glimpse of the Aboriginal landscape of Darwin in mid-1911.

Medical Officers, Burston and Holmes and Inspectors, Beckett and Kelly, both found that the Larrakia 'tribe', 'in whose tribal district Darwin is situated', were the largest group resident in town although understood that 'tribes extending over a very wide radius' were also represented. The Medical Officers and Inspectors acknowledged that there were few Aborigines in their camps at the time of their initial inspections. Burston and Holmes thought that this was because they were either at work in the town or out bush with the buffalo hunters, while Beckett and Kelly thought that the fright induced among the Aborigines by 'deliberate misrepresentations' of the Aborigines Department was the cause of their absence.

Burston and Holmes visited eight Aboriginal camps in Darwin. The Larrakia tribe were gathered in two camps situated a quarter of a mile to the west of the town, one being on a cliff and the other on the beach below it - known respectively as King Camp

⁶⁶ *South Australian Advertiser*, 14 August 1911.

⁶⁷ Herbert Basedow, 1907. 'Anthropological Notes on the Western Coastal Tribes of the Northern Territory of South Australia', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, vol. 31.

⁶⁸ Memorandum to Inspectors of Aborigines from H Basedow, 18 July 1911, Mitchell Library, MSS 161/1 (11).

and Lameroo Camp.⁶⁹ Each of these Larrakia camps consisted of half a dozen iron and bark ‘shanties’ enclosing a central open area – an arrangement not dissimilar to that described by Parkhouse in the early 1890s. Of the twenty or so adults and the numerous children found in the camp, there was no ‘disease’ evident, except that one elderly woman had ‘leucoderma’ on the palms of both her hands. Aborigines from the Daly, Alligator and Adelaide Rivers regions were also living in various camps about the town. Some Daly River Aborigines were camped on a beach at the site of the old ice works. A small camp of Alligator Rivers Aborigines was half a mile to the north-east of the town and another one a half mile north of this one. The Wulna were camped about a mile north of the town and there were a few small collections of Aborigines on Fort Hill and on the vacant town allotments.⁷⁰ Most of these camps were found to be ‘fairly clean’ with old tins and rubbish being removed away a short distance and ‘no appreciable odour’ being detected about any of the camps. The medicos concluded their ‘preliminary inspection’ by claiming that ‘the aborigines about Darwin appear to be fairly free from serious disease and to be well conditioned and contented’.⁷¹

Beckett and Kelly surveyed the town Aboriginal population and concluded that the approximate number of Aborigines in the immediate area was 225 – most of whom were ‘contented and well fed’.⁷² In stark contrast to the newspaper portrayals of lazy, opium smoking, drunks, prostitutes and pimps, Beckett described the Aborigines in Darwin who were in constant contact with whites as, ‘docile submissive people, who, in spite of the many aspersions cast upon them by detractors in other states render

⁶⁹ Spencer 1913, ‘General Policy in Regard to Aborigines’, *Northern Territory Annual Report 1912*. Spencer also recorded that the name of the Lameroo Beach camp was ‘Nim-birra’ and the camp above it was ‘Gwi-ambirra’ (WB Spencer, 1912. ‘An introduction to the study of certain native tribes of the Northern Territory’, *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*). TA Parkhouse also recorded in 1895 that ‘Nimbirra’ was the Larrakia’s name for the Darwin beach camp (SAR Journal [South Australian Rail] Palmerston Line, South Australian Museum AA 247).

⁷⁰ The inspectors also visited a camp of Larrakia people across the harbour near the Point Charles lighthouse.

⁷¹ Report from Medical Inspectors of Aborigines, S. Roy Burston & Mervyn J Holmes, to Herbert Basedow, 27 July 1911, CRS A1/1 12/10964.

⁷² In 1911, the census figures for Darwin within a five mile radius were:- European (male 224, female 150), Japanese (male 77, female 4), Filipinos (male 52, female 4), ‘half-Filipinos’ (male 13, female 8), ‘half-caste’ Aborigines (male 30, female 28), Chinese (364 male, 78 female), ‘half-Chinese’ (4 male), ‘Malays’ (21 male, 3 female), Javanese (7 male), Timorese (49 males), Siamese (4 males), Cingalese (5 males), South Sea Islander (5 males), ‘half-Samoan’ (1 female), ‘Eurasian’ (1 male), Fijians (2 males), ‘Zanzebar Negroes’ (2 males), ‘full blooded’ Aborigines (145 males 102 females). Altogether making a total of 1387 people (Northern Territory, 1911. Taking of the Census, CRS A1 1911/16191 NT).

excellent service in return for the pittance doled out to them'.⁷³ On average these employees received two shillings per week together with food and clothes. Beckett even considered the Aborigines he described as 'rouseabouts' gave good value for the wages they received. During their inspection, Beckett and Kelly heard much critical comment about expensive and 'useless' Aboriginal employees. However, they failed to meet 'one employer of aboriginal labour who was not anxious to retain the services of those blacks employed by him or her'.⁷⁴ Beckett criticised the lack of systematic training offered to Aboriginal employees but was enthusiastic about their potential, claiming that those who had received training had been in the 'service of their masters' for many years (some for fifteen or twenty).⁷⁵ Aboriginal women who had received domestic training were observed to be making a 'primitive attempt' to create 'homes' of their own, complete with pans, mugs and camp ovens. Some of the Aborigines in long term employment had 'even conquered the almost irresistible habit of taking a periodical "walk about longa bush"' and had 'settled down to live upon the premises of their employees and avoid visiting the camp'.⁷⁶

Beckett believed that most of the Aborigines in Darwin wanted to work but there was not enough work for them all. It was this that led to them 'assembling about the town' and forming a 'vicious association' with 'unscrupulous Asiatic people ... who have debased the aboriginals by means of opium and drink'. The women in particular were 'ruined physically and morally' and Beckett and Kelly argued that abortion was 'largely responsible for the decrease in the strength of tribes dwindling all too rapidly away'. Beckett understood that many Aborigines who had acquired the desire for opium and alcohol, prostituted the women to obtain these substances. Kelly and Beckett's solutions to this situation was to impose 'severe penalties on Aborigines found in Asian settlements or associating with an Asian without a permit or sufficient

⁷³ Report from Inspector of Aborigines, JT Beckett, to H Basedow on an inspection carried out on 18th instant by himself and Inspector Kelly amongst the Aborigines living at and in the vicinity of Darwin, 29 July 1911, CRS A1 1912/10964.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ For example, a thirty-two year old Larrakia man named 'George' had been employed by the storekeeper, PR Allen, for 16 years (Undated report in Herbert Basedow's paper, Mitchell Library, MSS 161/1 (11)).

⁷⁶ Report from Inspector of Aborigines, JT Beckett to Herbert Basedow, 29 July 1911, CRS A1 1912/10964.

reason'.⁷⁷ Unemployed Aborigines were to be placed 'upon tracts of good country where they could be taught to work by Government officers'. According to Beckett, many Aborigines were 'anxious to take their places in such work'.⁷⁸ Beckett and Kelly later outlined an agricultural scheme which would not only assist Aborigines, but 'relieve Darwin of the eyesores which fringe the town in the shape of dirty and unsanitary native camps infested by vermin and dogs which are worse than vermin' – a contradiction to the medical inspectors' observations of the cleanliness of the Aboriginal camps in Darwin.⁷⁹

For Kelly and Beckett, '[e]verything in the habits and modes of living of the aborigines around Darwin' suggested that, 'should the Government decide to do so little difficulty would be experienced in placing all of the unemployed natives upon a suitable settlement where they might be taught to assist themselves to be largely independent'.⁸⁰ This latter comment is rather ironic given that it was Aboriginal people's independence and autonomous lifestyles that was considered the real problem in the town. While some Aborigines may have desired work, Beckett had only a limited experience with town Aborigines and may not have appreciated that they would have known that the precondition to them being able to remain in the town was their being employed and therefore, that their claims regarding their desire for employment were platitudes designed for his unsuspecting ears. Unemployed Aborigines who were in the town to obtain opium and alcohol may have been politically savvy enough to know that their presence and behaviour was deemed undesirable by the white settlers and so orchestrated their responses to Beckett accordingly.⁸¹

Chief Protector Basedow consequently drafted a scheme for the 'supervision' and 'employment' of Aborigines which required a large staff of protectors, medical officers,

⁷⁷ Report from Inspectors of Aborigines, JH Kelly & JT Beckett, to Chief Protector of Aborigines, 11 August 1911, CRS A1/1 12/10964.

⁷⁸ Report from Inspector of Aborigines, JT Beckett to Herbert Basedow, 29 July 1911, CRS A1 1912/10964.

⁷⁹ Report from Inspectors of Aborigines, JH Kelly & JT Beckett, to Chief Protector of Aborigines, 11 August 1911, CRS A1/1 12/10964.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ That Beckett soon reached a better understanding of Aboriginal people's aptitude for wiliness is shown in his observation of how the threat of exile to an island was regarded by Aborigines in a 'humorous spirit' because they knew the Department was short of a boat and watched those boats plying between Darwin and Melville Island. When one was in port, those Aborigines who knew they would be on the

inspectors, superintendents of reserves, teachers of education, craft, trade and domestic subjects, stockmen, 'intelligent half-caste and Aboriginal overseers' and an indefinite number of 'Native Attendants'. Basedow recommended that individual tribes be allocated reserves of between 250 and 2500 square kilometres which were to be run as government stations under the control of a superintendent.⁸² Basedow recommended that Aborigines in Darwin be given the 'opportunity to continue their primitive desires for sport' by fishing. They could then supply the general community with fish which would be bought at a fixed rate and the proceeds paid into respective funds.⁸³ '[T]rapping, netting and hunting' might also be undertaken for a similar purpose. Basedow suggested that the Larrakia Reserve be selected on the sea front adjoining the Darwin Botanic Gardens where some 'neatly clad' Aborigines could be employed as attendants and watchmen in the garden. These Aborigines could 'assist in keeping the grounds tidy, and do any little odd duties in connection therewith'. If they were 'neatly and systematically dressed' they would also provide 'an additional attraction for visiting travellers'. Basedow envisaged this reserve being an auxiliary one for the more 'civilised and educated' Larrakia, while the main reserve would be established further away from the town.⁸⁴

Basedow also advocated the establishment of an institution for the 'adequate housing, settlement, employment and supervision' of Aborigines of mixed descent. It was to be established ten miles out of Darwin, on country suitable for agriculture and run by a Superintendent who would ideally be a 'middle-aged, married man'. All work on the settlement was to be done by the 'half-caste inhabitants'.⁸⁵ In response to this proposal, the Acting Northern Territory Administrator, SJ Mitchell, recommended that the first work to be done was for the police to 'gather in all half caste children who are living

deportation list, went bush until the boat was gone (Report of Inspector Beckett, *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1913*).

⁸² Austin 1997, pp29-30.

⁸³ As part of Basedow's scheme he proposed establishing individual bank accounts for Aborigines into which their wages would be paid. This was vastly different from the Trust Fund scheme which was eventually instituted where all the money was paid into the one fund and if an individual Aboriginal was lost sight of the money would revert to consolidated revenue (Austin 1997, p30).

⁸⁴ Extract from an incomplete report in Basedow's collection titled 'Scheme for the Protection, Medical Supervision and Systematic Employment of the Australian Aborigines', 5 July 1911, Dept of External Affairs to Chief Protector and Chief Medical Inspector H Basedow. Mitchell Library, MSS 161/1 (4).

⁸⁵ Correspondence from Chief Protector of Aborigines, Herbert Basedow, to the Acting Administrator, SJ Mitchell, 31 July 1911, CRS A1 1911/18824. With the transfer of the Northern Territory to Commonwealth Government control the title and position of the Government Resident was abolished.

with aborigines'.⁸⁶ Mitchell had previously described the 'half-caste problem' as a difficult one but argued that 'every half-caste child found with immoralised aborigines should be put into an industrial School'. Mitchell thought that the mothers of the children who were taken may suffer 'mental pain', but believed that Aborigines did not have the 'lasting depth of feeling' which Europeans had in parting from their children. Besides, he believed that whatever grief was borne by the mother, it was in the 'best interests of the half-caste child that it shall come under the influence of training and discipline at an early age and that it, if a girl, be surrounded as early as possible with the protection of the law'.⁸⁷ The anthropologist, WB Spencer, agreed with this proposal to withdraw all 'half-caste children from native camps'. However, rather than establishing them in a separate institution near Darwin, Spencer suggested distributing them amongst the various mission stations.⁸⁸

A combination of administrative, legislative and political obstacles resulted in Basedow resigning within a month of taking up his position.⁸⁹ While awaiting the arrival of Baldwin Spencer as the new Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines, the main duty of the Aborigines Department was to keep unemployed Aborigines out of Darwin. To accomplish this, Inspector Beckett convened a meeting of the 'influential members' of the 'Larrakeyah, Woolner, Wargite & Alligator tribes' who agreed to 'camp in amity on a piece of crown land ... nearly two miles from the town and to keep away from the town at night and when not at work'. Beckett advised that the 'whole cost of the removal of the blacks from the vicinity of the town' would not 'exceed a few cases of iron and one man's labour for a week or two'. Given the onset

The chief administrative position in the Northern Territory was now held by the Northern Territory Administrator.

⁸⁶ Correspondence from Acting Administrator, SJ Mitchell, to the Minister for External Affairs, 12 September 1911, CRS A1 1911/18824.

⁸⁷ Correspondence from Acting Administrator, SJ Mitchell, to the Minister for External Affairs, 20 January 1911, CRS A1 1911/2848.

⁸⁸ Correspondence from WB Spencer, 6 November 1911, CRS A1 1911/18824.

⁸⁹ One of Basedow's proposals that was rejected by the Government was to permanently inscribe Aborigines with their own 'mark of recognition'. This would be registered by the Aborigines Department to aid in their easy identification. Traditional Aboriginal methods of skin raising were to be used to make these 'identification marks', which were to be in an 'inconspicuous place' and described by Basedow as superficial, painless and not exceeding one or two inches. Basedow was disappointed that his proposal was not accepted by the Government and declared that this would make his work more difficult as he had no means of easily identifying Aborigines (Correspondence from Herbert Basedow to the Acting Minister for External Affairs, 6 May 1911, CRS A1/1 1911/8705; Correspondence from Herbert Basedow to Acting Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 19 May 1911, CRS A1/1 1911/8705).

of the wet season, Beckett thought it ‘unjust to compel the natives to leave their camps’ without offering them some help to re-erect their shelters. He enthused that the expense this would entail would be offset by the ‘gain to the town in peace and cleanliness’⁹⁰ The editor of the newspaper applauded Beckett’s proposal, declaring that it would finally ‘enable that ancient aboriginal camping ground - Lameroo Beach - to be cleaned up and transformed into a pleasant recreation resort for sun-baked and weary townsfolk’. The editor claimed that this was the ‘first step in an attempt to realise the *ideal* of keeping the natives out of the town during the night time’, but tempered his satisfaction by claiming that moving Aborigines further away from the town would be ‘a good thing for the aboriginal’s themselves’. No coercion was to be used in the matter and the Aborigines were allegedly quite agreeable to move to new camping grounds on the ‘assurance that the authorities will assist in making “new feller house”’.⁹¹

WB Spencer arrived in Darwin to take up the position of Chief Protector of Aborigines on 15 January 1912. Spencer had vast experience with Aborigines in Central Australia and had spent time working with Aborigines across the Northern Territory the previous year as the leader of the Commonwealth’s Preliminary Scientific Expedition to the Northern Territory.⁹² During the scientific expedition, Spencer spent time with the Larrakia in their camp on Lameroo Beach. He found their houses ‘miserable’ but believed the overall setting quite picturesque with the overhanging trees, the blue sea and the dug-out canoes on the beach. A few days later, Spencer described their dwellings somewhat differently. Now he saw them as ‘wonderful structures made up of sheets of bark and old corrugated iron’. Even so, he found the ‘filth and dirt’ ‘simply indescribable’ and, like Stretton, objected to the dogs in the camp which were ‘miserable, and just as much a part of the family as the piccaninnies’.⁹³

⁹⁰ Correspondence from Protector of Aborigines, JT Beckett to His Honour the Acting Administrator, 8 December 1911, CRS A1/1 12/10964.

⁹¹ Emphasis added. *Northern Territory Times*, 8 December 1911.

⁹² By the time Spencer came to the Top End of the Northern Territory he had developed a keen interest in Aborigines. In 1894, he was the biologist and photographer for the Horn Scientific Expedition and ethnography soon became his passion. He made further visits to Central Australia throughout the late 1890s and then in 1901 he travelled, with Francis Gillen, through large parts of the Northern Territory undertaking a major anthropological investigation (Austin 1997, p32). See also DJ Mulvaney and JH Calaby, 1985. ‘So much that is new’: Baldwin Spencer 1860-1929, Melbourne.

⁹³ WB Spencer Diaries, 16-26 June 1911, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

The scientific expedition made a number of recommendations regarding Aboriginal people. Aborigines in settled districts should be kept separate from the 'evil' influence of the Chinese; any attempt to civilise Aborigines should be concerned mainly with the children and; a comprehensive study of the Aboriginal tribes in the Northern Territory should be made for both humanitarian and scientific reasons.⁹⁴ Spencer's experiences with the expedition influenced the changes he would make in Darwin when he became Chief Protector of Aborigines. Prior to taking up his appointment, he decided that Chinatown, in the heart of Darwin, would become a prohibited area to Aborigines. He also drafted new regulations for the Aborigines Act which allowed the Chief Protector to take Aborigines into custody and remove them from the control of whites; made it easier to remove employment licences from employers of Aboriginal labour; and toughened restrictions on non-Aboriginal entry to reserves and Aborigines entry to prohibited areas.⁹⁵

Spencer's wet season arrival in Darwin made him confine his work to the settled districts with special attention being paid to Darwin, Pine Creek and the various settlements along the railway line where he was determined to make 'every endeavour ... to abolish the pernicious association of aboriginals with Asiatics'.⁹⁶ Like those before him, Spencer held that the greatest difficulty and 'source of evil' in dealing with Aborigines around Darwin and the other settlements was the 'presence of a large number of undesirable Chinese and Malays' and their provision of alcohol and opium to Aborigines to 'obtain possession of the lubras for immoral purposes'.⁹⁷ In order to deal with this 'evil', Aborigines were to be totally prohibited from entering 'Chinese or Malay' premises and Chinese and Malays were to be prevented from entering Aboriginal camps. Spencer thought there would be 'great difficulty' in implementing the prohibited areas regulation but believed that 'firm treatment' would soon show both Aborigines and the Chinese that it was 'advisable to keep them apart'. Spencer's determination to separate Asians from Aborigines was not because he was unaware that

⁹⁴ For a discussion of the recommendations of the Commonwealth Scientific Expedition see Austin 1997, pp31-3 and McGregor 1997, p68.

⁹⁵ Austin 1997, p34; WB Spencer's preliminary proposals and suggestions re NT Aborigines Act 1910, 7 November 1911, CRS A1 1912/2937; WB Spencer Diaries, 30 January 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

⁹⁶ Correspondence from Chief Protector of Aborigines, WB Spencer, to the Minister for External Affairs, 17 January 1912, CRS A1/1 12/10964.

⁹⁷ Undated document page headed 'Removal of Camps' by WB Spencer, CRS A1/1 12/10964.

Europeans also engaged in prostitution with Aboriginal women, but because he believed that this sexual intercourse did not result in the same ‘physical degradation’ of the women as occurred with the Chinese.⁹⁸ As mentioned above, the greatest number of ‘half-caste’ children in Darwin were of European-Aboriginal descent. Spencer believed it was the practice of abortion that led to this ‘physical degradation’ but does not explain why this only, allegedly, occurred with the Chinese.⁹⁹

The first day that the law declaring Chinatown a prohibited area came into force, Spencer sent a police inspector and two constables to patrol the area. However, only six Aborigines ventured into the prohibited area. Four were ‘innocent of any deliberate defiance’, one woman was ‘so stupid with opium that she did not know what she was doing so we brought her before a magistrate and sent her to the gaol hospital’ and a man was sent to gaol for the day without any tobacco to ‘think over things’.¹⁰⁰ On the fourth day of Chinatown being a prohibited area Spencer remarked, ‘There is no sign of a native in Chinatown where everything is quiet and peaceful. We have certainly made a change for the better in Darwin’.¹⁰¹

Even so, Spencer soon found it difficult to exert any control over Aborigines ‘who required restraint’. Although the Act allowed the Chief Protector to contain an Aboriginal person within the boundaries of a reserve or institution, there was no such place ‘in which detention was practicable’. Spencer consequently requested the reservation of an Island ‘free from any chance of interference by whites or coloured people’ to send intractable Aborigines.¹⁰² In the meantime, he used the Bathurst Island mission station, north of Darwin, as a detention centre. One Aboriginal woman in particular was giving the Department ‘a lot of trouble’, apparently because she chose to live with a ‘Malay’ rather than with her Aboriginal husband. However, on the day that Spencer arranged to deport her she was ‘spirited away by some Malay men’. Spencer declared, ‘It is only a question of time and we will find her and then she will go to gaol

⁹⁸ Even so, Spencer was emphatic in his recommendation that only married men be appointed Protectors of Aborigines.

⁹⁹ WB Spencer, 1913. ‘Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory’, *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1912*.

¹⁰⁰ WB Spencer Diaries, 9 February 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹⁰¹ Spencer Diaries, 12 February 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹⁰² Undated document page headed ‘Removal of Camps’ by WB Spencer, CRS A1/1 12/10964.

for a time just to show her and her friends that they cannot do what they like'.¹⁰³ Just over two weeks later, Spencer reported that the Aborigines were 'much impressed' with the Department's enforcement of the Prohibited areas regulation and 'not one of them ventures inside Chinatown'. He described the effect of putting two Aboriginal people in the 'lock-up' as 'simply wonderful' and the 'surprise' of the local 'lubras [who] thought that we could not do anything with them' when a 'particularly objectionable lady' who had 'defied' the Department was caught and sent away to a mission station on an island where she was to 'remain for some time with plenty of opportunity to think things over quietly'.¹⁰⁴

Two weeks after Spencer arrived in Darwin and began implementing the legislation, he acknowledged that he was 'running up against a good number of people' in his enforcement of the regulations, but resolutely declared that it did 'not matter and in the course of a month or two I hope to have cleaned things up in Darwin'.¹⁰⁵ In early February 1912, Spencer met with a delegation of local Chinese merchants who wanted to amend the section of the Aborigines Act which prohibited Asians from employing Aborigines. There were a few 'Asiatic employers' whom Spencer thought could be granted licences, but most of them worked and lived in the prohibited area of Chinatown.¹⁰⁶ Given that Spencer's prime goal was to reduce Aborigines contact with 'Asiatics', he declined to amend the Act. In what seems a grossly unfair act, Spencer recognised that a few 'reputable white settlers' lived in prohibited areas, so to 'prevent any hardship or inconvenience in business matters', he introduced a system where authorised employers could get permits for their Aboriginal employees to go into Chinatown on business. Aboriginal employees would have to carry a brass disc with a number on it.¹⁰⁷

Spencer considered the editor of the *Northern Territory Times* his 'chief enemy'.¹⁰⁸ On 16 February 1912, the editor wrote that local Aborigines 'seem hardly to know how to regard the paternal interest which is being taken in their welfare by the all powerful Protector'. Some regarded the enforcement of the prohibited areas restrictions with

¹⁰³ WB Spencer Diaries, 6 February 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹⁰⁴ WB Spencer Diaries, 23 February 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹⁰⁵ WB Spencer Diaries, 30 January 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹⁰⁶ WB Spencer Diaries, 9 February 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹⁰⁷ WB Spencer Diaries, 15 February 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

‘fear and dislike’. Others apparently recognised the ‘good motive underlying autocratic action. As one old “flour-bag” tersely put it, “Me savee that one all right” him want to stop ‘im blackpeller catch ‘em grog and opium longa Chinaman’.¹⁰⁹ The editor also described the regulation which gave the Chief Protector power to arrest and detain any Aboriginal for any period of time without being charged as an ‘insane and ridiculous clause’. This clause ‘gave more power to the Chief Protector than the Northern Territory Administrator, the Governor-General or the King of England’.¹¹⁰

A few months later, under the heading ‘Protection or Prosecution’, the editor described the Aborigines Act as a ‘masterpiece of despotic legislation, an Act which places in the hands of one formidable man more power than any one mortal should be entrusted with’.¹¹¹ This editorial was provoked by the Aborigines Department sending two young Aboriginal boys from Darwin to a pastoralist in Western Australia. The editor described how the ‘evident misery of both, and the weeping, both at Darwin and at Wyndham, of at least one of the boys, spoke eloquently enough of their view of the notion of their “Protectors”’. Given the Department’s intention to educate Aboriginal children and preserve ‘as far as possible, the tribal life of the natives’, the editor argued that the action of sending the two boys ‘almost as far as possible from school, and separating them completely from their relatives and friends’ was ‘inexplicably contradictory and heartlessly cruel’.¹¹²

These two boys had been resident at the Plymouth Brethren Mission in Darwin. However, the mission was closed in April 1912 and the seventeen children who were there were found alternate accommodation by the Aborigines Department. Spencer’s actions regarding the closure of this mission shows his determination to implement the Aborigines Act. The Plymouth Brethren missionaries, Mr and Mrs Barry, had established a mission and school for Aboriginal children of full and mixed descent in Darwin in 1911. In November 1911, the Barrys applied to the Acting Administrator, SJ Mitchell, for an area of land about five kilometres away from the town centre. They were ‘keenly alive to the evils attendant on the blacks living in or near the town’ and

¹⁰⁸ WB Spencer Diaries, 15 February 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹⁰⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 16 February 1912.

¹¹⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 16 February 1912.

¹¹¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 31 May 1912.

wanted to ‘get the children as far from the bad influences as we can and still be able to rely on reaching them’. If the missionaries were allocated this land, they would devote their energies to building an ‘industrial mission’ in recognition that, ‘making the native a useful member of the community is the first step to his uplifting’.¹¹³ Neither Mitchell nor Spencer thought much of the Barrys’ proposal nor their running of the mission and, consequently, did not support their application for land.¹¹⁴ Spencer examined Barry’s mission and decided that, compared to the Convent run by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the Plymouth Brethren Mission was ‘hopeless’ and he ‘had to condemn it’. Spencer described Mr Barry as ‘a little weak creature who has no control whatever over the children - in fact they have sometimes taken the law into their own hands and chastised him’.¹¹⁵ The lack of success of their application for land and Spencer’s order that Mr Barry must send the children in his care to the State School resulted in the Barrys’ decision to disband the mission. The Aborigines Department took on the task of finding alternate housing and ‘control’ of the children from the mission.¹¹⁶

Whether the Plymouth Brethren Mission should have remained open or not is not the point of this story. What is important is the way that Spencer treated the father of three of the children in the Barrys’ mission. The Larrakia man, Billy Shepherd, had entrusted the care of his children to the Barrys, paying them a small amount for their upkeep. Shepherd worked full time for the Northern Territory Administrator and his wife was suffering from a mental illness and was unable to care for the children. When the mission closed, Shepherd tried to take charge of his children but was allegedly told by Spencer, ‘Clear out; you have nothing to do with them, we look after them’.¹¹⁷ This

¹¹² One of these boys was Larrakia and the other was described as a ‘half-caste’ (*Northern Territory Times*, 31 May 1912).

¹¹³ Correspondence from AM Barry to the Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory, SJ Mitchell, 27 November 1911, CRS A1 1912/9487.

¹¹⁴ See Correspondence from SJ Mitchell, Acting Administrator to the Minister for External Affairs, 12 September 1911, CRS A1 1911/18824; WB Spencer’s Diaries, 2 March 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4; Correspondence from Josiah Thomas to JK McDougall Esq MP, Parliament House, 12 July 1912, CRS A1 1912/9487.

¹¹⁵ In later correspondence, Spencer again claimed that the children were uncontrollable – ‘They frequently for example, boys and girls together, held corroborees together naked and painted in the scrub adjacent to the mission station long after midnight’ (Correspondence from Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines, WB Spencer, to the Minister for External Affairs, 9 April 1912, CRS A1 1912/9487).

¹¹⁶ Correspondence from Josiah Thomas to JK McDougall Esq MP, Parliament House, 12 July 1912, CRS A1 1912/9487.

¹¹⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 5 April 1912.

provoked an angry letter to the editor of the newspaper from Isaac Bennett who claimed that Spencer's action 'defies comment'. Bennett accepted that 'neglected children' could be taken from their parents but 'a lawful father who is willing to pay for the care of his children shall be denied all right to them - this passes the limit'.¹¹⁸ Spencer denied this charge, arguing that Billy Shepherd was 'an alcoholic' and his wife 'practically an imbecile and entirely unable to undertake any supervision of the children'. Spencer also criticised Shepherd's rejection of an offer from a Protector of Aborigines in Katherine, three hundred kilometres south of Darwin, to adopt his son Robert and his choice to 'hand him over to a man who is the contractor for the removal of nightsoil with whom he would live in deplorable surroundings'.¹¹⁹ While Spencer snubbed residency with a nightsoil contractor, it was obviously a preferable solution for Billy Shepherd and his family to have the twelve year old Robert remain close to them in town.

What is even more remarkable about Spencer's treatment of Shepherd is that Spencer already knew Shepherd well. Billy Shepherd had been working at Government House for around ten years when the Commonwealth Scientific Expedition came to the Territory. Prior to that he had worked for Justice CE Herbert. Shepherd was chosen to accompany the Scientific Expedition on their journey to Roper River. It is unlikely that someone whom Spencer dismissed as an alcoholic would have been chosen for the job. Shepherd may have enjoyed a drink, but Spencer may have been playing into the notion that Aborigines in towns were drunkards and wasters in his defence to the Minister over his actions. Spencer and Shepherd obviously formed some bond during the expedition because on Spencer's arrival in Darwin to take up his position as Chief Protector, Shepherd came to meet him off the ship, 'As soon as he caught sight of me there was a huge grin so I gave him my little bag with all my valuables in to take up to the hotel'.¹²⁰ That Spencer could, only a few months later, treat Shepherd and his family in this way, is indicative of Spencer's determination to show both the Aborigines in town and the

¹¹⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, 5 April 1912.

¹¹⁹ Correspondence from Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines, WB Spencer, to Minister for External Affairs, 9 April 1912, CRS A1 1912/9487.

¹²⁰ WB Spencer Diaries, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

whites who rejected such autocratic behaviour that he was determined to make changes in Darwin.¹²¹

Public criticism of the Aborigines Department in the local newspaper lessened considerably from April. This coincided with Spencer having an ‘unfortunate accident’ which left him unable to walk for nearly two months and confined to Darwin and routine work.¹²² In a distinct turnaround, the editor of the *Northern Territory Times* became more concerned with criticising the policy of the government rather than the officers charged with implementing the policy. The editor described the ‘failure of Australia to do its duty to the black race throughout the continent, which the progress of settlement has displaced and contaminated’ as ‘one of the dark blots of our history’. Furthermore, the Aborigines immediate extermination ‘by means of the bullet’ could not be ‘more painful nor more disgraceful to the country than the long-drawn-out death by disease and vice with which the sight of the black’s camps adjacent to hundreds of Australian towns has familiarised us’.¹²³

The Kahlin Compound

Spencer’s major concern as Chief Protector was restricting the interactions between Asians and Aborigines, but another important change that he made in Darwin was the removal of Aboriginal camps from within the township. A couple of days after his arrival in Darwin, Spencer visited the Aborigines living on Lameroo Beach and told them that he was going to ‘move them all to another beach’. In his diaries, Spencer wrote that the Aborigines’ residency in Darwin was ‘very bad for them’. In other correspondence, his stated reason for their removal was ‘in order to secure [their] better supervision and to remove the natives from the immediate proximity of the

¹²¹ Billy Shepherd worked at Government House for over forty years. He accompanied the Northern Territory Administrator, JA Gilruth, on many of his exploratory trips overland by motor car. The trust shown in him as an employee is evident in the NT Administrator Gilruth’s photograph collection – this is particularly evident in the photographs of Shepherd hand in hand with the Gilruth’s small daughter (see Samantha Wells (ed), 2001. *Saltwater People: Larrakia Stories from around Darwin*, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Darwin).

¹²² Following Spencer’s recovery in mid-June 1912, he traveled to the East Alligator River where he remained until 8 August investigating the Aborigines of that region in company with Paddy Cahill. Spencer returned to Darwin on 18 August and remained there for two weeks before travelling with the Administrator to the McArthur and Roper rivers regions, then on to Katherine and Pine Creek and back to Darwin at the end of November. Almost immediately he set off for Bathurst and Melville islands and returned to Darwin on 15 December. He departed for Melbourne ten days later.

Township'.¹²⁴ Inspector Beckett and Spencer 'chose a beautiful spot about one and a half miles away [from the town at Cullen Beach] where they can have two camps, one right down on the seashore and another on the cliffs'. In choosing this location, Spencer respected the 'old traditions' of the Larrakia who were divided in two sections, 'one of which always lives on the seashore and the other on the higher ground'. The Aborigines were allegedly 'quite satisfied' with the new location and so, no doubt, would be the majority of Darwin's white residents.¹²⁵ The Aborigines would now be located a far enough distance from the town to no longer disturb them but were, conveniently, within walking distance of their employment. Spencer also decided to build a separate camp for Aborigines from the Alligator Rivers district about three miles from the township.¹²⁶ This represented a significant change from a decade before when these Aborigines had their camps burnt in an effort to expel them from Darwin.

Spencer outlined his intentions for the new camp at Cullen Beach in two reports on future policy for Aborigines in the Northern Territory.¹²⁷ Unlike the ethnographers before him, Spencer recognised the spiritual and cultural importance of distinct places to Aborigines and the 'deep importance' of being able to carry out ceremony in those areas. This constituted a particular problem in removing Aborigines from any particular part of the country, *except* Spencer notes, in the settled districts where the Aborigines were 'degenerate' and had 'lost their old beliefs and, to a large extent, given up performing their old ceremonies'.¹²⁸ Spencer therefore made a major distinction in his policy recommendations between Aborigines who lived in or close by towns and Aborigines who were living in areas remote from the settled districts of the Northern Territory. For Spencer, the tribes in the immediate neighborhood of Darwin were 'not only demoralized but decimated' and his main concern was their continued degradation by 'contact with a civilisation that they do not understand and from which they need

¹²³ *Northern Territory Times*, 19 April 1912.

¹²⁴ WB Spencer Diaries 17-20 January 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4; Undated document page headed 'Removal of Camps' by WB Spencer CRS A1/1 12/10964.

¹²⁵ WB Spencer Diaries, 17-20 January 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹²⁶ WB Spencer Diaries, 21 January 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹²⁷ WB Spencer, 1913. 'Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory', *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1912*; WB Spencer, 1913. 'General Policy In Regard to Aborigines', *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1912*.

¹²⁸ See David Carment's article, 'The Dispossession of the Warumungu', for parallel descriptions of a 'degenerate' local Aboriginal population on the mining frontier (David Carment, 1998. 'The Dispossession of the Warumungu: Encounters on a North Australian Mining Frontier 1932-1936', in

protection'. However, Spencer also recognised that, under the right kind of supervision, these 'degenerate', 'demoralised' and 'decimated' Aborigines were actually good labourers and very 'useful' about the town. Therefore his way of both 'protecting' Aborigines and maintaining and housing the town's menial labour force was to create an institution which became known as the Kahlin Aboriginal Compound.

In Spencer's, 'General Policy in Regard to Aborigines', he highlighted his vision for the Kahlin Aboriginal Compound. The 'old ramshackle, dirty huts' that the Aborigines had built from remnant corrugated iron in their previous camps were to be replaced by 'neat huts with walls of stringybark and roofs of iron'. Each Aboriginal family was to have their own house and separate houses would be provided for single men, women and visitors to the Compound. There was to be a school house in the Compound and the school teacher and his wife would double as the Superintendent and Matron of the Compound. Rations would be distributed to 'old and indigent natives' but able-bodied Aborigines were expected to be self-supporting, employed either in the Compound garden or in business places or private houses in the township. Those Aborigines employed in the Compound garden would be paid a definite wage and the same was to apply to those employed in businesses and private houses.¹²⁹ A minimum wage was to be fixed and a register of Aborigines kept by the Superintendent of the Compound. Applications to employ Aborigines were to be directed to the Superintendent who was also to hear all complaints by employers against Aborigines. Spencer also recommended that a certain amount of the Aboriginal employee's wage be withheld by the employer and paid to the Superintendent who would deposit it into an individual account at the Saving's Bank.

Contrary to his previous assertions of the success in impressing on Aborigines the powers of the Aborigines Act, Spencer later highlighted the difficulty that the Department was having in enforcing the prohibited areas restriction. He hoped that

Tony Austin and Suzanne Parry (ed) 1998, *Connection and Disconnection: Encounters between settlers and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory University Press, Darwin.

¹²⁹ The Cullen Beach site chosen for the location of the new camp for the Larrakia was already the location of some Chinese gardens. These gardens had been established for around thirty years and the Chinese gardeners paid rent to the Government for the lease of these lands (*Northern Territory Annual Report, 1912*). However, Spencer decided that the Chinese would have to be ejected because their gardens were too close to the proposed Institution – and the reason for the new Institution was to prevent the association between Chinese and Aborigines - and because Spencer hoped that the Aboriginal residents would help work the gardens (WB Spencer Diaries, 6 June 1912, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4).

once the Kahlin Compound was completed and ‘under proper supervision’ it would be ‘more easy to deal with the aboriginals and to prevent the Asiatics from coming into contact with them under cover of night’.¹³⁰ To assist this, the whole Compound was to be fenced and no-one, apart from Aborigines or officials, was to have access to it. Those Aborigines employed in private service were to be either housed on their employer’s premises or resident in the Compound. Spencer advised that a new regulation be passed which prohibited Aborigines, except those with a special permit, from being within the township between sunset and sunrise. All Aborigines and ‘half-castes’ were to be either at the Compound or on their employer’s premises after sunset. Any infringement of this regulation would be punished with a gaol term. He also recommended that Aborigines not be allowed to leave Darwin without the consent of the Superintendent or a Protector. Aborigines from outside districts were not to be encouraged to come to Darwin although Spencer recognised that local demands for domestic labour might necessitate this at certain times.¹³¹ In terms of Aborigines of mixed descent, Spencer now recommended that, in most cases, the ‘best and kindest thing is to place them on reserves along with the natives, train them in the same schools and encourage them to marry amongst themselves. Any special cases in which a half-caste – a boy especially – shows any marked ability, can be easily provided for and he can pass on from a native to any ordinary school or to some other institution’.¹³²

In October 1912, by order of the Protector of Aborigines, Aboriginal people from King Camp, moved to their new camp at Kahlin Beach. A horse and cart assisted in moving them and their belongings to the new ‘neat bark and iron’ residences which had been erected at the Compound.¹³³ Late in the following year, Protector of Aborigines Stretton, reported that most of the Aboriginal camps in the town had been ‘broken up, and the aboriginals removed to the Compound at Kahlin’. It had, however, been a ‘difficult matter to induce the different tribes to amalgamate and fraternize’.¹³⁴ Local Aborigines were not as malleable as had been predicted by the Aborigines Department.

¹³⁰ WB Spencer, 1913. ‘Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory’, *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1912*.

¹³¹ WB Spencer, 1913. ‘General Policy in Regard to Aborigines’, *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1912*.

¹³² WB Spencer, 1913. ‘Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory’, *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1912*.

¹³³ *Northern Territory Times*, 24 October 1912.

¹³⁴ Report from Chief Protector of Aborigines, WG Stretton, *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1913*.

That the officers of the Aborigines Department failed to understand how Aboriginal people were ordering their political landscape is displayed by the fact that, contrary to predictions, it was actually very difficult to gather Aborigines together in the Compound. Even though the inspectors had noted the way that distinct Aborigines were grouped in different camps about Darwin, they did not attempt to understand or accommodate the spatial organisation of these camps.

On 29 March 1912, the *Northern Territory Times* contained a series of questions from an ‘old flourbag’:

That one new pfeller gubment been come on? ‘What for no more come on quickpfeller gib it tucker longa blackpfeller?’ ‘What for gubment gib it new pfeller house longa Alligator, no more gib it longa Larrakeeah?’ ‘Gubment been send im paper longa blackpfeller all same whitepfeller read im paper belonga to corroboree?’ ‘My word gubment too much gammon – him been talk gib it plenty tucker. Him gammon. No more gib it plenty, only little bit. No good like that gubment Mo-muk. Me go cowl belonga Missa Peckett!’¹³⁵

While Spencer had respected the traditions of the Larrakia in the choice of their new camp site, he had not understood the continuing political status of the Larrakia in Darwin. The ‘old flourbag’ made clear the Larrakia’s dissatisfaction that Aboriginal people from another district were having their houses built first in Darwin, on Larrakia country. Further, he believed that the promises made by the Aborigines Department, for example that Aborigines would be given plenty of food, had not been fulfilled and that the Aborigines Department was only making hollow promises to encourage the Aborigines to leave their old living spaces.

The *Northern Territory Times* offers further evidence of Aborigines’ dissatisfaction with the new legislation and the Aborigines Department. Given the above described hostility between the editor of the *Northern Territory Times* and Spencer, the motives in publishing articles allegedly from Aboriginal contributors regarding the implementation of the Act engenders some skepticism. Nevertheless, the content of the

¹³⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 29 March 1912.

articles and the language used is interesting and indicative of genuine Aboriginal contribution. An article under the heading, 'Calichilic Gwara Gubment' ('No good Government') from 'Billy Muck', elsewhere identified as a Larrakia man, appeared in the *Northern Territory Times* on 16 February 1912:

MISSA WHITEPFELLER – Whaffor that one Pisher Gubment huntem allabout my countryman long old pfeller camp and makem sit down close up that new pfeller wurley? Sposen sit down that one alright, by'mbye plenty Chinaman all time come longa my camp, lookout lubra, give 'em opium. More better that one gwara gubment makem all about yeller man sit down longa him country, and no more cum longa black pfeller camp. Waffor that one gwara gubment let'em im white pfeller sit down longa Chinaman wurley drinkem crog all day, by'mbye all about big pfeller trunk? Whaffor that one gubment let'em im Malay sit down longa Chinatown, no more work? Plenty color man keepem lubra, some pfeller him gotem two pfeller lubra, by'mbye gib it crog, opium longa blackpfeller, take 'im allabout money blackpfeller him catchim longa white pfeller. More better than one gwara gubment leabe im blackpfeller, lubra allabout old pfeller camp and makem allabout Chinaman, white pfeller, Malay ketch im belonga im country lubra, then by'mbye blackpfeller no more sick. You think it, Missa Whitepfeller, that one gubment hunt im up blackpfeller more cos im wantem allabout lubra, him wantem look corroboree, and no more let im you and allabout 'nother one, white pfeller seem im. Wafo this one government too much creedy? Billy Muck.

Billy Muck is obviously challenging the fairness of placing all the restrictions in the new Act on the Larrakia, the traditional owners of Darwin. He wonders why Aborigines have to 'sit down' in a new camp and why the Chinese cannot go back to where they came from and leave the Aborigines alone. He also suggests that Aborigines be allowed to remain in their 'old pfeller camp' while placing the onus on Chinese, whites and Malays to 'catch' women from their own nations. If this happened then, by and by, Aborigines would no longer be sick. The real reason for removing Aborigines to the new camp was because the government was greedy. It wanted all the Aboriginal women for themselves and wanted to be the only ones able to look at the Aboriginal corroborees, identified in a previous chapter as a source of entertainment to the white settlers. These complaints to the newspaper indicate that the officers of the

Aborigines Department held little understanding of local Aborigines cultural and political organisation and suggest that these officers, newly arrived in Darwin, were unaware that they were part of a subtle, but ongoing, negotiation with the Larrakia over the terms of the shared occupancy of their land.

There is no doubt that the Aboriginal groups whose country was being closely settled were undergoing substantial cultural change as a result of colonisation and its attendant ramifications which included serious population decline. By the end of the period under study, official reports on 'town' Aborigines contained extremely pessimistic statements about the cultural decline of local Aborigines. Inspectors Kelly and Beckett observed that 'tribal differences and animosities' appeared to be 'matters of ancient history'; that important 'tribal ceremonies', apart from the occasional initiation ceremony, were 'not persistent'; that the complete absence of 'tribal marks' on Aborigines who were constantly associated with whites indicated that the Aborigines 'ancient customs' were 'gradually dying out'; and that the 'more intelligent of the aboriginal freely admit that tribal ceremonies are dying out, [and] they accept the changed times as inevitable'.¹³⁶ Kelly and Beckett argued that the Larrakia in particular, had 'more easily fallen away from the old order of things', because they did not practice circumcision. Spencer was also pessimistic about Larrakia cultural survival describing town Aborigines as 'demoralized', 'decimated', 'degenerate' and having 'lost their old beliefs and, to a large extent, given up performing their old ceremonies'.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the Larrakia comprised the largest group in Darwin, called on the authority of some older Larrakia men to stand guard over some 'recalcitrant' Aboriginal women from another district, recognised the 'traditional' divisions of the Larrakia's former camps in his choice of their new

¹³⁶ Only a few years previously Herbert Basedow collected and wrote up extensive notes on Larrakia people's traditional customs including detailed descriptions of boys and girls initiation ceremonies and of standard ceremonial activity together with the Larrakia words to describe aspects of this ceremonial activity (Basedow 1907).

¹³⁷ See David Carment's article, 'The Dispossession of the Warumungu', for parallel descriptions of a 'degenerate' local Aboriginal population on the mining frontier (David Carment, 1998. 'The Dispossession of the Warumungu: Encounters on a North Australian Mining Frontier 1932-1936', in Tony Austin and Suzanne Parry (ed) 1998, *Connection and Disconnection: Encounters between settlers and Indigenous people in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory University Press, Darwin.

camping site and did language work with Larrakia people beside a small bubbling spring which he was told was named 'Korowa demara'.¹³⁸

Some of the above observations regarding cultural decline were made after brief contact with the Larrakia and after it had been acknowledged that Aborigines in the town were concerned about the motives of the new Aborigines Department. Any information that Aborigines may have provided in these circumstances has to be understood in this context. These observations also indicate a limited understanding on behalf of the officers of the Aborigines Department that Aboriginal people were capable of mediating and controlling the transmission of cultural knowledge about themselves. Ethnographers working in Darwin in the late nineteenth century observed the caution with which Aboriginal people divulged particular types of information. That the Larrakia were mediating how much they were prepared to have whites know of their culture is apparent from Foelsche's description of the way the Larrakia man, Lirrawah, would only provide information regarding the 'origins of the Larrakia race' after Foelsche promised not to disclose this information to other Aboriginal people.¹³⁹ Parkhouse also observed the way Aboriginal people were not 'prepared to divulge ... information upon tribal matters' without first having confidence in the person who desired it.¹⁴⁰ Seven years prior to Spencer's assertions that town Aborigines had 'lost all their customs', Larrakia people were willing to provide Herbert Basedow with detailed information regarding various ceremonies, aspects of their land use and cultural and political organisation as well as some Larrakia language and place names. Perhaps they had more confidence in Basedow than Spencer. Spencer's 1911 complaint that the Larrakia were 'much too civilised and know the value of money so that you have to pay them' for ethnographical information shows the way that the Larrakia continued to control the transmission of cultural knowledge.¹⁴¹

In 1913, Beckett pessimistically noted that the Larrakia had fewer representatives in the town than Aboriginal groups from elsewhere. They were 'greatly outnumbered in their own country. Disease and excesses have killed, and are still fast killing, them off'.

¹³⁸ WB Spencer, 1912. 'An introduction to the study of certain native tribes of the Northern Territory', *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*. Spencer also recorded that the name of the Lameroo Beach camp was 'Nim-birra' and the camp above it was 'Gwi-ambirra'.

¹³⁹ Foelsche, 1881-2.

¹⁴⁰ Parkhouse 1895.

Even so, Beckett acknowledged the ‘considerable virility’ which persisted among them and described several ‘tribally married couples’ who were ‘raising large and vigorous families’.¹⁴² By 1916, Beckett had reached a greater appreciation of the persistence of a Larrakia traditional landscape. He described the way that the Larrakia’s ‘ancient burial grounds’ were on the ‘beaches and in the jungles fringing the beaches’ and their traditions ‘woven around the headlands and landmarks along the shore’. Two years previously, the Superintendent of Kahlin Compound had recorded the Larrakia language names of these headlands and landmarks.¹⁴³ Beckett was also given to understand the Larrakia’s ongoing sense of ownership of Darwin. This is apparent in his observation that Darwin had been built upon the ‘tribal property of various Aboriginal families’ and that the Larrakia ‘still impressed’ this ‘right of ownership’ upon their children’.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Throughout the first forty years of colonisation, the Larrakia lived about Darwin with occasional assaults on their rights to be within the town space but mostly with the support of the colonisers who recognised that they were in their own country and realised that they did not have the legislative authority to remove them even if they had wanted to. It was the introduction in 1910 of ‘An Act to make Provision for the better Protection and Control of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Northern Territory’ which brought significant changes for the Larrakia and other Aborigines. This legislation provided the colonisers with the legal right to order the landscape about Darwin and the Aboriginal people within it as they saw fit. They could determine who was to be in the township and when; the type of behaviour that was appropriate in the township; where Aboriginal camps could be established, what sort of habitations they would live in and the social arrangements of those living spaces; where and by whom Aborigines could be employed; and who they could associate with.

Within a few years of Kahlin’s establishment, the Northern Territory Administrator proclaimed that the ‘usefulness’ of the Compound was more apparent each year.

¹⁴¹ WB Spencer Diaries, 21 June 1911, Mitchell Library, MSS 29/4.

¹⁴² Report from Protector of Aborigines, JT Beckett, *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1913*.

¹⁴³ FL Godfrey, 1914. List held at the Place Names Committee, NT Department of Lands.

‘Nomadic’ Aborigines were no longer ‘camped’ throughout the vacant areas of the towns and suburbs. Rather, they were ‘compelled’ to camp within the Compound. The Aboriginal residents of the Compound were allegedly ‘happy *and* under the thorough control’ of the Compound Superintendent, for whom the majority held ‘a high regard’. The permanent huts in the Compound were ‘prized’ by their occupants and all kept in ‘thorough order’. ‘Native customs and names’ were encouraged and the co-operation which existed between “‘King” George of the Larrakeah tribe’ – said to exercise ‘no small authority’ - and the Superintendent was ‘of considerable value in the maintenance of discipline and harmony’ at the Compound.¹⁴⁵ ‘Compel’, ‘control’, ‘order’, ‘authority’, ‘discipline’ - Aborigines were finally subjected to the administrative control that many colonisers had spent years advocating. Aborigines were finally segregated from the town by legislation which dictated that they had to reside in the Kahlin Compound and controlled their presence in the town area through night-time curfews and the declaration of prohibited areas. However, they were not so far away that they could not continue to be the mainstay of Darwin’s domestic and manual labour force. The white townsfolk were happy, the Aborigines were happy and, in a continuation of the alliance that had marked previous relations between the Larrakia and the colonisers, a working relationship had developed between the Larrakia elder, King George and the Compound Superintendent. A bright future for the Kahlin Aboriginal Compound and the non-Aboriginal town was assured. Or was it? Future research will be interested in examining the ‘success’ of this legislation in both ‘protecting’ and ‘controlling’ the town Aboriginal population.

¹⁴⁴ Report by Chief Inspector of Aborigines Beckett, 19 January 1916, CRS A3 1916/608.

¹⁴⁵ *Northern Territory Annual Report, 1915-16 and 1916-17.*

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that the colonisation of the Darwin region and the interactions between the Larrakia people and the white settlers in the period between 1869 and 1911, were far more complex than has been represented in popular historical texts and in the contemporary native title debate.

An early part of this thesis explored the way that 'friendliness' was represented as an innate characteristic of the Larrakia and played a major role in their relations with the white settlers. This, however, obscures the reality that there were two parties to the initial encounters and that it was the behaviour of both parties which determined the nature of contact. If the surveyors and early settlers had come presenting arms rather than offerings, it is possible that the initial encounters would have been much different, as would the historical representation of the Larrakia.

The friendliness that was exhibited by both parties to the encounter was the product of prior knowledge and experience gained during interactions at the Escape Cliffs settlement, well before Goyder claimed the Darwin peninsula as the site for the capital city of the Northern Territory. Despite this initial ease of relations, the historical record shows that 'friendliness' was not a persistent or dominant characteristic of encounters between the Larrakia and the colonisers during the first year of settlement. Relations became strained within seven weeks of the survey party's arrival in Darwin and culminated in the Aborigines' spearing of two of the surveyors at Fred's Pass. Following this incident, relations were distinctly unfriendly for many months. There was no one response or dominant characteristic of the colonisation of the Darwin region. It was a complex mix of friendly, violent and nearly always suspicious encounters between the Aborigines and colonisers.

An emphasis on conflict and violence or, conversely, on accommodation and compromise, in the colonial encounter obscures the complexities of the interactions between the Larrakia and the white settlers. Suggestions in the native title debate that the Larrakia were not 'strong enough' to defend their land are a misrepresentation of the complex negotiations on both sides of the colonial divide over the settlement of Darwin.

Undoubtedly, one of the more complex of their interactions was the negotiation of what could best be described as an abstruse alliance. The basis of this alliance was that it was the Larrakia as traditional owners of the Darwin region who asserted themselves and were recognised by the colonisers as the right group to negotiate with. This thesis shows that this negotiated alliance was sought after and crucial to both parties. While respecting their official instructions that they establish friendly relations with local Aborigines, the colonisers knew that an alliance with the Larrakia was essential to the peaceful and successful settlement of Darwin. It strengthened their defence against other potentially hostile Aboriginal groups and it provided them with a local labour force and indigenous knowledge of the region.

Whatever negotiations took place within the Larrakia clans regarding this alliance, it is probable that two major concerns were highlighted. Firstly, the Larrakia sought an outcome which best ensured their survival. In the face of the devastating impact on their people from the smallpox epidemics discussed in this thesis and their knowledge of the military strength and ready aggression of the whites, the Larrakia would not have wanted to court further population loss from a prolonged resistance against the colonisers. Secondly, the land the colonisers were intent on settling was Larrakia country and if the Larrakia were determined to stay about their country, then they had to negotiate how they would do it.

This thesis provides many examples of the way the colonisers assisted the Larrakia in asserting their authority over other Aboriginal groups who were coming to Darwin. Apart from militarily, this alliance found expression in the specific employment of Larrakia people in the township; in ensuring that the Larrakia had primary access to whatever goods were being distributed on their country; and in the colonisers' defence of the rights of the Larrakia to remain in the town area when other Aboriginal groups were being evicted. Non-Larrakia Aborigines are represented as 'out of place' in the town while the Larrakia *and* the colonisers are represented as the rightful occupants of the town area. It is also arguable that the colonisers absolved themselves from invading Larrakia land because they were assisting the Larrakia defend their country.

This alliance was a continuing theme of the relations between the Larrakia and white settlers in the whole period under study. However, that this alliance occurred in an

unequal power relationship is shown by the way that the colonisers fell away from their part in the alliance. As settlement proceeded, the colonial officials needed to be reminded by the Larrakia that they had negotiated the terms of the alliance on the understanding that their rights to land in Darwin continued to be recognised and that they would continue to have primary access to any of the benefits arising from the new settlement, which included rations and housing. This was particularly true following the appointment of the officers to the new Aborigines Department in 1911. The Larrakia asserted their rights through public protests in the newspaper and by sending deputations to colonial officials.

One of the complexities of colonisation that this thesis highlights is the tension within the white settler population about the appropriate way to deal with what was presented as the 'Aboriginal problem'. This thesis has shown that at least some colonisers understood the importance of land to Aboriginal people's survival and the dire consequences of their invasion on that survival. The notion expressed in the late twentieth century that asking compensation for their colonised lands was 'pure arrogance' on behalf of the Larrakia is not substantiated in the period under study. The ideology of compensating Aboriginal people for having invaded their land and undermining Aboriginal people's means of subsistence was understood and condoned by many colonisers. The distribution of government rations, the allocation of reserves and the ongoing recognition of the Larrakia's right to be within the township were all ways that the colonisers tried to compensate Aborigines for invading their land.

Following the changes to their landscape and traditional economy brought about by colonisation, the Larrakia engaged with the new economy as labourers and domestic servants. They also drew on the marketable aspects of their cultural knowledge and skills by performing public corroborees and spear throwing demonstrations. Suggestions in the native title debate that the Larrakia claims were illegitimate because the Larrakia did not make any contribution to the development of Darwin are unfounded in the period under study. This thesis shows that the Larrakia made an active contribution to Darwin's development through their alliance with the colonisers, their engagement with the labour force and their participation in the cultural and social life of the new settlement.

The British Colonial Office tried to have Aboriginal land rights recognised in the colonisation of South Australia during the 1830s. That there was some residual sentiment regarding Aboriginal land rights in the colonisation of the Northern Territory is evident in the colonisers' use of the word 'invasion' to describe the settlement of the Northern Territory; in the constant use of the phrases 'their country' or 'their land'; in the colonisers' explicit recognition of the prior occupancy and rights of the Larrakia to lands in Darwin – and their preparedness to assist them in defending those rights against other Aborigines on numerous occasions; in the often expressed acknowledgement that the whites had taken the Aborigines' country and given them nothing of substance in return; and in the description of the annual government expenditure on Aborigines as being 'blood money' which the coloniser's paid out annually for 'robbing them of their territory'.¹

During the encounters at Escape Cliffs, the survey party understood that the Aborigines they met with were comprised of numerous and distinct groups who were responsible for specific tracts of land. The colonial surveyors, Bennett and Goyder, explicitly recognised that the Darwin region was within Larrakia country and included this on their maps. Bennett also recorded the indigenous names of particular localities and identified the 'chiefs' of those localities. Bennett and Goyder did not just imagine these land boundaries, the names of the chiefs or the Aboriginal place names. They consulted local Aborigines on these matters and were supplied with answers. The surveyors were presented with defined Aboriginal districts and 'chiefs' or knowledgeable men for those districts. If the early colonisers had followed their original instructions which had explicitly stated that land would be reserved for Aborigines, reserves could have been negotiated with these men. However, the colonisers chose to disregard Aboriginal interests in these lands. There was never any direct negotiation over land with the recognised 'chiefs', there were never any land treaties signed and the allocation of land reserves for Aborigines occurred two decades after the initial invasion. The reserves were finally granted and promoted in response to a perceived need to protect Aborigines rather than any commitment to indigenous peoples' land rights or understanding of the importance of land to Aboriginal society and cultural well being.

¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 25 May 1894.

The colonisers disregarded Aboriginal people's land interests because of the 'inherent conflict between the goal of colonising a new country and the rights of the indigenous people' and because of the 'determined pressure from [some] colonists that nothing should get in the way of economic progress'.² The notion that the Aboriginal population was doomed also influenced their inaction. Throughout the period under study, the South Australian government was also besieged by state politics and problems and Aboriginal people in the remote Northern Territory were not a major concern. Although the early Northern Territory colonial officials did little to implement the instructions issued to them by the South Australian government, it was the South Australian government in the late nineteenth century, who was charged with being morally irresponsible and culpable in relation to Aborigines because of their failure to declare reserves of land for Aborigines or to ratify and implement protective legislation for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

Although some white settlers learnt some Larrakia language through their everyday interactions with local Aborigines, there was never an officially sanctioned, systematic attempt to learn the Larrakia language that had long term application. As Tim Bonyhady remarks, 'place names remain a powerful assertion of rights over land; a key ingredient in the development, if not the creation of tradition'.³ It is possible to see that through place names, the Larrakia know the land in one way and whites know it in another. The Larrakia's ceremonial site, Gundal, became known to the colonisers as Point Emery, after a man who at this place and for a brief moment in time 'discovered' the same water that had no doubt been used countless times to quench the thirst of those involved in ceremonial business. Similarly, the harbour and city were given the name of a man who never paddled the water searching for turtle or dugong to feed his family, nor walked the land, hunting and talking to the country, dripping his sweat on to it, and affirming its sentience. If Larrakia place names had been learnt by the early colonisers and used on maps rather than the rapid renaming that took place, it is possible that whites may have had a better understanding of the Larrakia landscape. It would also have made it more difficult for present day whites to dismiss Larrakia people's history and relations with the land. However, as seen throughout this thesis the colonisers

² Bain Attwood and SG Foster, 2003. 'Introduction' in Bain Attwood and SG Foster (eds), 2003. *Frontier Conflict. The Australian Experience*, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, p6.

overlaid the Larrakia landscape with their own names, uses and meanings. Not only did the colonisers fail to understand and incorporate Larrakia land uses, place names and sites of cultural importance in the colonial process, they deliberately supplanted pre-existing Larrakia land uses. This is explicitly shown in Goyder's decision to site the Virginia township first on an Aboriginal burial place and then, on discovering that the tide levels were infelicitous, relocating the township site to a much used Aboriginal living space.

The popular historical accounts position the Larrakia as prior occupants of Darwin who 'disappeared' as settlement progressed. In the period under study, the Larrakia remained an easily recognised and visible presence in the colonial township. However, by the end of the period under study there are some clues as to how the Larrakia became as disenfranchised from their history and country as is suggested in the native title debate. The imposition of colonial discourses on the land in the shape of names, roads, houses, fences, dams, and wells superimposed itself on suggestions of an Aboriginal landscape - for the colonisers anyway. By usurping and changing the outward appearance of the physical landscape, the colonisers no longer saw Aborigines in town areas as having any connection with land. Aboriginal people are automatically positioned on the outside of what is now a non-Aboriginal domain. Regardless of whether Aboriginal living places had been used prior to colonisation, these same sites were now depicted as fringe camps - that is, on the periphery of colonial settlement. Similarly, Aborigines were depicted as gathering or loitering about the town rather than staying about their traditional country. As the land changed, so too did representations of Aboriginal people in the town area. From Harriet Daly's depiction of wild 'savages ... armed to the teeth', the Larrakia were soon represented as 'civilised', safe, tame, local, 'town' Aborigines. When local Aborigines try to affect the behaviour required of them by the colonisers when in town - sober, dressed, quiet, employed, sedentary - they are understood to have lost their culture. This is particularly evident in the colonial depictions of tourist corroborees as 'tame' and in Inspector Beckett's praise of those Aborigines who had 'conquered the almost irresistible habit of taking a periodical "walk about longa bush"' and had 'settled down' to live upon the premises of their

³ Tim Bonyhady, 2002. 'So much for a name' in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds), *Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, p142.

employees and avoid 'visiting the camp'. While Beckett sees this as a positive, it has extremely negative connotations for Aborigines expressing any ongoing interest in land.

Although whites reconceptualised, redeveloped and reinterpreted the landscape, they did not completely supplant pre-existing Aboriginal land ownership and use in the period under study. This thesis is replete with accounts and references to the persistence of autonomous Aboriginal lifestyles. That a distinct Aboriginal political landscape continued to exist is particularly obvious in the disputes which took place between Aboriginal groups in Darwin. These disputes also show the ongoing vigilance and determination of the Larrakia to assert their authority over Aboriginal action in the township. Apart from various accounts of Aborigines' ceremonial lives and their traditional use of resources, Aboriginal people maintained a distinct and very visible presence in the town. Aboriginal people lived where they chose to about the town, in structures they had designed and built and in culturally appropriate relationships with each other. However, by the turn of the nineteenth century the Aboriginal 'problem' or 'question' was a much debated issue in Darwin. Much of the last part of this thesis has examined the attempts of whites to order and govern the landscape and the Aborigines within that landscape, according to European notions of what constituted appropriate behaviour within the town space. As the township developed and the number of Aboriginal people in the township increased, much of the behaviour of Aboriginal people is increasingly defined as inappropriate in the township and leads to the determined resolve of the colonisers to rid the town of 'undesirable' Aboriginal people and their undesirable practices. Nude, loud, unwashed, diseased Aborigines congregating in large groups and practicing noisy ceremonies, spear throwing or carrying out traditional funerary practices or forms of punishment were definitely unwanted. So were opium smokers, drinkers, prostitutes (although this is arguable) and 'loafers'. Cleanly dressed, sober, quiet Aborigines who were 'useful and inclined to work' or who belonged to the 'local tribe' were permitted (and required) to remain in the town.⁴ Raiding settlers' gardens, spearing European livestock, petty thieving, failing to adopt regular work schedules and keeping large numbers of dogs were practices that challenged the colonial ideal of ways of living in a town. However, in rejecting the lifestyles and disposition they knew the colonisers expected of them, the

⁴ See *Northern Territory Times*, 25 December 1880 and 19 March 1881.

Larrakia were maintaining as much independence as was possible in the circumstances and protesting the changes and assertion of new rules taking place on their country.

Although they were not legislatively empowered to do so, the authorities, on a number of occasions, either ordered Aborigines to leave the town or 'persuaded' them to leave by burning their camps and destroying their living places. However, it was not only for the good of the town that Aborigines be excluded, it was also for their own good. Those colonisers who were concerned for the plight of Aborigines saw the town as 'bad' for Aborigines because of the ready accessibility of alcohol and opium and the practice of prostitution to obtain those substances. However, whether it was for Aboriginal people's own good or the good of the town to exclude them, there were two exceptions to this call. The first was employed Aborigines and the second was Larrakia people. 'Visiting' Aboriginal people could be ordered to leave the town because the colonisers believed they were able to return to their own country. However, the Larrakia presented a different issue since it was recognised that they were already in their own country. To be employed and/or Larrakia remained the main criteria for being allowed in the town throughout the whole period studied.

Although Larrakia people were sought after as employees, complaints were made by the colonisers regarding Aboriginal people's failure to adopt a western work ethic. Aborigines were seen as lazy and indolent rather than asserting their autonomy or working for conditions and in occupations which suited them or rewarded them well. It was not until 1913, some four decades after settlement, that the payment to Aboriginal workers of 'a stick of tobacco and the scraps of the table ... for a day's work, such as cutting firewood, cleaning yards, and other work of a similar nature', was considered no longer acceptable. The Northern Territory Administrator ordered that Aboriginal people permanently employed by the Government were to be housed, clothed, fed and paid at least 2s 6d per week.⁵ Colonial criticisms about Aboriginal people's failure to keep to regular work schedules also represent Aborigines persisting in their autonomous lifestyles. Larrakia had much scope to do this because of the colonial settlement being situated within their traditional estate. The town-centricity of this thesis enhances the

⁵ Memo to the Chief Secretary from Government Secretary HE Carey, 1 October 1913 (NTRS F5 H174 Home and Territories. Payments to Aborigines 1918-1919). Report from the Department of Aborigines, 1913, CRS A3/1 1915/2131.

notion that the Larrakia were sedentary and totally focussed on 'town', or non-Aboriginal, life. However, there are many accounts in the historical record which attest to the Larrakia continuing to access other parts of their country. The Koolpinyah Station journals in particular show the movement of Larrakia people about the Darwin-Adelaide River region.

A strong implication of representing nineteenth century Larrakia people as innately friendly and welcoming rather than as diplomatic negotiators over land is that they surrendered their land. However, the colonial recognition of Darwin being Larrakia country and the Larrakia's assertion of their rights to Darwin are constant themes of the whole period under study. The Larrakia's commitment to stay about their country and their defence of their rights to their country in this period suggests that these were not opportunistic concerns born during the passage of the Aboriginal land rights legislation in the late twentieth century. Various incidents described throughout this thesis show that the Larrakia never felt that they had 'lost' or given up their country. However, it is also clear that by the end of the period under study, the introduction and implementation of the 1910 Aborigines Act had a significant impact on the lives and freedoms of Aborigines in the Darwin town area. The Larrakia were marginalised from their 'town country' through their eviction from Lameroo Beach, their enforced residency at the Kahlin Compound, the restrictions and control on their movement and associations with people in the town, through the introduction of a night-time curfew, and by the subsequent declaration of parts of Darwin as prohibited to Aboriginal people.

It is undeniable that colonisation forced great changes onto Larrakia society and impacted considerably on their pre-invasion lifestyles. However, rather than presenting the impact of colonisation on the Larrakia as a 'one way process of collapse to which the appropriate response is passive sorrow', this thesis has tried to understand the negotiations, compromises and decisions the Larrakia made to survive in their changing landscape.⁶ It is the task of future research to try and look 'beneath' the stories of dispossession and marginalisation, of restrictive and discriminative legislation and of

⁶ Cowlshaw Gillian, 1992. 'Studying Aborigines: Changing Canons in Anthropology and History' in Bain Attwood and J Arnold (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines, Journal of Australian Studies*, Special Edition No 35, LaTrobe University Press, Melbourne, p25.

projections of cultural degeneration to the ‘minute transactions’ of the everyday lives of Larrakia people. Through utilising the methodology of oral history it may be possible to ‘detect a story different from the usual one of wholesale tribal displacement, acculturation, assimilation, or extinction’.⁷

⁷ Jean M O’Brien, 1997. *Dispossession by degrees. Indian land and identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790*, Cambridge University Press, p10.

Appendix One

Instructions from the Commissioner of Crown Lands to the Protector of Aborigines

1. In the absence of any reliable information as to the numbers and condition of the aborigines of the Northern Territory, I must at present content myself with merely indicating for your guidance the general course of action with reference to them which the Government are desirous should be adopted by you, in your capacity as Protector of Aborigines.
2. It is a matter of great importance, not only to the natives themselves, but to the expedition which you accompany, that a friendly feeling should exist between them and the Europeans; and you should therefore be careful to lose no opportunity which may present itself of bringing about and fostering such a desirable state of things.
3. To this end I would suggest that you should endeavour to acquire, as soon as possible, some knowledge of the language of the tribes who may be located in the neighborhood of the new settlement, so that you may be able to act as interpreter between them and the settlers.
4. You should seize the first favourable opportunity of gaining confidence and respect of the natives, employing your medical knowledge in the cure or relief of any of them whom you may observe to be suffering from disease; as a few successful cases of this kind will probably give you great influence over them, which you can exercise beneficially in various ways.
5. You should endeavour to make them comprehend, as clearly as possible, that they are British subjects, and that, as such, they are amendable to, and protected by, our laws. Care should be taken at the outset to let the natives understand that their lives and liberties will be protected by the Government as long as they are peaceable and well disposed.
6. The rank and social position of the various chiefs should be recognised, and their authority, so far as consistent with law, supported; and their concurrence should be obtained, if possible, if any punishment inflicted, or reward conferred on any natives belonging to their respective tribes. It would also, perhaps, be well that each chief should have some distinctive badge or medal conferred upon him, and that the trinkets, & c., which have been provided should be judiciously distributed as presents among the principle men.
7. It will especially be necessary that the law prohibiting the giving or selling of intoxicating liquors to the natives should be strictly enforced, and that any improper interference by the settlers with the native women should be guarded against.
8. Should any natives be incapacitated by accident or sickness from obtaining subsistence, it will become your duty to prescribe for them in your medical

capacity, and to take care that they are supplied with necessary food - but no relief should be given to the able-bodied, except as payment for work performed.

9. Should you find that any of the natives have been carrying on any kind of trading, such as the trepang fishery, you will take care that they are not interfered with, but encouraged and protected in doing so; and that any provisions supplied by them for the use of the settlers are fairly paid for by barter or otherwise.
10. Every inducement should be offered to them to work for the settlers, and you should endeavour to make them feel perfect confidence that, in such cases, their services will be properly rewarded.
11. The Government surveyors will be instructed to leave reserves of lands for the use of the aborigines so to secure them free access to water and an ample supply of wood for canoes, implements of the chase, &c. and the knowledge of the habits of the natives which you will acquire will, probably, enable you to assist in selecting the best sites for these reserves, so as not to interfere with their favourite hunting grounds, or places of resort.
12. You will, of course, lose no time in endeavouring to make yourself acquainted, as far as possible, with the general condition, and the manners and customs of the various tribes; and you will report, through the Government Resident, to this office, in order that the Government may be in a position to consider your suggestions and send you more regular and detailed instructions for the future.¹

¹ SA State Records, GRS 1 NT194/1872.

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