

TELLING SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY:

**the life history
of**

**Alexander Donald (Pwerle) Ross
(1915 – 1999)**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is focused on the life history of Alexander Donald Ross, a Kaytetye senior man, of both Kaytetye and European ancestry, jointly authored by Alexander Donald (Don) Ross and Terry Whitebeach, a Tasmanian writer with European and Aboriginal family connections.

Don Ross was born in 1915, approximately half a century after the first contact between Europeans and Aboriginals in the Northern Territory, and worked most of his life in the developing Northern Territory pastoral industry. He owned a cattle station, Neutral Junction Station, near the Barrow Creek Telegraph Station, on Kaytetye land, in Central Australia, between 1947 and 1952. During a lifetime spanning most of the twentieth century (he passed away in April 1999) Don Ross's life was influenced greatly by changes in the pastoral industry and by social and political changes related to the rights of Indigenous people, which affected both the family lives and the employment conditions of Indigenous pastoral workers in the Northern Territory and throughout Australia.

The thesis employs Don Ross's narratives of his childhood, relationships and working life, which were compiled from interviews and conversations with a series of people (including the author of this thesis) to explore aspects of the period and region in which he lived. Relevant archival and other historical material are also employed as part of this investigation of the 'life and times' of Don Ross. Two significant aspects of Don Ross's life, his skill as a stockman, and his ambiguous legal and social status as a man of both European and Kaytetye

parentage, and the concomitant limits and freedoms his classification as ‘half-caste’ awarded him during different decades of the twentieth century, are crucial to this investigation.

The thesis also investigates the processes whereby a life history is mediated through, and affected by, the perceptions and cultural position/s of the researcher, writer and receiver of the story, the perspectives revealed in the historical documents and records of the time, and successive interpretations of this material.

Thus, it addresses the complex and contested historical, historiographical, literary, cultural and cross-cultural and personal processes of receiving, researching, compiling and narrating, from another time and place, and through the multifaceted lenses of memory and history, another person's life history; the implications and responsibilities of telling someone else's story.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

Signed:

Date:

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My greatest debt of gratitude is to Alexander Donald Ross for his friendship, his patience and good humour and for the amazing stories he told. I appreciated deeply the opportunity given me to participate in documenting both his personal story and aspects of the history of the Kaytetye people of Central Australia.

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I thank Graham Ross for actively encouraging me to write his father's life history, and I thank him and other members of the Ross family for sharing their memories of their father and grandfather and for providing support, advice and valuable feedback on drafts of the manuscript. Particular thanks to Alec, Dawn, Donna, David, Jenny, Ginger, Ronda and Chris Ross for their vision and participation.

Institute for Aboriginal Development linguist Myfany Turpin began the recording of Don's stories and invited me to continue. She provided linguistic information, translations of Kaytetye documents and oral histories she had recorded with other Kaytetye people, feedback on subsequent drafts of the manuscript, and access to a variety of relevant documentary material as well as to information given her by Kaytetye colleagues and friends. I offer my thanks to her and to her colleagues in the Kaytetye Dictionary program.

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I also thank colleagues at the Institute for Aboriginal Development and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in Alice Springs for discussion on cultural and historical matters. I owe a particular debt to Rosie Riley for her support and cultural guidance.

Heartfelt thanks to the librarians in the Off Campus library service of Charles Darwin University, who were painstaking and efficient in their efforts to supply me with books and articles. (And thanks are due also to our rural mail contractor in Tasmania who, once I had left the Northern Territory, delivered an endless stream of book parcels to my door for more than two years.)

Thanks are also due to the staff of the National Archives of Australia in Canberra and Darwin, in particular, Phyllis Williams in Darwin, and to the Northern Territory Archives and Northern Territory Library staff.

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My deepest thanks, finally, to my dear partner, David Collins, for his intelligent interest in my work, his ongoing support and good humour and his patient navigation of the IT software and hardware glitches over the last several years!

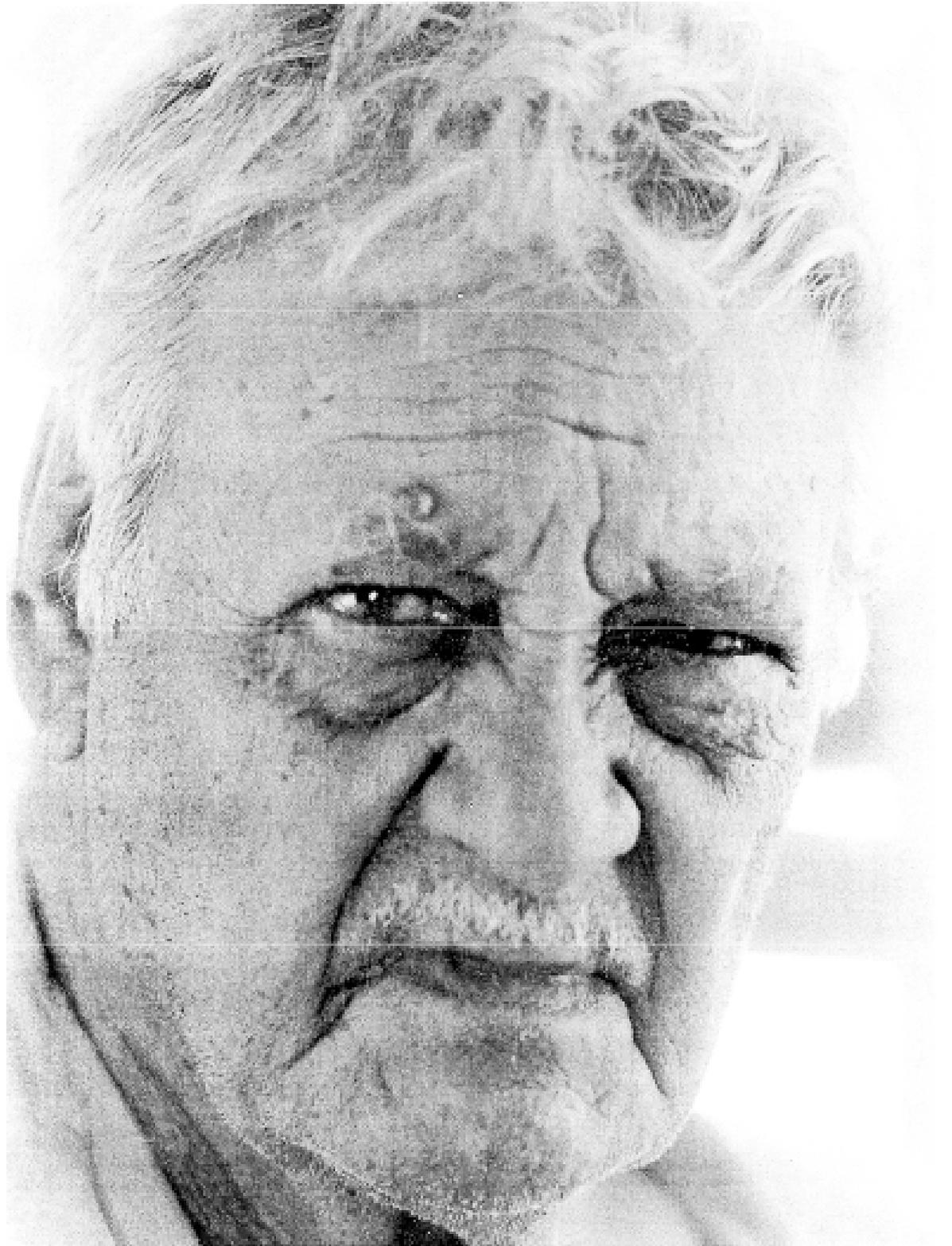


Figure 1: Alexander Donald Ross circa 1994
Photograph supplied by Dawn Ross

INTRODUCTION

Writing is an act of remembering, a process by which things that have marked one, returning, pass through the heart. Our job is to recover our own face in the broken mirror of the dominant culture, and recover our faith, recover a sense of reality. It's the first stage in a long process of recovery, to discover ourselves in all possible dimensions.¹

We consciously and unconsciously absorb knowledge of the world and how it works through the exchange of life stories. We constantly test reality against such stories, asserting and modifying our own perceptions in the light of them. These exchanges and the knowledge they impart...become part of our reality. They are as true as our lives.²

I believe the telling of the stories – lived experiences of people – is crucial in part to the reconciliation process.³

Compiling the life history of Alexander Donald (Don) Ross (1915–1999), a Central Australian senior man of Kaytetye and European parentage, who worked much of his life as a stockman on Neutral Junction cattle station, was both the impetus for, and the focus of, this thesis. Don Ross was a skilled stockman and in the late nineteen forties the owner of Neutral Junction station. But as a ‘half-caste’⁴ man he also was affected over the decades by the legislation and policies that governed the lives of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

¹ E. Galeano. From notes taken at lecture in the Seattle Public library May 1991. Uruguayan historian, journalist and writer, Eduardo Galeano, tells the history of North and South America in *Memoria de Fuego (Memory of Fire)*, a compilation of documentary text, fiction, poetry and visionary epic. 1982. *Genesis*. 1984. *Faces and Masks*; 1986. *Century of the Wind*.

² Personal Narratives Group. Truths. In J.W. Barbre et al Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis, p. 261

³ M. Dodson. 11 February 1996. *Awaye*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio National

⁴ Certain terms commonly used by Don and others in times past, for example, ‘half-caste’, terms that are currently considered unacceptable, have been retained, to accurately depict the terminology of the day. When directly quoting Don or his contemporaries, parentheses are omitted. Elsewhere parentheses are retained, to indicate that these terms are no longer acceptable as common usage or to draw attention to any ambiguity of meaning or intent.

As the context and focus of the thesis is the life history of Don Ross, a brief account is given at the outset, below.

DON'S STORY

Alexander Donald (Pwerle) Ross, called 'Don Rathe', by Kaytetye people,⁵ (in accordance with the Aboriginal English pronunciation of 's') was born at Thangkernarengge – Barrow Creek – on 9 February 1915, shortly before the Gallipoli landing in World War I. Hettie (Ngalyerre) Hayes, Don Ross's mother, a remarkable woman by all accounts and a 'lovely mother'⁶ by her son's admission, was a tall, strong, hard-working Kaytetye woman of Kapetye moiety from Akalperre country. She was a good runner, an adept horsewoman and an excellent cook and gardener. She was the daughter of Corrie Ngangkarle,⁷ a traditional Kaytetye woman, and George Hayes, cattleman, one-time Overland Telegraph linesman and subsequently the owner of Neutral Junction cattle station, (located in Kaytetye country) eleven kilometres northeast of Barrow Creek and two hundred and seventy kilometres north of Alice Springs. Don's father was Alec Ross, a pastoral worker and prospector of Scottish descent.

⁵ During his life time Don Ross's Aboriginal contemporaries referred to him by his bush name 'Akweltyayte', which is the name of the edible grub which grows on the mistletoe found on Mulga trees and witchetty bushes. Personal communication with Myfany Turpin 2000

⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 April 1998

⁷ Hettie's mother, Corrie, was the first wife of Paddy, Peter Horsetailer's father. G. Koch. (ed) 1993. *Kaytetye Country: An Aboriginal History of the Barrow Creek Area*. Institute for Aboriginal Development Press, Alice Springs, p. 66

Don was the eldest of Hettie's four children. A younger son, Dick, was born in 1918, followed by a daughter, Lorna, in 1920. A younger, Blanche, was born circa 1925. Her father, Norman Ampetyane, was a traditional Kaytetye man.⁸ Of the four siblings, only Blanche is still living. Blanche was also the only one of the four to live a traditional Kaytetye life. She married Sandy Tywelkertaye, from the Kaytetye Ertwerrpe (rainmaker) clan, and in 1954 she was declared 'Aboriginal within the meaning of the Aboriginals Ordinance 1918–1953', in a declaration signed with her thumbprint.⁹ Dick was killed in an accident involving army vehicles in Central Australia in World War Two. There was some suggestion of foul play, with regard to the accident. Lorna married Alec Pepperell (son of George Hayes' partner in the original Neutral Junction station lease.) Her second husband was Sam Sultan, the son of an Afghan father and a European mother. Lorna passed away in October 1994 and Don died at eighty-four, on 17 April 1999.

Don's great grandfather, John Ross, (1817–1903), 'an explorer' by Don Ross's admission, and an experienced frontiersman who had been connected since 1838 with exploration and pioneering in South Australia, played a crucial role in the establishment of the Overland Telegraph Line from Adelaide to Darwin: he was one of the surveyors of the route of the southern section of the Overland Telegraph Line.

⁸ Blanche's father was a rainmaker, from the rainmaker place, southwest of Taylor Crossing. 'You can see it from the road', Don said, 'see it on the west side. It's north from Barrow Creek, a big hill, that's the rainmaker place'. Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 30 October 1997

⁹ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item CA-7114, pp. 84, 114–115 Appendix 1, pp. 371–373

George Hayes, one of Don's maternal grandfathers, was English by ancestry, born in Somerset. He was a stern, parsimonious man, who, according to both Don and Graham Ross, hated Aboriginal people.¹⁰ It is true that George Hayes would not allow Don to speak Kaytetye in his presence: he wanted his grandson to grow up as a white person. Alyawarr man Donald Thompson had a different assessment of George Hayes, of whom he said (in translation), 'George Hayes protected the Kaytetye people from around here. George Hayes was good. He protected Kaytetye people. He didn't shoot them'.¹¹ Don's assessment of his grandfather was generous, influenced possibly both by Don's position as a favoured grandson and his respect for his grandfather's skills. 'A lot of those old station owners were a bit horrible to blackfellas', Don admitted, 'but our Old Man was all right. He wasn't a bad fella. Bit mean, but you had to be mean. You had to send away a long way to get things. Mail once a month. Horse mail. I think it was once a month'.¹² Don himself had had first-hand experience of the 'tyranny of distance'.

Don's father, Alec Ross, was a bit of a wanderer, so Don saw very little of him. Alec Ross had two sisters, neither of whom Don knew: they lived in Adelaide, rather than Central Australia. There was little contact between the Aboriginal

¹⁰ Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 5 February 1999; interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 29 October 1997

¹¹ Recorded 13 October 1999; cited by D. Moore in an email to M. Turpin 6 June 2002

¹² Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 14 April 1998. Blanche Ross recalled that George Hayes shot all the dogs in the Aboriginal camp on Neutral Junction Station because the dogs scared the cattle away from the water. She also recalled that her father, who worked at Barrow Creek as a police tracker, would ride from Barrow Creek to Neutral Junction Station to visit Hettie Hayes (Norman's wife and Blanche's mother), and Old George Hayes would jump on his horse and chase Norman off the property. Blanche Ross maintained that George Hayes also availed himself of Aboriginal women, as most white pastoralists did, in those times. Personal communication 2000 Blanche Ross to Myfany Turpin. Peter Horsetailer's father's first wife was taken by George Hayes when Peter's father was working guiding camel trains north from Oodnadatta. G. Koch. (ed) 1993. p. 32

members of the Ross family in Central Australia and the white branch of the family in Adelaide and gradually the association was broken. Graham Ross contacted some members of the Ross family in Adelaide, in later years, but they were not interested in renewing the connection.¹³

Don's grandfather, Old Alec Ross, whom Don remembers as a kind old man, all crippled up, who owned a lot of dogs, lived on Neutral Junction station in his old age and looked after the garden. The son of John Ross, he had accompanied his father on trips from the age of eleven. He accompanied John Ross on his 1874 expedition and also accompanied Ernest Giles on his expedition in 1875.¹⁴ He became a pastoral pioneer in Central Australia, working in the Northern Territory most of his life, at one time (1888) managing Crown Point station.

Barrow Creek, Don's birthplace, lies two hundred and seventy kilometres north of Alice Springs and fifty kilometres south of Central Mount Stuart, the geographical centre of Australia. Later, it was chosen as the site of a repeater station for the Overland Telegraph Line.

Soon after Don was born his mother took him to Neutral Junction cattle station. This was to be his home for nearly forty years. Living conditions on the station at that time were basic, as it was a fairly new pastoral lease, funds were limited and life was hard, but Don remembered his childhood and early manhood as good

¹³ Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 5 February 1999

¹⁴ G. Bucknall. Alexander Ross (Alex). In D. Carment, R. Maynard and H. Wilson. (eds) 1996. *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 3*. Northern Territory University Press, Casuarina. pp. 253-254

years. In his old age Don looked upon the time he spent out in the stock camps as the best part of his life. And it was on the station and out in the stock camps that Don was taught to read and write by Bill Abbott, an educated old Englishman.

By nature Don was sensual, with a very healthy sexual appetite. His appeal to women was strong. 'They were all after me', he claimed. 'They said I fell from the stars'.¹⁵ It was easy to understand why. He was a tall and very good-looking man, a 'fair one', who resembled his mother and maternal grandfather. His father, Alec Ross, 'was as bald as a badger', Don admitted, 'but Old George Hayes was a hairy bugger. Curled hair. And my mother had lovely hair, that's where I get it from'.¹⁶

Although Don Ross could be accused of taking advantage of his good looks, his fairness and his popularity with the opposite sex, he had a number of genuinely caring relationships with women, although his first marriage was not a happy one. He fathered twenty-four children (not all of whom are mentioned by name in his life history.) He was unusual for the times; he acknowledged all of his children and supported them to the best of his ability. Don Ross was known as an easy-going and generous man.

Don's eldest son, Alec (Alexander), was born to a traditional Kaytetye woman, Weedah (Ouida). When Alec was about four years old he was removed from his

¹⁵ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes 30 October 1997

¹⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 14 April 1998

mother by the authorities and taken firstly to the Bungalow¹⁷ in Alice Springs then to the Croker Island mission.¹⁸ In 1942, during World War Two, the children from the mission were evacuated to Otford, south of Sydney. Alec was not to return to the Northern Territory until he was an adult.

Don's first wife, Lorna Petyarr Purvis, was of Western Arrernte and European parentage. Don met her on Woodgreen station, where she was staying with her uncle, the 'Sandover Alligator',¹⁹ a man reputed to be able to eat a whole goat in one sitting.²⁰ Don and Lorna married in their twenties and subsequently produced eleven children, Noel (deceased), Doreen, Graham, Jenny, Sally (deceased), Adrian, Andrew, John (Doc), Virginia (Ginger), Donna and Fiona, the first five of whom were born on Neutral Junction station.

In 1947 Don Ross purchased Neutral Junction from his grandfather, George Hayes, an impressive achievement for an Aboriginal man in those times. The odds against such an event happening in 1947 were very long ones. In fact, Don

¹⁷ The Alice Springs 'Half-Caste' Institution established by the Commonwealth Government in 1913, was known as the Bungalow from 1932 when it was relocated to the Old Telegraph Station near the Alice Springs waterhole, a permanent soakage called Turiara, owned by the Arrernte people. D. Mellor and A. Haebich. (eds) 2002. *Many Voices: Reflections on Experience of Indigenous Child Separation*. National Library of Australia, Canberra. p. 63

¹⁸ Located on the Arafura Sea, northeast of Darwin, it was a Methodist mission, opened in 1941. Before the evacuation, there were about 95 children in the care of a nurse, a teacher and missionary, Margaret Somerville, assisted by local Indigenous people. D. Mellor and A. Haebich. (eds) 2002. p. 120

¹⁹ R.H. (Bob) Purvis Senior.

²⁰ 'He could eat a kid goat, with soup made out of the head. It was done for a bet. He didn't do those things just for the hell of it. This was a very tough country and money was scarce, and you used whatever ability you had to make a few bob. That was one of the things Dad did. A hundred hard-boiled eggs, a case of apples, that sort of thing, for a bet. It went against him as he got much older. He was in serious digestive trouble. They found that most of the food was not really digested, so that's why he was able to do these things'. Personal communication Terry Whitebeach with J.R. Purvis, son of R.H. (Bob) Purvis 26 March 2005

Ross was one of the few Aboriginal men in the twentieth century to have owned a cattle station in the Northern Territory.

He worked hard, trained many Kaytetye stockmen, and maintained cordial relationships with many white station owners, managers and stockmen, but being an owner and manager in those harsh times was an arduous and sometimes unpalatable business even for a man whose chief loves were horses and cattle, because Don Ross acknowledged Kaytetye family ties and his nature was more generous and easy-going than many of his white counterparts of the time. Such factors militated against his 'success' as a cattle station owner. Other contributing factors were the climate, the nature of the country in which his property was situated, his relationships with women and his increasingly serious drinking habit.

Nevertheless Don took great pleasure in keeping detailed records of station life and events in diaries, which he wrote up every night. He spoke of these diaries with pride. Sadly, they later went missing. Don greatly regretted their loss. 'I dunno what happened to them,' he said. 'I'm still crooked on that'.²¹ A case of history repeating itself? His great-great grandfather, John Ross, kept diaries of his expeditions. Two of these diaries are held in the Royal Geographic Society Archives in Adelaide, but the third diary, recording the survey expedition for the Overland Telegraph Line in and around the Alice Springs area, has been lost.

Falling demand for cattle after the withdrawal of troops from Central Australia at the end of World War Two, severe drought in the early 1950s and an unfortunate

²¹ Interviews with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 February 1998 and 14 April 1998

partnership imposed by the agents which led the station into further debt, proved too much for Don, and he sold the station in 1951 and went to work on Stirling station, for his old mate Stan Brown. William Stanley Brown (1892–1986)²² was a strong, muscular, athletic man. He was employed initially in the Northern Territory as a public servant, and was granted his first pastoral lease in 1913, at Dorisvale Station. In 1933 he took up his first grazing licence in Central Australia. He lived initially at Mud Hut and later took up Stirling Station. Stan Brown, with whom Don maintained a staunch friendship over many years, was a much shrewder and harder man than Don Ross. Don worked for Stan Brown for many years, doing what he knew best, stock work, no longer bowed down with the worries of a station owner. His Kaytetye relatives grieved his departure, and his older children, who had been born on Neutral Junction, were sorry to leave their carefree life in the bush for a house in town with Lorna and Hettie. Lorna died soon after the birth of her youngest daughter, Fiona, and Hettie continued to care for the children into her old age.

Don had three happy years with his new partner Emily Furber, until she died unexpectedly while they were on holiday in Mount Isa, Queensland. They had no children. His next partner was Grace Miller. Don and Grace had three daughters, Maria, Dawn and Roseena. Grace died when her youngest daughter, Roseena, was just a baby. The children were cared for by Grace's mother. By that time Don was in his sixties and coming to the end of his years as a stockman. He made the

²² R.W.Wilson. William Stanley Brown. In D. Carment and H. Wilson. (eds) 1996. pp. 29–34

reluctant move to town. The children also had to be in Alice Springs for school. 'I didn't like it at all', he said. 'I liked the bush'.²³

The years of hard physical work and intermittent injuries had taken their toll on Don's body. He became 'crippled up in the legs'²⁴ after taking a job caring for the Council gardens, a job he took great pride in, and continued to perform faithfully until he retired at seventy. He had been drinking heavily for years, but his health and his daughters' pleading persuaded him to give it up.

There was a decade spent in and around Katherine and south of Darwin, saddling. His companion during that time was a Kaytetye woman, Aileen, with whom he had had a relationship as a young man (in the 1930s). Don and Aileen's daughter had died of pneumonia when she was very young. Her parents had been afraid to take her to the doctor in case Don was arrested because it was illegal in those days for a 'half-caste' man to be in a relationship with a 'full-blood' woman. By the time Don and Aileen got together again, in his retirement, that law had been repealed and their liaison was legally permitted. He fell in love one last time, in his old age, but his intended wife, Ethel, 'a Tableland woman from Alexandria way',²⁵ died suddenly, a week before the wedding, much to his sorrow. 'She wanted to marry me, right or wrong', Don said. 'She was too happy. She was a happy woman, all right'.²⁶

²³ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 6 March 1998

²⁴ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 6 March 1998

²⁵ Possibly Alexandria Downs.

²⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 6 March 1998

A familiar and well-liked identity in Alice Springs in his senior years, Don was known affectionately as 'Pop Ross'. He spent the last years of his life with family, staying active as long as he was able, reading for as long as his failing eyesight permitted, doing leatherwork and happily cooking the occasional meal. He enjoyed talking with people about the old days, but those occasions became less frequent as his health problems increased. In his final months, in very poor health, he was admitted to Old Timers Nursing Home, out through Heavitree Gap, in Alice Springs, where he died on 17 April 1999.

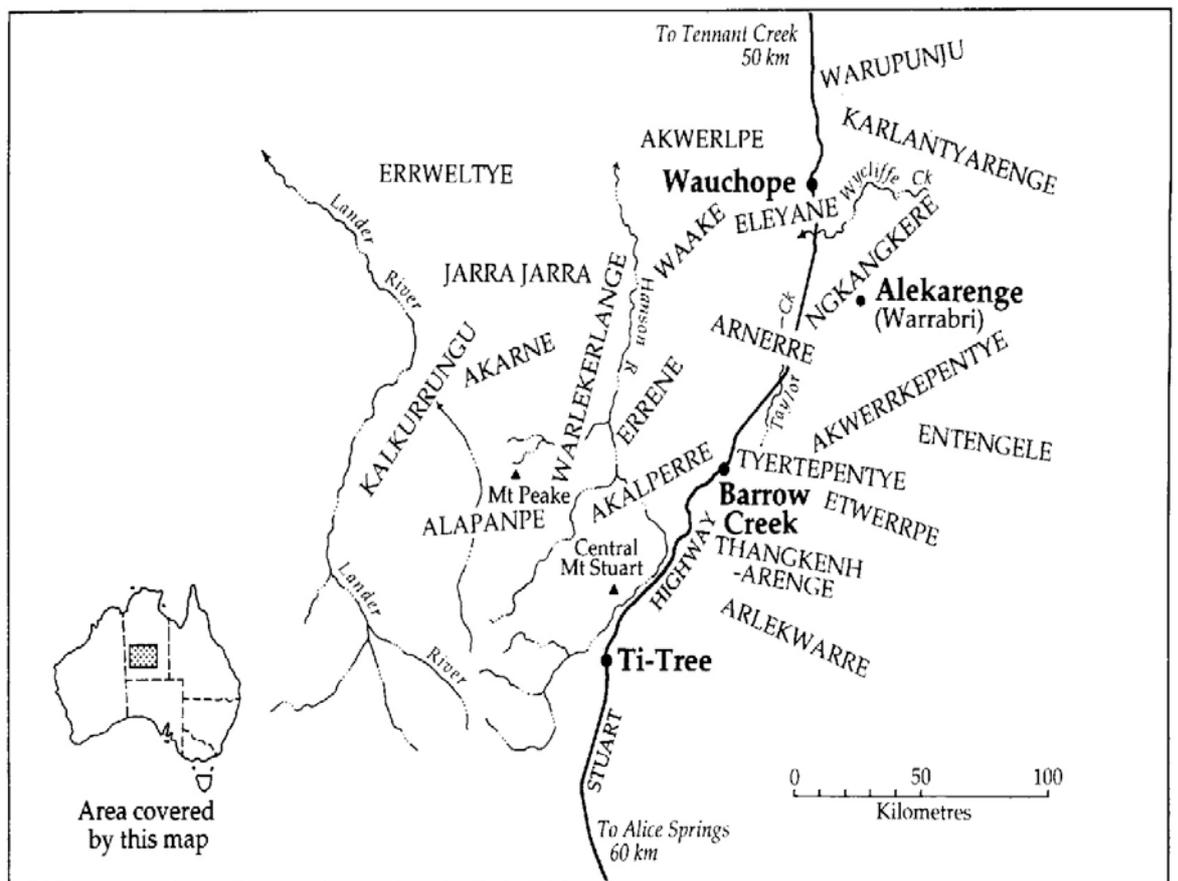


Figure 2: Kaytetye Country (Map drawn by Brenda Thornley)
G. Koch. (ed) 1993. p. 47

OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS

The thesis's first objective is to locate the life history of Alexander Donald (Pwerle) Ross in its historical and historiographical contexts, within a tradition of scholarly discourse, and to investigate the ways in which the life history elucidates and interrogates some aspects of twentieth century life in Central Australia, in particular the development of the pastoral industry and the legislation and government policies which deeply affect/ed Aboriginal people's lives.

The second objective is to examine the process of cross cultural collaboration, investigating the ways in which the life history is influenced by the perceptions and cultural positions of the oral narrator/s and the researcher, writer and receiver/s of the story, by the dialogic interaction between these persons and by the perspectives revealed by historical documents and records.

Compiling the life history of Don Ross, investigating its historical and historiographical contexts and parameters and critically examining the process of constructing the written text of the life history, have been considered a joint literary and historical enterprise.²⁷

²⁷ The final location of the thesis solely within the discipline of history is itself an accident of history. At the time I applied to be a PhD candidate the Northern Territory University (now Charles Darwin University) had recently lost its English discipline (which I had assumed to be the appropriate academic setting for my PhD research). Professor Carment invited me to apply as a History candidate as he felt my project was relevant both to history and literature. Initially I had both a history supervisor, Professor David Carment, and an English supervisor, Dr Christina Hill, both of whom had scholarly backgrounds in biography/autobiography. Dr Hill was unable, for family reasons, to continue to supervise my research. Subsequently, I was unable to secure a second supervisor in English. From that point my candidature has been with the History discipline of the university.

The life history elucidates, confirms, and challenges certain Western historical hegemonies and demonstrates both the advantages and the limitations of its joint authorship. Relevant sections of the text of the life history and/or the transcripts of the original oral history interviews are cited where appropriate below.

PREMISES ON WHICH THE THESIS IS BASED

The thesis's first premise is that Don Ross's life history elucidates significant aspects of Northern Territory history. He was a man of mixed race: as the grandson of early explorers and surveyors of the then relatively unknown Northern Territory 'frontier', his European heritage linked him with the 'opening up' of the Territory to white settlers, and the development of a fledgling pastoral industry in Central Australia. As the son and grandson of Kaytetye women, whose forebears had owned and cared for their 'country' in Central Australia for millennia, he was connected intimately with country, and shared some of the Kaytetye responses to it and some of the cultural meanings invested in it, although he did not directly partake in ceremonial and traditional caretaker responsibilities for it. With Don Ross's birth two ancestries met. He continued to live in Kaytetye country, but his life did not reflect cultural unity. How his two ancestries coexisted in his life time, and were reflected in the choices he was offered and denied, in what he valued and aspired to, the way he maintained (or failed to maintain) family and cultural ties and mores, provide some insights into the way the frontier was shared by Indigenous land owners and European 'settlers' in Central Australia in the first half of the twentieth century. The particular details of Don Ross's life elucidate

certain aspects of the way the sharing of that space was negotiated and some of the results of that coexistence.

The thesis argues that the life history reveals not only the individual, singular aspects of Don Ross's life and nature, but that it elucidates certain issues, such as the role and treatment of Indigenous pastoral workers in the twentieth century, and the ways in which Aboriginal people, including 'half-castes' like Don Ross, were affected by legislation and policies governing the lives of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, as well as affording some insights into the debate about Indigenous identity.

The second premise is that to compile an account of this (or any other) Indigenous ('half-caste') person's life was/is a complex scholarly task. As a cross-cultural undertaking it is fraught with ambiguity and paradox as was/is the lived life itself. It requires interrogation and deconstruction of the process, at this particular historical moment, when debates about 'telling the truth about Aboriginal history'²⁸ occupy much scholarly discourse, and the legitimacy and veracity and usefulness of cross-cultural enterprises is being questioned by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars alike, when the questions 'Who speaks?' 'For/with whom?' are particularly urgent. Questions of authorship, agency, methodology, are often predicated upon particular historical conditions and social orthodoxies: they are of vital concern if potentially contested versions of a 'shared' history are to exist in useful relationship with one another.

²⁸ Also the title of a scholarly work by Bain Attwood. 2005. Allen & Unwin, Crow's Nest

ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The text of the thesis constitutes the Introduction, five chapters and the Conclusion.

The Introduction describes the genesis of this particular life history project. It includes a brief account of the life of Alexander Donald Ross and locates Indigenous life histories, and, in particular, the mediated autobiography of Don Ross, within a tradition of collaborative, cross-culturally produced autobiography, biography and life history, and within the relevant critical contexts of past and contemporary scholarship, identifying issues particular to this form of historical and literary endeavour.

Chapter one, 'A Delicate and Complicated Collaborative Venture', describes and analyses the methodology employed in writing the life history, and discusses a number of critical issues arising from the cross-cultural collaborative process which produced the life history of Don Ross.

Chapter two, 'Crossing the Borders', further discusses the dialogic nature of life histories, the nature and function of language, concepts of memory and identity and the ways in which the social and cultural dimensions of these concepts affect the form and content of life histories. It includes a discussion of oral history.

Chapter three, 'Both Sides of the Frontier', locates Don Ross's particular life history within the narrative of twentieth century Northern Territory history, in particular, the development of the pastoral industry.

Chapter four, 'Black, White or Brindle'²⁹ focuses on the history of legislation and policies which governed Aboriginal people's lives in the Northern Territory in the early decades of the twentieth century and reflects on the ways in which Don was affected by these policies during his childhood and early adulthood, and the way in which his identity was established, in the period before World War Two, during a time that 'miscegenation', the 'the half caste problem' and building a 'white Australia' were national concerns.

Chapter five, 'Citizenship: A Bridge Over the Wide Divide?' focuses on the effects of World War Two on the lives of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory and examines the policies of the assimilation era, and the gradual accession of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory to the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship. It also briefly discusses the issue of Indigenous identity.

The Conclusion draws together the major arguments of the thesis and offers some conclusions about Aboriginal history in the Northern Territory in the twentieth century and the role that Indigenous life histories play. Finally, it comments on the value of the particular life history on which this thesis has focused – *Good One, Don Ross*.

²⁹ Used by anthropologist Gillian Cowlishaw as the title for one of her books. *Black, White or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia*. 1988. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

TELLING SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY

Human beings are a 'storied' species. We exchange information, explore ideas, imagine, offer love, comfort, affirmation or censure through story. We use story to give a sense of self and community, place and connection, or conversely, to vilify, exclude, condemn or nullify 'others'. We seek to understand the past, examine the present and predict the future by telling our own and other people's stories. And when those stories contain traumatic memories, the need to restore a sense of order to those memories is acute, as is the need to have these stories heard and accepted as true. Paul Valent, the compiler and editor of a book of Holocaust survivors' testimonies, states, 'Perhaps a person needs a validated thread of memories to achieve a sense of identity and a meaningful life'.³⁰

As a researcher, educator and writer I have been involved for many years in writing other people's stories – particularly the stories of those seen to be culturally and socially marginalised, those once deemed to have no stories of significance to relate, or whose stories have been silenced or misheard/read. These stories have included accounts of the working lives of male and female factory employees, the memories of elderly residents of a number of cities and rural areas, the migration experiences of non-English speaking citizens, stories of pre-literate children, off-shore island dwellers, a non-literate Indigenous community, isolated rural women, rural and urban school students, Indigenous

³⁰ P. Valent. 1994. *Child Survivors*. William Heinemann, Port Melbourne, p. 66

Central Australians, unemployed rural youth and members of Native American communities.

My role has varied from assisting the story tellers to access necessary skills and resources—interpreters, transcribers of oral accounts, classes in the craft of writing, sponsors and publication opportunities—to undertaking the writing myself; constructing the story from interview tapes, conversations, research and archival material, and working with the narrators to achieve a version of their story they felt represented them accurately and appropriately.³¹

My involvement with ‘true stories’³² (a term Helen Garner annexed for her collection of the same name in order to interrogate the notion) has been life-long. Both my work in adult life as a researcher, oral historian, writer and creative writing teacher, as well as my family background and early life experience (including discovering in the books I read in primary school very few stories that reflected my life or the lives of anyone I knew, nor the stories told in my family, an impression reinforced by much of the adult literature I encountered in

³¹Anthologies and other published works resulting from the more than thirty biographical and autobiographical projects in which I have participated over a twenty year period, include a collection of autobiographical writing by elderly Tasmanians, 1989. *Walking Towards the Past*. Adult Education Southern Region, Hobart; a collection of oral histories of retired and current employees of Pasmenco Metals Electrolytic Zinc Company, 1990. *E.Z Stories*. Kaleidoscope Community Arts, Hobart; a collection of translated oral histories of the migration experiences of elderly residents of Tasmania, 1992. *Some Say Hello, Some Can't See You*. Migrant Resource Centre, Hobart; a radio play created from oral histories of the (mostly retired) female employees of Launceston textile mills, broadcast on local radio in 1994 and commissioned by ABC Radio National's *Airplay* in 2004. *Mill Ends*. Cacti Community Arts, Launceston; an anthology of Batchelor Institute's Creative Writing students' work, 2000. *Ngoonjook*. Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education, Batchelor; a novel for young adults, written collaboratively with my son Michael Brown, documenting young men's lives and employment and unemployment in rural Australia, 2002. *Bantam*. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle.

³² H. Garner. 1996. *True Stories*. Text Publishing, Melbourne. Also the title of the 1999 Boyer Lectures and subsequent book by Inga Clendinnen. 2000. Australian Broadcasting Corporation Books, Sydney

adolescence) made me aware that there are many more stories to be told than are in print, and that there existed a whole other 'literature' that was not (yet) written.

As a Tasmanian I had grown up familiar with the notion that places and people had contested histories³³ and that much of our regional history (particularly Aboriginal history) was contained in private documents and/or oral accounts which either were not widely available or were not generally appreciated and valued. This impression has been reinforced through a number of experiences in my professional life, for example on a performance tour and cultural exchange, Wartilpa Kalipanunga, in which I took part in 1991, travelling with two Sydney poets and two painters and song men (one Warlpiri and one Pintubi, from Papunya) in California, New Mexico and Arizona, where we performed and ran workshops in colleges, theatres and on Native American reservations, the America we experienced, the Americans we met and the stories they told were largely unknown outside their own communities. Neither had they heard many of the stories we told, particularly the stories of Indigenous Australia.

In the Northern Territory, as in other parts of Australia, there is an equal fund of 'untold' stories, stories that often are well-known but (mostly) disseminated orally within certain restricted social groups, and that often may contain elements which

³³For example, when I was a child, in the 1950s, Port Arthur was both a holiday destination, a part of our heritage and also a place of unspeakable brutality: I was aware of its being both a source of pride (as an historical tourist destination) and shame (people had tried to burn it down at least three times in my father's lifetime, and he was of the opinion it should be razed) to local people. A more sinister example was the historical 'given' current in my childhood, that the Tasmanian Aboriginal people were extinct, that there were no Aboriginal people in Tasmania: concurrent with this 'fact' was also the 'fact' that most Tasmanians knew and readily could identify Aboriginal families in their area. See, for example, P. Conrad. 1988. *Down Home: Discovering Tasmania*. Chatto and Windus, London, in which Conrad speaks of the Fewkes (which he misspells as 'Fuchs') family of Goodwood.

give insights into, or may challenge or contest authorised or more widely accepted versions of the history of events of that region. These stories are beginning to be given utterance, and to reach wider audiences. The publication of increasing numbers of life and community histories³⁴ is continuing that process, as is much of the recent scholarship in the area of Northern Territory history.³⁵

³⁴Including the following: M. Bil-Bil. 1995. *It Just Lies There From the Beginning*. Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) Press, Alice Springs; G. Cowlishaw (ed) 2000. *Love Against the Law: The Autobiographies of Tex and Nellie Camfoo*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra; G. Crugnale. (compiler) 1995. *Footprints Across Our Land: Stories by Senior Western Desert Women*. Magabala Books, Broome; R.M.W. Dixon and M. Duwell. (eds) 1990. *The Honey Ant Men's Love Songs and Other Aboriginal Song Poems*. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia; P. Havnen. 2001. *Under the Mango Tree*. Northern Territory Writers Centre Inc., Darwin; R.G. Kimber. 1986. *Man From Arltunga: Walter Smith, Australian Bushman*. Hesperian Press, Victoria Park; G. Koch. (ed) 1993; C. McAdam and E. Tregenza. 1995. *Boundary Lines*. McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood; F. Merlin. (compiler) 1996. *Big River Country: Stories From Elsey Station*. IAD Press, Alice Springs; B. Neidjie. 1989. *Story About Feeling*. Magabala Books, Broome; B. Neidjie, S. Davis and A. Fox. 1989. *Australia's Kakadu Man*. Resource Managers Ltd, Darwin; P. Ogden (compiler) and P. Sing. (narrator) 1992. *From Humpy to Homestead: The Biography of Sabu*. Self-Published, Darwin; P. Read and J. Read. (eds) 1991. *Long Time Olden Time*. IAD Press, Alice Springs; D.B. Rose. 1991. *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra; W. Rubuntja and J. Green. 2002. *The Town Grew Up Dancing*. IAD Press, Alice Springs; T. Thompson and M. Turpin. (compiler) 2003. *Growing Up Kaytetye*. IAD Press, Alice Springs; P. Vaarzon-Morel (collector) 1995. *Warlpiri Women's Voices: Our Lives, Our History*. IAD Press, Alice Springs; J. Wositsky. (told by Yiduduna Bill Harney) 1996. *Under the Paperbark Tree*. ABC Books, Sydney; A. Wright. 1997. *Grog War*. Magabala Books, Broome; A. Wright. 1998. *Take Power, Like This Old Man Here*. IAD Press, Alice Springs.

³⁵Including the following: T. Austin. 1989. *Exceptionally Assimilable: the Commonwealth and Half-Caste Youth in the Northern Territory 1911–1939*. PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, St Lucia; 1990. Cecil Cooke, Scientific Thought and 'Half-Castes' in the Northern Territory 1927 – 1939. *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 14, No.1, pp. 104–122; 1993. *I Can Picture The Old Home So Clearly: The Commonwealth and "Half-Caste" Youth in the Northern Territory, 1911 – 1939*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra; 1997. *Never Trust a Government Man: Northern Territory Aboriginal Policy 1911–1939*. Northern Territory University Press, Casuarina; T. Austin and S. Parry. (eds) 1998. *Connection and Disconnection: Encounters Between Settlers in the Northern Territory*. Northern Territory University Press, Casuarina; B. Brian. 2001. *The Northern Territory's One Big Union: The Rise and Fall of the North Australian Workers' Union 1911 – 1972*. PhD Thesis, Northern Territory University, Darwin; B. James. 1989. *No Man's Land: Women of the Northern Territory*. Collins, Sydney; J.P.M. Long. 1992. *The Go-Betweens: Patrol Officers in Aboriginal Affairs' Administration in the Northern Territory 1936–1974*. Australian National University/North Australian Research Unit, Darwin; A. Powell. 1982/1996. *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne; G. Reid. 1990. *A Picnic with the Natives: Aboriginal-European Relations in the Northern Territory to 1910*. Melbourne University Press, Melbourne; D.B. Rose. 1991; 1992. *Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in an Aboriginal Australian Culture*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; T. Rowse. 1998. *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; J.T. Wells. 1995. *The Long March: Assimilation Policy and Practice in Darwin, the Northern Territory 1937–1967*. PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, St Lucia; J.T. Wells, M. Dewar and S. Parry. (eds) 2005. *Modern Frontiers: Aspects of the 1950s in Australia's Northern Territory*. Charles Darwin University Press, Casuarina; S. Wells. 2003. *Negotiating Place in Colonial Darwin: Interactions Between Aborigines and Whites 1869-1911*.

How effectively I had internalised the notion of the powerlessness of Indigenous people was demonstrated to me by the surprise evinced when, as a newcomer to the Northern Territory in the nineteen nineties, I was told by Graham Ross, a colleague of mine at the Institute for Aboriginal Development Press in Alice Springs and a man of Kaytetye, Arrernte, English and Scottish ancestry, whilst he was relating information about his father's involvement in the early days of the Northern Territory pastoral industry, that his father, Don Ross, had owned a cattle station near Barrow Creek, in the late nineteen forties. My response to Graham Ross's information was that I had not imagined such a thing to be possible for an Aboriginal man of those times. At that stage I had only the most general idea of the history of the Northern Territory since white 'contact' but sensed the significance of this particular story, which as far as I knew, was known only to a limited number of Northern Territorians.

Over the years people had encouraged Don Ross to record his life story. The Ross family, in particular, felt their father's story was significant. In 1996 Graham Ross approached me to help compile his father's life history. In 1997 Don Ross was consulted on linguistic matters by the Institute for Aboriginal Development³⁶ Dictionaries staff, who were compiling a Kaytetye dictionary. Linguist Myfany Turpin had recorded some of Don's stories during those consultations. She approached the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

PhD Thesis, University of Technology, Sydney; B. Wilson and J. O'Brien. 2003. 'To infuse an universal terror': A Reappraisal of the Coniston Killings. *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 27, pp. 59–78; W. R. Wilson. 1995. Sillitoe's Tartan in Northern Australia: A View of Black and White Policing in the Northern Territory 1884–1935. Northern Territory University Honours Thesis, Darwin.

³⁶ Hereafter referred to as IAD

Studies in Canberra,³⁷ who agreed to fund a more extensive series of interviews with Don Ross (and to archive the taped material) with a view to publishing a life history of Don Ross. After consultation, Don expressed himself willing to collaborate with me and he and I began to record his life history in 1998. A very cordial relationship developed as we recorded his memories, discussed aspects of Northern Territory history and ‘yarned’ about a range of people, places and issues. Both our friendship and our collaborative work were interrupted by Don’s death in April 1999.

The interview and transcription process was facilitated and monitored in Alice Springs by IAD Dictionaries Program staff. A group which included Indigenous and non-Indigenous IAD staff and members of the Ross family supported the project, ensured appropriate cultural protocols were maintained and kept the Ross family apprised of and involved in the progress of the project. After Don’s death I continued to work closely with members of the Ross family and with the Institute for Aboriginal Development Dictionaries staff. My own severe illness in 2001 and the ensuing protracted convalescence delayed the completion of subsequent drafts of the manuscript; however, a final draft was given to the Ross family in 2002, for their comments. They agreed to its public circulation and publication after deleting some passages of sensitive material.

Don Ross and I had discussed embedding his life history in a piece of academic research focused on Northern Territory history and the process of collaboration and joint authorship, and he was very interested in pursuing that possibility. Don

³⁷Hereafter referred to as AIATSIS

also was very interested in reaching a wider audience with his life history, and speculated on more than one occasion as to what ‘that Sydney, Melbourne mob’ might make of his life history and his ‘take’ on a Central Australia that had changed almost out of recognition from his younger days. Sadly, that collaborative process never was to be completed.

Concomitant with recording Don’s life history I was involved in a collaborative project with my son, in which we documented, in a fictional form (a novel, *Bantam*) based on factual accounts, the lives of young men in small rural towns and explored the issues of unemployment and rural downturn.³⁸ *Bantam*, the setting for the novel, is a fictional town in southeast Australia. Historical material is accurate but the location and other details are not specified, but are revealed largely by the characters’ actions and dialogue in ongoing conflicts and discussions in the local pubs, rather than through the formal discourses of history. We amalgamated the various oral testimonies of young men, which my son and I were given, into narratives of fictional characters, narratives which portrayed what we felt to be (and others subsequently have agreed is) a recognisable and accurate picture of rural downturn and the life of unemployed young men in regional south-east Australia.

The decision to use the fictional form of the novel as a device for exploring the issues was a considered one and based on similar grounds to Alexis Wright’s decision in her important book, *Grog War*, where she creates such fictional

³⁸ T.Whitebeach & M. Brown. 2002. *Bantam*. Fremantle Arts Centre Press. This book received critical acclaim.

characters as Mickey Nothing, Lucas and Devine in order to portray the devastating effects of alcohol on families and communities in Warumungu country in and around Tennant Creek.³⁹ The effects on families and communities of the high rate of suicide of young men in rural south-east Australia constrained me from identifying actual people and real communities, and the considerable shame and distress of young unemployed men in rural communities constrained me from adding to their burdens by identifying particular individuals or places. I was to face similar constraints with some of the interview material in compiling Don Ross's life history.

The other reason for choosing young adult fiction as the most appropriate form for conveying the realities with which *Bantam* dealt was that our intended target audience primarily was the subjects of the text. It was their story and we wanted them to read it. Thus we chose a form readily accessible to young people to whom written texts were not necessarily very appealing, and whose reality was rarely the subject of literature intended for their own readership. A similar consideration, of the target audience for Don Ross's life history, and the implications this had for choosing an appropriate narrative method, created dilemmas for which it took me a number of years to find partial or complete solutions. These issues are discussed in the thesis.

However, in the early stages of both projects my methodology was similar. The drafts of *Bantam* were read to the young people involved in the project, who, of course, had editorial rights: they gave their input, clarified facts and details,

³⁹ A. Wright. 1997. pp. 3–21

expanded on stories, gave their approval and also exercised their right of veto over the contents. Some material was excised accordingly. Don Ross, the Ross family and other relevant people gave input and exercised the same rights of veto over material recorded for Don Ross's life history. We employed the same method, my son in Tasmania, and I in Alice Springs, reading aloud the texts that had been created mainly from orally transmitted material and inviting discussion, and amending the written texts accordingly.⁴⁰

For the five years I was engaged in constructing the text of Don Ross's life history I kept a record of my reflections on the process, of the questions which I tried to answer and the dilemmas with which I struggled, such as how to preserve the authenticity of Don's voice in the printed text and how to present him as the primary speaking subject whilst not denying my role as co-creator, editor and, to a certain extent, interpreter of the text. (This last role, I felt strongly, did not include challenging, denying or over-riding with my own interpretations the words spoken by Don Ross.) From this record of my reflections, from my research and literature searches and from conversations and consultations with a range of people, I compiled a text to accompany the life history. This text exists in a dialogic relationship with Don's narrative.

⁴⁰ *Bantam*, co-incidentally, partially reverted to its origins as an orally transmitted text when it was serialized on the ABC's *Book Reading* in 2004, and with the broadcast of my radio play, on *Airplay*, entitled *Bantam, a Real Book by Mick Brown and Terry Whitebeach*, which I wrote to explore both the process of collaboration with my son and the social history content of the novel: this latter aspect was taken up by ABC's rural program *Bush Telegraph*, whose presenter interviewed Michael Brown. It felt necessary and useful to offer some analysis both of the content of the novel and the collaborative process by which it had been produced – the history of a history, so to speak.

I had undertaken, in good faith, to facilitate the presentation of a written text of Don's life story as told by himself, consisting of those aspects of his life history he chose to speak of, publicly, in the way he remembered them and chose to make meaning from them, in his eighty third and eighty fourth years. I was of course aware of potential and actual discrepancies between the lived reality, the remembering and relating and the way Don Ross (and everyone else) might make meaning from events now far in the past. To give some indication of the complexity of memoir-making, and to allow the presence of alternative, complementary or even contested points of view and discourses I included historical documentation and comments and narratives by people who agreed to my requests for clarification and amplification of material supplied by Don, or alternative points of view to those expressed by him. By those means I hoped the readers would be able to honour Don's own account of his life, to read the silences and have the freedom to insert, either from direct experience or by imagination, additional and/or potentially disparate ways of constructing the memories or accounts of the events Don related.

Life histories (oral texts recorded and compiled as a written text by a person other than the narrator) represent a significant proportion of the books published by Indigenous publishing houses in Australia, presses who are at the forefront in publishing the burgeoning body of literature by Aboriginal authors.⁴¹ Cultural maintenance is a significant brief of IAD Press. It is responsible for the only other two published Kaytetye histories, *Kaytetye Country*, compiled by Grace Koch and *Growing Up Kaytetye*, compiled by Myfany Turpin. (It has also published A

⁴¹ A term which in my definition includes both writers and oral narrators.

Learner's Guide to Kaytetye and the *Kaytetye Picture Dictionary* compiled by Myfany Turpin and other members of IAD Dictionaries Staff.) Don Ross's life history was offered to IAD Press and they agreed to publish it. That decision solved a number of issues for me, as the writer of the history, and allowed (and required) me then to focus the academic work more closely on issues of history, historiography and literary theory. Accordingly, I excised much of the interpretive and theoretical text from the life history text (alternatively, one could say I liberated the life history from the academic and theoretical text – from the weight of interpretation) and have located it in the text of the thesis.

Whilst the forth-coming published life history, *Good One, Don Ross*, jointly 'authored' by Don Ross and Terry Whitebeach, will be aimed at a wide general readership, its initial audience will be Central Australians, including Kaytetye people, who eagerly await its release, who will be familiar with much of the history and many of the circumstances and events explicitly and implicitly revealed in Don Ross's life history. Implicit also is an understanding that this is Don Ross's story, the way he chose to tell it, predominantly in his own voice with minimal editorialising, interpretation and analysis of the narrative. However the overt acknowledgement of joint authorship signals the dialogistic nature of the construction of the text.

Once the decision to publish the life history as a separate text had been made, the thesis, as stated above, took as its major foci the location of that life history in its historical and literary critical contexts and the exploration of the cross cultural collaborative process by means of which the life history had been created.

The documentation of the lives of Indigenous Australians in autobiographies, biographies and life histories has been, and continues to be, a complex and evolving historical and literary process, and it can be argued that the changes in the methodology and exegesis of these texts over the last half-century reflect both advances in historiography and significant shifts in the Australian psyche. In creating the text of a life history and in examining the process of creating a particular text – Don Ross’s life history – a number of critical issues related to those changes and the challenges they present are raised and discussed within the context of the relevant critical discourses.

The life history of Don Ross can be considered both an account of an individual’s particular life and circumstances, revealing particular idiosyncrasies, inconsistencies, personal biases and perspectives, and a means to illuminate a significant period of Northern Territory history, providing insights into both the development of the pastoral industry and the history of race relations in the Northern Territory. Don Ross’s perceptions, prejudices, beliefs, motivations and actions mirrored the influences brought to bear on him, and reflected many of the prevailing beliefs and attitudes of his times. They also reflected his particular character, capabilities, life experience, strengths and weaknesses. And when one considers the disparate nature of the collection of narratives by Don Ross which constitute the life history, narratives related to a number of different listeners in a range of circumstances over a fourteen-year period, narratives varying in tone, content, emphases, detail and nuance, and answers given to (and significant silences, sometimes, in the face of) questions posed by many different people, the

falsity of the humanist notion of the single, unified self narrating a coherent account of a life becomes apparent.

As a man of Kaytetye and European ancestry, Don Ross's personal story is imbued with the complexities of a potentially conflicted racial identity. He was a man who lived both in Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. 'I was brought up by whites, but I was called Aboriginal, I suppose', he said,⁴² summarising in typically laconic fashion a life which had been a dexterous balancing act between his Aboriginal and European identities, for, within certain limits, some of which are revealed overtly or covertly in his life history, Don Ross managed to navigate the twentieth century rural white world of the Northern Territory whilst retaining his Kaytetye identity and family ties.

At the outset, I was troubled by the legitimacy of taking on the role of collaborator with Don Ross. I was a relative stranger, so felt myself to be hardly qualified to do justice to a project steeped in Northern Territory history. I was also very sensitive to the long history of Aboriginal people as the objects of study, with a whole range of people having felt they had the right to speak for Aboriginal people and to interpret their reality with impunity. These conflicts I discussed at length with the Ross family and the IAD Dictionaries staff, both of whom wanted me to go ahead with the project, and eventually it was put to me baldly that Don Ross was old and ailing, there was no-one else to do the work, and if I didn't write his life history, no-one else would. Whilst that may or may not have been the case, I found it necessary to put aside my own worries about my legitimacy, and respond

⁴² Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 April 1998

to the desire of Don Ross and his family to undertake the life history writing, despite my feeling that it would have been a more appropriate task for a member of the family, or another Arrernte or Kaytetye person to undertake. But there was no Arrernte or Kaytetye person available to meet the urgency of the situation.

Although working on Don Ross's life history would be by far the most extended piece of biographical writing I had undertaken, initially I adopted a version of the 'fairly naïve, empirical approach'⁴³ Heather Goodall describes in her 1987 article, 'Aboriginal History and the Politics of Information Control'. Like Goodall, I also expected 'to take a low profile and let the [man] speak'.⁴⁴ The questions I put to Don Ross, particularly in the early days of our collaboration, like Goodall's questions to her informant, sought information about events, rather than broader interpretations.⁴⁵ Don Ross loved to talk about his days as a stockman, and had a ready fund of stories on this subject. Perhaps, like Goodall, I also 'expected that once [Don Ross] had agreed to record [his] memories the interpretations of what [he] had said would be self-evident and unproblematic'.⁴⁶ Beyond creating a glossary of terms associated with the cattle industry and outback Northern Territory life, which also included (sometimes dated) colloquial and Aboriginal English expressions unfamiliar to some readers,⁴⁷ I initially expected to be the 'silent partner' in the enterprise.

⁴³ H. Goodall. 1987. Aboriginal History and the Politics of Information Control. *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No. 9, p. 18

⁴⁴ H. Goodall. 1987. p. 33

⁴⁵ H. Goodall. 1987. p. 33

⁴⁶ H. Goodall. 1987. p. 9

⁴⁷ Appendix 2. pp. 374–386

Don Ross was not an informant in an anthropological field-study. He could tell his own stories. He had been doing so for years. He was assertive, self-directed, highly intelligent, with a fund of great yarns, and he was literate, but his health was poor, his sight was fading and he had a marked tremor in his hands, which would have made writing nearly impossible for him.

Unlike many Aboriginal people whose life histories have been constructed from oral histories, Don had learned to read and write as a child, and he valued his hard-won literacy. (Until his sight began to fail, he had enjoyed reading, particularly cowboy novels and accounts of outback life.) During the years of his ownership of Neutral Junction cattle station, he had kept detailed diaries of stock and station matters. Keeping those diaries, the only form of autobiographical writing, if it legitimately could be called that, which Don had undertaken in his life, demonstrated both what he felt was important to record, and what he felt was expected of him as a station owner. Always his preferred topics of conversation were horses and cattle and at eighty-three years of age he still dreamed about mustering.⁴⁸

Perhaps all Don needed to create his life history was the most ghostly of ghostwriters? In that case, I was happy to offer my services. However, during and after the conclusion of the interview period I became aware, as stated above, that if I were to do the project and the man justice I would need to investigate and consider in much greater detail and in a much more systematic and sustained way than at first I had anticipated the historical, literary and ethical issues of telling

⁴⁸ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 10 June 1998

someone else's story, if only to avoid adding to the burden of misrepresentation Indigenous people historically have suffered.

My concern as a listener and witness was that the authenticity and integrity of Don's story be preserved. That his point of view and his construction of his life be presented in the way he wished it to be. My concern as a writer was to transfer the oral narratives into an appropriate written form. And my concern as an historian was that Don's story be as useful an historical document as possible. What was needed was to find a valid speaking position for Don, and for myself, and to allow Don's life history both to inhabit and to interrogate Northern Territory history. It was out of the desire to write fittingly, respectfully and well, the life story of a remarkable man, Alexander Donald Ross, and to set that story in its appropriate historical and historiographical contexts, and also out of the need to research and document the process and address some of the issues involved in 'telling someone else's story' that this thesis has been developed.

Life writing, the literary tradition in which Don Ross's life history may be located, is anchored in fact, in lived experiences, and its narratives are created from memories and perceptions of, and responses to, these 'facts' by the individual him/herself (the 'auto' part of biography) or as reported or construed by a third person, who is 'writing someone else's story'. Imagination and history is the way Albert Stone describes life writing, literary convention and cultural activity.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ A. Stone. Cited by Personal Narratives Group. In J.W. Barbre et al. Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. p. 140

The term 'life writing' incorporates a range of auto/biographical writing, including testimony, life history, biography, autobiography, and memoir. However, the increasing tendency of writers to use 'true story' rather than novels to reflect contemporary reality, the consequences of post-modern literary theory on life writing and the increasing range of memoirs, life histories⁵⁰ and autobiographical writings reflecting the lives and experiences of Indigenous people which are being published, are both transforming past and current literary genres and producing new hybridised genres, such as Creative Non-Fiction, a 'transitional and experimental'⁵¹ form of writing by Indigenous people which includes commentaries, anecdotally-based pieces which are socio-political yet playful, opinionated or provocative, reflective pieces and 'identity' pieces primarily devoted to either the individual's or the group's search, preoccupation or analysis of the contemporary Indigenous perspective contrasted with the dubious legacy of colonialism.⁵²

Autobiography, the form of writing about personal life experiences, or responses to events, a convention most utilised in Western literature of the past two centuries, connects the writer (or teller) to his or her individual self as well as to collective human existence. Similarly, the description of a person's life and

⁵⁰ Written texts compiled from orally transmitted narratives, based on a collaboration between the narrator and the writer. Authorship of a published life history is variously assigned: to a single (usually non-Indigenous) author; to joint authors, with no differentiation between the roles of each 'author' – the writer and the narrator; to joint authors, defining the role of each 'by X as told to Y'; to the narrator as primary 'author', with the second 'author' listed as editor or compiler. The way authorship is assigned often reveals the political and philosophical stance of the 'writer' of the life history.

⁵¹ R. Marsden. (ed) 2000. *Crisp Blue Edges: Indigenous Creative Non-Fiction*. Theytus Books, Ltd., Penticton, B.C. p. 15

⁵² R. Marsden. (ed) 2000. pp. 17–18

his/story, conveyed to a third person and compiled within the conventions of the hybridised literary form of mediated autobiography, (a form which Don Ross's and other Indigenous life histories may – but not necessarily – employ)⁵³ also provides insights into the historical and political contexts of that particular lived life. Discussion of the way in which the text of a particular life history was produced collaboratively may be said to constitute the history of a history.

That the interview process was never completed and Don Ross's and my collaboration was interrupted by his death has had significant implications for the form and content of the final text of his life history. In our limited time together, it may have been more appropriate for me to have concentrated less on checking the transcripts of the material which had already been recorded – a laborious process for Don, except where it gave rise to new stories – or in looking at documents, local histories and photos of cattle and station life with him – an activity, nevertheless, that we both enjoyed immensely – and more on recording further interviews and discussing in greater detail the final form the text might take. For, in examining the interview transcripts after Don had passed away, I realised that in many cases they consisted of a series of tantalising fragments, some of which it has not been possible to include as coherent and meaningful narrative sequences in the final text, because details such as the identity of persons mentioned, temporal and geographical locations and context had not been ascertained or verified, thus making the account incomplete or even incomprehensible. There still remains much about Don Ross's life and world that is unknown to me: these 'gaps in the

⁵³ Care must be taken with the term 'mediated' as McConaghy points out, 'it is the process of "mediation" which creates the potential for misunderstanding, myth-making and the creation of racial stereotypes'. C. McConaghy. 1994. Fashion and Prescription in Representations of Indigenous Education. *Discourse*, Vol. 15, No. 2, University of Queensland, p. 82

record' have hindered and in some cases prevented the 'shuttlework'⁵⁴ of interweaving all of the strands of the life history as effectively as I would have desired, a cause for great regret.

I have always felt, and nowhere more deeply than in compiling Don Ross's life history, the responsibility involved in crafting 'someone else's story', especially in view of the gaps that now might never be filled. But perhaps my regret is also a particular expression of an impossible desire to arrive at the 'final word', the complete picture, the incontestable account, a desire which has its origins, perhaps, both in the philosophical tradition of truth and authority in which I have been nurtured (we are all to some extent products of our social conditioning) and in the literary traditions of writing fiction; novel-writing in particular. Despite the body of critical opinion that argues that 'factual' writing like autobiography is a form of fiction, that 'truth' is a slippery commodity and that 'writers have bent everything out of shape'⁵⁵ it is still possible to argue the significant differences between history and fiction writing.

In fiction, provided an internal coherence in the material is retained and the writer manages to effect a willing suspension of disbelief in the reader, he or she is then free to invent at will. Inga Clendinnen says:

The shape of a story blooms in my head, I cherish it for a while, imagine my way through it, set it down. Fiction invents a world free from moral demands and from moral consequences, while imposing

⁵⁴ A. Portelli. Cited by J. Douglass. *Women's Travel Narratives of the 1950s*. In K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton. (eds) 1994. *Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 235

⁵⁵ R. Marsden. (ed) 2000. p. 21

paradoxical restrictions of its own. We may invent experiences and put our chosen shapes upon them, but the experiences must always be believable, which is something history does not require.⁵⁶

But, in history writing one must fashion the narrative not from lively invention, but from records of occurrences, from what Clendinnen refers to as ‘the deceitful, accidental record’⁵⁷ to which the historian is epistemologically bound (as she/he is also bound, morally, Clendinnen claims, to the dead men and women she/he has chosen to represent, and to the living men and women the historian wants to read her/his words and trust them).⁵⁸ The role of imagination in history is not to invent, but to try to understand,⁵⁹ Clendinnen says. And as any form of historical knowledge, Pickering avers, ‘is necessarily partial, provisional and time bound one of the historian’s most abiding senses of frustration in relation to his or her material is its absolute incompleteness, its inevitable existence in the present only as time’s traces’.⁶⁰ As with life, history is always shadowed by mystery.⁶¹

Despite this, Pickering maintains, the problems encountered from having to piece together the surviving or retrievable odds and ends of the past and of having to struggle imaginatively to make them cohere, rarely surface in the texts historians construct.⁶² It felt imperative to signify clearly that the text of Don Ross’s life

⁵⁶ I. Clendinnen. 2000. *Tiger’s Eye*. Text Publishing, Melbourne, p. 245

⁵⁷ I. Clendinnen. 2000. p. 244

⁵⁸ I. Clendinnen. 2000. p. 244

⁵⁹ I. Clendinnen. 2000. p. 244

⁶⁰ M. Pickering. 1987. *History, Experience and Cultural Studies*. Macmillan, London, pp.7-8

⁶¹ I. Clendinnen. 2000. p. 245

⁶² M. Pickering. 1987. pp.7-8

history was pieced together from ‘the surviving and retrievable odds and ends of the past’⁶³ and that it represented only one of a number of possible narrative accounts of his lived experience, an account influenced by Don’s memory and ‘way of remembering’ as well as by my own lived experience, my relationship with him, and also by his and my cultural outlooks and beliefs and the nature of our communication and the way I had understood and subsequently attempted to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, what Don had communicated to me and other interviewers.

A concomitant necessity was to inform the narrative by locating the life history in its wider context of Northern Territory history and to reveal to the reader the social realities of the political forces brought to bear on Don Ross during his lifetime.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Australian history had conventionally been regarded as the history of Australian society, i.e. of Western European civilisation in the Australian setting. Conventional histories either relegated the Indigenous inhabitants to the margins or banished them altogether by means of the doctrine of Terra Nullius.

Until the 1960s the only substantial historical treatment of Aborigines was within the context of missionary history, the history of ‘native administration’ and anthropology.⁶⁴

The cult of forgetfulness⁶⁵ has been significant in the formation of social memory in Australia – a memory, Chris Healy claims, that was/is a product of

⁶³ M. Pickering. 1987. pp.7-8

⁶⁴ R.H.W. Reece. 1987. Inventing Aborigines. *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 254

⁶⁵ W.E. Stanner. 1969. *After the Dreaming*. ABC Books, Sydney, p. 25

colonialism.⁶⁶ Constructions of settler history depend on being able to forget in order to remember, Lyn Riddett reminds us.⁶⁷ It is an unpleasant fact, as Reece⁶⁸ and many other historians have attested, that the white occupation of Australia has been achieved only at the cost of tens of thousands of Aboriginal lives. Many early colonial writings were more honest in their admission that Europeans were in direct competition with the traditional owners (whilst also disputing or refusing to recognise the Aboriginal concept of ownership) and many regretted, even whilst viewing it as a sorry necessity, the harm done to Indigenous people and culture, during the ‘settlement’ of the continent. From the government residence in the Northern Territory in 1887, J. Langdon Parsons wrote:

In nearly all cases the early results of the white man’s intrusion is a permanent feud between the blacks and whites. The blacks frighten and spear the cattle and hold themselves in readiness to attack boundary riders and stockmen, or to make a raid upon outstations or the storeroom. The whites look well to their Winchesters and revolvers, and usually proceed on the principle of being on the safe side. It is an affectation of ignorance to pretend not to know that this is the condition of things throughout the back blocks and the new country Australia.⁶⁹

So much was the safety of the settlers perceived to depend upon the ‘dispersal’ of the original inhabitants of the country, and so great were the depredations on Aboriginal communities that the subsequent, widely (and conveniently) held belief that the Aborigines were a dying race arose and became firmly entrenched in the

⁶⁶ C. Healy. 1997. *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 6

⁶⁷ L. Riddett. 1995. Think Again: Communities Which Lose Their Memory: the Construction of History in Settler Societies. *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 44, p. 47

⁶⁸ R.H.W. Reece. 1987. p. 270

⁶⁹ J.L. Parsons. 1887. Cited by H. Reynolds. The Written Record. In B. Attwood and S.G. Foster. (eds) 2003. *Frontier Conflict, The Australian Experience*. National Museum of Australia, Canberra, p. 86

consciousness of white Australia. Whilst time, scholarship and a changing political climate are confounding some of the myths, still misapprehensions and distorted perceptions of Indigenous people have persisted almost unabated to the present day amongst certain sections of the non-Indigenous Australian population.⁷⁰ Ignorance, indifference, arrogance and racial ideology, Broome claims, shaped these European views of culture contacts on the Australian frontier.⁷¹ These potent amnesiacs have provided the means to nullify (pun intended) both the memory of having annexed the land against the will and to the cost of its traditional owners and inhabitants and the moral responsibility incumbent upon those actions.

Thus emerged a culture of forgetfulness. This tendency to forgetfulness, as Henry Reynolds has argued,⁷² reflects deep psychological needs in the Australian community to provide for itself a social history containing only what the community can bear to remember. All communities, if left unchallenged, Riddett maintains, will construct a history based on a social memory that ignores uncomfortable and 'negative' facts.⁷³ That is not to suggest a simplistic or psychologically transparent view of Australian history, a history which, Alan Atkinson attests, is full of deep shifts in an ocean of feeling about race, shifts of

⁷⁰ R. Broome. *Historians, Aborigines and Australia: Writing the National Past*. In B. Attwood. (ed.) 1996. *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney. pp. p. 55

⁷¹ R. Broome. 1996. p. 55

⁷²H. Reynolds. 1972. p. 472

⁷³ L. Riddett. 1995. p. 45. In her article, Riddett provides a contemporary example. She documents and analyses the processes whereby it was expunged from public memory that the site of the Mindil Beach market in Darwin was an Aboriginal burial site. Studies of the recollections of members of communities governed by fascist administrators demonstrate similar amnesiac tendencies, Luisa Passerini demonstrates. *Women's Personal Narratives: Myths, Experiences and Emotions*. In J.W. Barbre et al *Personal Narratives Group*. (eds) 1989. pp. 189–200

feeling that have been matched, in complicated ways, by shifts in behaviour.⁷⁴ But, either the expunging of the memory of the presence of, or the emphasis on the ‘otherness’ of, the Aborigines, Riddett insists, is functional in the construction of non-Aboriginal social memory in a settler society,⁷⁵ a memory in which Aboriginal people were seen as having little significance in the shaping of Australian history, except as they served the white settlers’ belief in the vast superiority of British civilisation, revealing an attitude to non-Europeans that is a central feature of our national tradition.⁷⁶

Part of the problem for historians, Reece maintains, is the lack of documentation of early frontier history.⁷⁷ It is a cause for great regret that because Australian history until recent times conventionally was regarded as the history of Western European civilisation in the Australian setting,⁷⁸ comparatively little of what Indigenous participants in the process and making of Australian history had to relate was recorded. Aboriginal perspectives might well have disrupted what Inga Clendinnen in her 1999 Boyer lectures called ‘one simple and necessarily false...story about how fine and great we are, how fine and great we have always been’.⁷⁹ This simplistic version of history was able to hold sway, as Ann McGrath and others have pointed out, as long as there were no general histories of Australia

⁷⁴ A. Atkinson et al. Cited by M. Hill and A. Barlow. 1985. *Black Australia 2*. Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, Canberra. p. 119

⁷⁵ L. Riddett. 1995. p. 45

⁷⁶ R.H.W. Reece. 1987. p. 259

⁷⁷ R.H.W. Reece. 1987. p. 259

⁷⁸ R.H.W. Reece. 1987. p. 269

⁷⁹ I. Clendinnen. 2000. p. 3

written by Aborigines and very few all-encompassing regional histories.⁸⁰ The terms for participation in the dominant discourse are laid down in the use of the words 'written' and 'histories'.

As Riddett has attested, the emphasis on the 'otherness' of Aborigines along with the process of social amnesia sanctions the separation of settler social memory from Aboriginal social memory.⁸¹ But what Clendinnen and others have called for is what Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Council insisted upon, in South Africa, that the new state begin not with no history, not with a false history, but with a history forged out of its divided but shared past.

From the earliest 'contact' times, in writing produced by the coercion of Aboriginal 'prisoners' in the Wybalenna settlement on Flinders island, in the stirring accounts of how the pioneers single-handedly and unaided tamed the savage and unforgiving land, to the present debates about the fabrication of Aboriginal history,⁸² false histories have abounded in Australia. True histories are much more complex, much more 'lumpy', to employ Clendinnen's terminology.⁸³

Now, finally, Aboriginal accounts of history are beginning to be afforded, or are winning themselves, a place. These counter-histories are being told especially

⁸⁰ A. McGrath. 1987. *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country*. Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, p. 373

⁸¹ L. Riddett. 1995. p. 47

⁸² K. Windschuttle. 2002. *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Vol. 1, Van Diemen's Land 1804-1847*. Macleay Press, Paddington

⁸³ I. Clendinnen. 2000. p. 3

through Aboriginal autobiographies, life stories, biographies and oral testimony.⁸⁴ Stock characters are reclaiming their individual and social identities, real people are emerging from the shadows of history to where often they had been consigned as unnamed faces and figures in historical or ethnographic photos, the unidentified ‘natives’, ‘boys’, ‘gins’ and ‘lubras’ of frontier stories. Their personalities, histories, cultures and versions of the past are finally being afforded the attention and respect they deserve.

‘Slowly the silences are filling up with truth’,⁸⁵ is the way Native American writer, Lesley Marmon Silko, puts it in her ground-breaking work, *Ceremony*, a truth (neither simplistic or essentialist as it is represented in Silko’s work) which may sometimes be of a different order, but which has equally legitimate claims to validity, necessity and relevance as the truths and orthodoxies of European-centred historical accounts.

Increasingly, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, Aboriginal people have been challenging existing Australian understandings of the colonial past; emphasizing their prior occupation, direct experience of invasion and racist oppression and their ongoing struggle for survival. And many of these challenges have come through the texts of published biographies, autobiographies and life histories. Ann Curthoys maintains:

⁸⁴ A. Curthoys. Aboriginal History. In G. Davison, D. Hirst and S. MacIntyre. (eds) 1998. *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 5. Also, B. Attwood. 1995. Aboriginal History. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 41, p. 39

⁸⁵ L.M. Silko. 1977. *Ceremony*. Penguin, New York, p. 246

The re-evaluations of historical sources and reinterpretations of past events, plus the increasing weight of evidence which Aboriginal testimony is providing, are seriously challenging certain beliefs, for example, beliefs about the capacity and skills of Aboriginal workers and thus certain aspects of the frontier myth. This counter history...has had a significant impact on historians, the law and public life.⁸⁶

Indigenous writer and activist, Anita Heiss, reflecting on the impact of Indigenous writing, cites Connie Fife's *The Colour of Resistance*:

The act of literary creation and our oral past have merged into a medium through which we can pass on not only the truth of our history but the moment in which we now exist. Our past, the present and the future come together through words that are 'living' from their first conception to the time when the reader finds her own meaning in them.⁸⁷

Like most traditional Indigenous communities, the Kaytetye people of Central Australia possessed a valid oral record of what Western historians would term their 'prehistory'. Kaytetye oral records include accounts of the arrival of Europeans and the impact on Kaytetye law and society of these newcomers. The Kaytetye, like Aboriginal people throughout Australia, were deeply affected by European 'settlement'. They also contributed significantly to the development of the Northern Territory pastoral industry from its inception in the mid-nineteenth century. But, until recently there has been little mention, in written histories, either of the annexation of their traditional lands or of their contribution to the pastoral industry. In recent times transcripts of oral histories and records of land claims have been included in some historical accounts, but, to date, whilst there

⁸⁶ A. Curthoys. *Constructing National Histories*. In B. Attwood and S.G. Foster. 2003. p. 185

⁸⁷ C. Fife. Cited by A. Heiss. 2003. *Dhuuluu-Yala-To Talk Straight*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, p. 163

exists a great fund of Kaytetye oral narratives, there have been only two published works of which Kaytetye people are the speaking subjects.⁸⁸

There has been considerable debate about the role biography or life writing play in the writing of history. Whilst scholars such as George Parsons of Macquarie University argue that ‘biography is not history’,⁸⁹ others, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, have asserted that the only true history is biography, and that the real source of all biography is the confession of the man himself [*sic*] to somebody.⁹⁰ Whilst not expecting nor desiring, necessarily, that Indigenous life history writing conform to such a culturally specific definition of biography as Emerson’s, this thesis hopes to demonstrate that the biographies, life histories and autobiographies written by, or in conjunction with, groups and/or individuals whose voices and experiences previously largely went unrecorded or unrecognised, are able to make a significant contribution to the complex heteroglossic ‘Australian story’ being written and discussed by contemporary Australian historians and authors.

Biography, autobiography and life history writing, which John Ritchie specifies as ‘branches of history that focus on an individual’s life and career’⁹¹ are, however, as Barwick observes, ‘notoriously difficult form[s] of historical writing, the complexities [of which] increase when an author must make the life and times of an individual comprehensible to readers from very different cultural

⁸⁸ *Good One, Don Ross*, will be the third.

⁸⁹ *Book Talk*. 10 January 2004. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio National

⁹⁰ R.W. Emerson. Cited by R. Hughes. 1996. *Australian Lives: Stories of Twentieth Century Australians*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. viii

⁹¹ J. Ritchie. 2002. Getting a Life. *Meanjin*, Vol. 61, No. 1, p. 94

backgrounds'.⁹² In contemporary Australia the increasing number of life histories being written, either individually or collaboratively, by those whose primary method of 'telling history' traditionally has been oral, namely Indigenous Australians, may function to 'inscribe what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times'.⁹³ These accounts, Brewster says:

Invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by chronological hierarchy (instantiated by social Darwinism) and by an asymmetry of civil rights. They transform the space of terror into a contact zone and affirm the spatial coexistence of memories previously quarantined by humanist history.⁹⁴

Aboriginal writers make this point more directly. Molly Mallett, Palawa elder, in her reclamation of Indigenous history, writes:

Can't people see written history is not true? Who starts this history? So much of it is just malicious gossip.... Let us Aboriginal elders tell our own stories...instead of others making up stories about us. It is time for our perspective, for our stories to be written in answer to all the past white interpretations.⁹⁵

Waanyi writer Alexis Wright told the 2000 Tasmanian Writers' Festival audience:

I do not like the way our histories have been smudged, distorted and hidden, or written for us. I want the truth to be told. Our truths.⁹⁶

And Indigenous autobiographer Stan Grant writes:

⁹² D. Barwick. 1981. Writing Aboriginal History: Comments on a Book and Its Reviewers. *Canberra Anthropology*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Australian National University, Canberra, p. 74

⁹³ P. Kumar. Cited by A. Brewster. 2002. Aboriginal Life Writing and Globalisation: Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*. *Southerly*, Vol. 62, No. 2, p. 159

⁹⁴ A. Brewster. 2002. p. 159

⁹⁵ M. Mallett. 2001. *My Past-Their Future*. Blubberhead Press, Hobart, p. 46

⁹⁶ A. Wright. Cited by A. Heiss. 2003. *Dhuuluu-Yala-To Talk Straight*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, p. 12

We have never truly owned our story; we've always been defined and interpreted by white society.⁹⁷

Increasingly, Indigenous Australians are claiming the right to narrate their own stories. Traditionally it has been anthropologists who have created the written accounts and interpretations of the lives of Indigenous peoples and of the nature and customs of so-called 'primitive' cultures for an academic as well as a wider reading audience. These accounts by 'outsiders' are being superseded increasingly by life histories written either by Indigenous individuals or communities themselves, or written in collaboration with non-Indigenous (and in some cases, Indigenous) writers and academics. Murri historian, Jackie Huggins, writes:

Aboriginals have become successively more visible and vocal in the face of attempted annihilation, and a great store of historical and cultural knowledge has begun to surface. Oral histories, storytelling, philosophy, biography and autobiography are coming to be published.... Recording and publishing the memories of elderly Aboriginals is an especially urgent task, otherwise important aspects of Australian history that our elders can pass on will be lost forever.⁹⁸

There is still a useful role, I maintain, for cross-cultural collaboration, although historical conditions, political changes and welcome shifts in consciousness are redefining the parameters of these collaborations. The best histories produced by these collaborations, Huggins reminds us, are by writers and academics who have 'some relationship and friendship with Aboriginal people'.⁹⁹ Just who is involved in the collaboration and the nature of the relationship between the writer and the speaker/storyteller affects the resulting text significantly, as does the considerable

⁹⁷ S. Grant. 2002. *The Tears of Strangers*. Harper Collins, Sydney, p. 6

⁹⁸ J. Huggins and R. Huggins. 1994. *Auntie Rita*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, pp. 5-6

⁹⁹ J. Huggins. Cited by A. Heiss. 2003. p. 10

difference in the language employed by the speaking subject in different social settings. Steiner points out:

We speak first to ourselves, then to those nearest in kinship and locale. We turn only gradually to the outsider, and we do so with every safeguard of obliqueness, of reservation, of conventional flatness or outright misguidance. At its intimate centre, in the zone of familial and totemic immediacy, our language is most economic of explanation, most dense with intentionality and compacted implication. Streaming outward, it thins, losing energy and pressure as it reaches an alien speaker.¹⁰⁰

The fact that Don Ross's life history was, in the first instance, transmitted orally by himself, the (literal) speaking subject, but that as a speaking subject ultimately he is invoked across a considerable cultural divide in an/other text constructed by a non-Kaytetye writer who is only one of a number of recipients of his narratives, focuses the issue of agency and foregrounds the dialogic nature of the text's construction, the 'double gaze of both [or all] participants'.¹⁰¹

It also allows and requires an interrogation of the roles of Don Ross and myself as speakers and listeners and of our roles as the 'authors' of the single print version derived from a range of collaboratively produced oral texts and documentary sources. It insists on a close examination of the process of constructing and editing a written text the aim of which has been to convey the sense of 'a life lived

¹⁰⁰ G. Steiner. Cited by G. Vizenor. *Crows Written on Poplar*. In B. Swann and A. Krupat. (eds) 1987. *I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, p. 108

¹⁰¹ R.E. Prell. *The Double Frame of Life History in the Work of Barbara Myerhoff*. In J.W. Barbre et al. *Personal Narratives Group*. (eds) 1989. p. 255

like a story', to quote Yukon Native elder, Mrs Angela Sidney,¹⁰² to a reading audience both of family, community and 'strangers'.¹⁰³

¹⁰² J. Cruikshank. 1990. *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln & London

¹⁰³ The term 'strangers', beyond its usual denotative and connotative meanings derived historically from the distinction between citizens, freemen and strangers in European societies, also contains a joke implicit in the term as it was/is employed in the pastoral industry. A stranger is an unbranded yearling (cleanskin), no longer dependent on its mother, but not yet claimed by a particular station in the first muster, thus available for the taking by whomever can muster it.

CHAPTER 1

A DELICATE AND COMPLICATED COLLABORATIVE VENTURE¹

How he would otherwise tell a different story of himself from the one I tell, I don't know. I do know that, like me, he would pull it together from fragments. He would draw on bits of memory, records, perhaps the oft-repeated anecdotes of others. He would shape it to suit his audience. Some facts or memories he would call upon as if testifying in court, others would be good for yarning with friends. His selection would satisfy the occasion.²

You work out how the piece of writing you are going to do can be of service to the community while at the same time staying true to the arguments that need to be put in the limited field of operations of intellectual discourse, what the protocols there can stand without breaking down completely under the strain.³

In a critical essay comparing the methodology of Sally Morgan's *My Place* with that of Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Tim Rowse lists what he considers the three most important functions of Aboriginal life writing.

It has an intrinsic value for those who produce it and for those in the writer's milieu who find the truth of their lives affirmed by it. It is to some extent a collective statement of Aboriginality, an attempt to inscribe Aboriginalities within the public culture. And it has the potential to be of enormous documentary value to those outside the writer's milieu.⁴

¹L.L. Langness and G. Frank. 1981. *Lives: An Anthropological Approach to Biography*. Chandler and Sharp, San Francisco, p. 61

²D. Merwick. Postmodernity and the Release of the Creative Imagination. In A. Curthoys and A. McGrath. (eds) 2000. *Writing Histories: Imagination and Narration*. Monash Publications in History, Department of History, Australian National University, Canberra p. 25

³S. Muecke. 1992. *Textual Spaces, Aboriginality and Cultural Studies*. University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, p. 203

⁴T. Rowse. 1993. The Aboriginal Subject in Autobiography: Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*. *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 23

Life history is the extensive record of a life told to and recorded by another who then edits and writes the life as though it were autobiography.⁵ As a literary form, it lies uneasily on the boundary of biography (a written record of the life of an individual)⁶ and autobiography (the story of one's own life written by himself [*sic*])⁷ and as such challenges many of our assumptions about telling and writing a life.⁸

In life history, two stories together produce one. A speaker and a listener ask, respond, present and edit a life.⁹ This definition, Somerville says, focuses our attention on the relationship, the inevitable power relations involved in the processes of the production of knowledge, the interface between talk and text and the need for alternatives to the conventional models of biography and autobiography.¹⁰ (Editorial work by another person has been a common feature of Indigenous autobiographical writing,¹¹ Dalziell points out.)

The relationship which developed between Don and myself had its genesis in a number of significant oral occasions, the primary purpose of which was an exchange of stories. This relationship, and Don's relationship with other

⁵S.N.G.Geiger. 1986. Women's Life Histories: Method and Content. *Signs*, p. 334

⁶ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. 1968. Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 180

⁷ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. 1968. p.126

⁸ M. Somerville. 1990. Life (Hi)story Writing: the Relationship Between Talk and Text. *Australian Feminist Studies*, No. 12, p. 29

⁹ M. Somerville. 1990. p. 29

¹⁰ M. Somerville. 1990. p. 29

¹¹ Cited by T. Rowse. 2004. Indigenous Autobiography in Australia and the United States. *Australian Humanities Review*, Vol. 33, <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR>, p. 6

interviewers, friends and family with whom he shared stories, were the crucibles in which the written text of the life history were forged.

How does the writer take what has been spoken, exchanged, and understood or (potentially) misunderstood from the original oral occasions and create from it a written text that 'speaks' to the reader in a way that is both significant to him/her and true to the sense of the lived life that the subject wished to convey? These are value-laden and complex tasks, which writers and historians have approached in a variety of ways.

During the year Don and I spent together (and subsequently, whilst working with members of Don's family and with other people, from transcribed oral accounts as well as other historical documents) I came to a fuller understanding of the complexity of Don's and my collaboration. In spite of a ready agreement to the objectives and outcomes of the task we shared, which was to create a written account of Don Ross's life, ambiguities and uncertainties complicated our work. Our human expectations, needs, desires, values, social constructs, lived experiences and world views coincided at times and diverged widely and significantly at others and our roles sometimes conflated, overlapped or became confused.

I was engaged initially as a writer and therefore approached the project with the aim of constructing a written text. Don understood and shared this aim: he was aware that his life history was of particular interest and significance, and was glad that someone would help him write it, but his primary interest and a great deal of

his vitality, as well as his major skills and expertise, were invested in the immediacy and the demands of oral occasions, their transactions, conventions and processes, and in the human engagement and relationship these occasions engendered. Don was a charismatic and engaging human being, and I quickly became very involved in his life. I enjoyed his company, and he enjoyed mine. What for me had begun as sympathy for this formerly active, skilled and able man who now was confined to a wheelchair or to bed, developed into a cordial friendship. And my concern that Kaytetye (and other Indigenous) stories be published and disseminated more widely, both for their own intrinsic value and to assist in redressing imbalance in the accounts of Northern Territory history, became focused into attempting to understand and document the complexities of a particular individual's life and to setting down an account of that life within an historical context.

The demands of friendship and scholarship were not always easily compatible. Marilyn Lake, discussing writing the biography of Faith Bandler, asserts, 'Friendship is deeply constraining.... There is an ethics of loyalty in friendship'.¹² Don's apprehension of past and present, his needs and desires and his varying roles as raconteur, paid informant, hospital patient, friend, seemed to be somewhat shifting ground at times, making our relationship a complex one for me to navigate. My roles as willing listener, audience/participator, scribe, academic, writer, mediator, as well as friend, companion, supporter and sometime personal assistant, potentially and actually conflicted, from time to time, during our collaboration.

¹² Using Lives: A Postgraduate Workshop in Biography. 2006. Australian National University, Canberra

The fact that the project was initiated and supported during the interview and transcription phase by Indigenous and non-Indigenous academic institutions, implied, engendered and influenced its academic, political and personal contexts, dimensions, assumptions and obligations, for me.

Don was the storyteller, the raconteur, the consummate bush yarner. It was his life, his story. He recounted anecdotes as they came to mind, events as he saw them, as he remembered them, or as he wished to remember them, without regard to constructing a chronologically sequenced narrative. (A culturally specific expectation that was not his, presumably.) His assumption was that I would take care of the final written text. My understanding of what that entailed, moulded both by my own academic education, my career as a writer and my desire to help erase some of the silences of Australian history, was to be scrutinised intently and modified considerably during the course of writing the life history.

Don also assumed a commonality of intent and world-view existed between us. This was a reasonable assumption, given my personal background, my social justice concerns and activities, my previous employment at IAD Press and my professional and personal relationships with Indigenous people in Alice Springs and elsewhere. But, beyond this, and within the context of our cordial father-daughter skin relationship, which carried certain freedoms and reciprocities (in an extended conversation between a younger woman and a senior man) and which also implied responsibilities (not necessarily explicated here) as well as dimensions which I had no accurate way of perceiving, the work of creating the

life history was carried out across significant age, gender and race divides. I was female, had grown up in a different place, had had a radically different working life, and possessed limited knowledge and understanding of Kaytetye culture.

We literally and metaphorically often spoke different languages. Therefore, if I were to be able to transmit Don's life story effectively, in as accurate a representation of Don's voice as possible, through a printed text, it must first be transmitted to me in a way that made it possible for me to understand and convey in a form and language accessible to a range of readers, some even more distanced than I.

I was also strongly aware from the statements and arguments of some Indigenous academics, that despite my Aboriginal family connections, people like myself, who were not strongly identified with or by a particular Aboriginal community were not always considered legitimate, these days, to undertake the task of compiling an Indigenous life history, and that by undertaking the task I could lay myself open to severe censure. Some Indigenous academics and activists have asserted that *only* Aboriginal people should and could research, write about or teach Aboriginal subjects (in all senses).¹³ One of the first such declarations was made in 1981 by the Working Party for Aboriginal Historians:

Just as colonised and oppressed peoples have insisted that their history and cultures are their own to be portrayed and represented by their own people, Aboriginal people are reclaiming their history and culture. We are the guardians and custodians of our history and

¹³ D. Hollinsworth. Aboriginal Studies, an Epistemological No-go Zone? In P. Van Toorn and D. English. (eds) 1995. *Speaking Positions: Aboriginality, Gender and Ethnicity in Australian Cultural Studies*. Victorian University of Technology, Melbourne, p. 91

culture, and it is our responsibility to pass on to future generations our set of truths.¹⁴

At literary conferences I had heard Indigenous spokespeople such as Associate Professor Anita Heiss of Macquarie University deny the right of any but Indigenous writers to portray Indigenous characters in their work,¹⁵ and whilst I deeply sympathised with the feeling behind such a prohibition, and understood its genesis, I also was aware that there is an argument to be put for cross-cultural collaboration. Indigenous scholars like Marcia Langton questioned the assumption that Indigenous people were necessarily the most appropriate and the only people to legitimately create/write Indigenous characters for film and television, in her essay published by the Australian Film Commission.¹⁶

In practical terms, considering a situation such as the writing of Don Ross's life history, the heart of the conflict is located in the difference between the assumption that one has the right to speak on any aspect of Aboriginal life or culture, should one so choose, and the responsibility of responding to a request to assist in the writing of a particular life history of a particular Indigenous person to whom one has been introduced and with whom one has developed a relationship. So the issues facing me were not simply issues of methodology, but ethical issues of authenticity and legitimacy. I struggled with these for the duration of the

¹⁴ Working Party for Aboriginal Historians. 1981. Aboriginal History and the Bicentennial History 1788–1988: A Celebration of Our Resistance to Colonialism. *Bicentennial History Bulletin: Australia 1939–1988*, May 1981, p. 22

¹⁵ Anita Heiss has since retracted that view, whilst still claiming (correctly, in my view) that non-Indigenous writers frequently misunderstand and misrepresent Indigenous realities.

¹⁶ Langton, M. 1993. 'Well I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television...' Australian Film Commission, North Sydney

project, but ultimately had to accept that Don Ross himself had decided upon the legitimacy of the collaboration, so I must let the matter rest there.

My acute awareness of the issues stated above made me even more sensitive to the fact (and the way) that my presence undoubtedly influenced the content and transmission of the narratives. My direct and indirect participation included precipitating or punctuating a narrative with questions, thus advertently or inadvertently creating distortions in the direction and content of Don's stories, to accommodate particular interests, concerns or attempts to contain the information offered within a cross-culturally explicable and appropriate form, a form which acceded to certain literary conventions. My decision to modify any of these conventions had to be predicated upon respect for Don's world-view and *modus operandi* and the need to make the narrative accessible to as wide an audience as possible. These issues were part of the delicate and complex interaction of two human beings.

Brumble speaks of the imperative of writers and editors of stories told to them by Native Americans (discrete episodes in a life, rather than the story of a life) to turn these separate stories into a continuous narrative with what Samuel Taylor Coleridge would recognise as organic unity¹⁷ (which may involve a number of techniques, such as blending questions and responses to questions within the narrative form). Working within the conventions of western biography, I too felt this imperative. And I am certain that Don felt it as well, whether or not he

¹⁷ H.D. Brumble. 1988. *American Indian Autobiography*. University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 77

understood what it implied, in practical terms, for he was fully aware that this was his life story we were writing. He was both a literate man, in the European sense of the word, as well as a Kaytetye man strongly encultured with Kaytetye linguistic and narrative mores. (IAD linguists had been directed by Kaytetye people from Barrow Creek and Atarre community on Neutral Junction Station to Don Ross as an informed consultant: he spoke the ‘old’, more correct form of Kaytetye, they were told.)¹⁸ And, whilst I had the assistance of Kaytetye speakers and linguists to guide me, I did not speak the language and there was a great deal about Kaytetye culture that was unknown to me. One of the reasons for including Kaytetye texts and translations of interviews with Kaytetye people other than Don in the life history was to redress the imbalance, as well as to provide additional insights into Don’s life and background and into public aspects of Kaytetye culture and history and to give readers and speakers of Kaytetye the pleasure of reading/hearing in their native tongue the story of a life lived in Kaytetye country.

To this day I feel a sense of strong responsibility to that old man and to the stories he entrusted to me and a concomitant anxiety about the authenticity, the ‘truth effect’ that my ‘authorship’ of Don Ross’s life story enhanced, achieved or denied.

The work of constructing the life history consisted of talking and listening to Don Ross and others, transcribing and editing interview tapes, collecting and collating archival and other documentary material to contextualize the life history, and the compiling of glossaries to explicate the text.

¹⁸ Personal communication with Myfany Turpin 1997

Primary source material included the following: tapes of interviews with Don Ross by his niece Emily Ross, which were produced for and broadcast on Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) radio's Kaytetye program in 1985 and 1986; tapes of interviews by linguist Myfany Turpin with Don Ross and members of his family, conducted in and around Alice Springs and Jay Creek from October 1996 to January 1998; tapes of interviews (and notes from conversations) by Terry Whitebeach with Don Ross in Alice Springs from December 1997 to early 1999, with Dick Riley in Tennant Creek 13 March 1998, with Alec Ross in Tennant Creek 14 and 15 March 1998, with Graham Ross in Alice Springs 2, 5 and 6 February 1999; tapes of interviews by anthropologist David Alexander with Dick Riley and Don Ross (and recorded conversations of Don Ross and Dick Riley) in Alice Springs 27, 29, 30 May 1998; transcripts and translations of Kaytetye oral histories collected by Myfany Turpin at Artarre (Neutral Junction Station) and Barrow Creek 1996 and 1997; transcripts and translations by Institute for Aboriginal Development Kaytetye linguists Myfany Turpin, Shirleen McLaughlin, Alison Ross and Emily Ross, in collaboration with Joannie Ross of interviews recorded with a number of Kaytetye people by Emily Ross for the CAAMA radio Kaytetye program in 1985 and 1986;¹⁹ excerpts from transcripts of oral history interviews with Kaytetye people held in the Northern Territory Archives;²⁰ records of personal communications and discussions by Terry Whitebeach with Central Australian historian, Dick Kimber, with Alice Springs retired businessman, Reg Harris, with Bob (J.R.) Purvis of Woodgreen Station, with David Ross, Chairman of the Central Land Council, with Central Land

¹⁹ All are archived at AIATSIS, Canberra, and cited with permission

²⁰ Cited with the permission of the Northern Territory Archives Service

Council personnel, 1999–2005; records of personal communications and discussions with Blanche Ross and Emily Hayes by linguist, Myfany Turpin, 1996–2003;²¹ documents from the Northern Territory Archives and the National Archives of Australia, Darwin and Canberra.

Secondary sources included: documents from the Alice Springs collection, Alice Springs Public Library; scholarly texts – books and journal articles; tapes and transcripts of radio broadcasts and lectures, material from emails, websites and other on-line sources.²²

The compilation of the life history was undertaken concurrently with an ongoing interrogation of my own practice, as stated above, an interrogation that interacted with and considerably influenced the written text. This interrogation reflects some of the debates in which contemporary historians, writers and literary critics are engaged.

Investigating my motives and methods via the discourses of history, the social sciences and literary theory and practice, as well as addressing ethical and basic human questions and dilemmas, both facilitated the task and at the same time increased its complexity. At times I found myself longing for what some have termed ‘the violence of certainty’, the comfort of cliché, the closure that ‘received’ wisdoms enable. Ultimately, I was not able to find a resting place, a niche the narrative completely fitted, nor could I find any solid sense of satisfaction,

²¹ Cited with permission

²² Cited in the thesis and listed in the Bibliography

certainty or rightness about either the methodology I had adopted in creating Don's life history, or the final result. (This, in spite of the approval of the Ross family, who read and discussed the text.) Perhaps it comes with the territory (no pun intended). Some of the old certainties, which harmed many and sustained others, are being or have been swept away and we must struggle together to find new ways of telling the multiplicity of stories that need to be told and to ensure 'critical and creative engagement with the myriad intertwining histories that have made up the nation'.²³ Indigenous life history or mediated autobiography extends and makes new demands of the genres of biography and autobiography, as well as creating new or hybridised genres.

In the early stages of the research, after reading widely in the genre, I decided to purchase, sight unseen, the entire biography collection of a Darwin second hand bookshop, thereby encountering biographies, autobiographies, life histories, and memoirs that I may not have selected in the ordinary course of my reading. These ranged from hagiographies, poorly written memoirs, through first class literary and popular works, to Hollywood 'tell-alls' and muckraking tomes that fell just short of libel. Biography is a broad church, I discovered.

I then sought out biographies which offered competing and/or contradictory versions of the 'truth' of a life or subject. The first of these were three biographies of David Helfgott, and they contained competing versions of David's childhood

²³ Ien Ang. 2001. Intertwining Histories: Heritage and Diversity. New South Wales History Council lecture 24 September 2001. *Australian Humanities Review*, December, p. 2
<http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue - December - 2001/ang.htm>

and his relationships with his siblings and parents.²⁴ I went on to compare different accounts of the life of Oscar Schindler,²⁵ the ongoing conflicting interpretations of the marriage of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath,²⁶ and closer to home, the conflicting perspectives of ‘settler’ and Indigenous accounts of Australia’s colonial history; for example, in the accounts of life on Elsey Station by Mrs A. Gunn in *The Little Black Princess of the Never Never* and *We of the Never Never*²⁷ and those given by Indigenous people in *Big River Country*.²⁸ A further example is a biography of Constable Willshire of Alice Springs,²⁹ which seriously questions the attitudes to and treatment of Aboriginal people in frontier times attributed to him by other documentary and oral accounts of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Such biographies clearly demonstrate the contested nature of ‘truth’ and remind us that it is not just the ‘facts’ that may be at issue, nor the subject of the biography, but also the relationship of the author to that subject – the circumstances, beliefs and personal agenda of the author and the subject, as well as the prevailing political conditions.

²⁴ B. Eley. 1996. *The Book of David*. Harper Collins, Sydney; G. Helfgott with A. Tanskaya. 1996. *Love You to Bits and Pieces: Life with David Helfgott*. Penguin, Ringwood; M. Helfgott with T. Gross. 1998. *Out of Tune: David Helfgott and the Myth of Shine*. Warner Books, New York

²⁵ T. Keneally. 1982. *Schindler’s Ark*. Hodder and Stoughton, London; E. Schindler with E. Rosenberg (translated by D.M. Koch.) 1996. *Where Light and Shadow Meet: A Memoir*. W.W. Norton & Co, New York

²⁶ J. Malcolm. 1994. *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*. Picador, London

²⁷ Mrs A. Gunn. 1907/1982. *The Little Black Princess of the Never-Never*. Hutchinson, London; Mrs A. Gunn. 1908/1987. *We of the Never-Never*. Hutchinson, London

²⁸ F. Merlan. (compiler). 1996.

²⁹ A. Stapleton. 1992. *Willshire of Alice Springs*. Hesperian Press, Victoria Park, Perth

After my initial foray into the genre (the tracks of which journey are evident in the Bibliography) I went on to read a wide range of biographies, autobiographies and life histories written from positions of social, cultural, political or literary silence and marginalisation – texts by Indigenous people of Australia and other countries, by survivors of wars, revolutions, ethnic cleansings, testimonies from stateless and working class people, all pertinent to my investigations in that they potentially are a challenge to the hegemony of the prevailing narratives of Western industrialised societies.³⁰ Finally, I decided to limit my focus to the biographies,

³⁰ Examples, from the Bibliography: D. Adelaide. (ed) 1998. *Cutting the Cord: Stories of Children, Love and Loss*. Random House, Sydney; T. Andre and A. McMahon. 1997. *On My Brother's Shoulders*. Wakefield Press, Adelaide; A. Ashworth. 1998. *Once in a House on Fire*. Picador, London; M. Baker. 1997. *The Fiftieth Gate: A Journey Through Memory*. Flamingo, Sydney; J. Blackburn. 2002. *The Book of Colour: A Family Memoir*. Virago, London; C. Bird. (ed) 1998. *The Stolen Children: Their Stories*. Random House, Sydney; L. Carey. 1991. *Black Ice*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York; R. Crossley and A. McDonald. 1984. *Annie's Coming Out*. Penguin Books, Ringwood; J.J. Deacon. 1974. *Tongue Tied: Fifty Years of Friendship in a Subnormality Hospital*. National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children, London; J. De Angelo. 1950/1990. *Indians in Overalls*. City Lights Books, San Francisco; F. De Caro. 1996. *A Boy Named Phyllis: A Suburban Memoir*. Penguin Books, New York; A. Deveson. 1991. *Tell Me I'm Here*. Penguin, Ringwood; W. Dirie. 1998. *Desert Flower*. Virago, London; B. Dodd. 1992. *Broken Dreams*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia; F. Douglas. 1868. *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave, Written by Himself*. Signet/Penguin, New York; J. Embling. 1978. *Tom: A Child's Life Regained*. Penguin Books, Ringwood; S.F. Farmaian with D. Munker. 1992. *Daughter of Persia*. Corgi, London; J. Frame. 1983. *To the Is-Land*; 1984. *An Angel at My Table*; 1986. *Envoy to Mirror City*. The Women's Press, London; R. Friend. 1985. *Eva*. McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, Ringwood; S. Grant. 2002. *The Tears of Strangers*. Harper Collins, Sydney; K. Harper. 2000. *Give Me My Father's Body: The Life of Mink, The New York Eskimo*. Profile Books, London; R. Hegarty. 1999. *Is That You, Ruthie?* University of Queensland Press, St Lucia; M. Hong Kingston. 1977. *The Woman Warrior*. Picador, London; N. Jabavu. 1960. *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts*. John Murray, London; M. Kennedy. 1985. *Born A Half-Caste*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra; W. King. 1996. *Black Hours*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney; S. Kinnane. 2003. *Shadow Lines*. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle; I. Koehn. (ed) 1981. *Mischling, Second Degree: My Childhood in Nazi Germany*. Puffin/Penguin, Ringwood; R. Langford Ginibi. 1988. *Don't Take Your Love to Town*. Penguin Books, Ringwood; 1992. *Real Deadly*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney; 1994. *My Bundjalung People*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia; A. Lustig. 1999. *Children of the Holocaust*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston; R. Marsden. (ed) 2000. *Crisp Blue Edges: Indigenous Creative Non-Fiction*. Theytus Books, Penticton; E. Montejo. 1970. *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth; P. Nabakov. (ed) 1978. *Native American Testimony*. Penguin Books, New York; Pitseolek. 1971. *Pictures out of My Life*. University of Washington Press, Seattle; P. Read. 1990. *Charles Perkins: A Biography*. Penguin/Viking, Ringwood; S. Rintoul. 1993. *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History*. William Heinemann, Port Melbourne; B. Rosser. 1978. *This is Palm Island*; 1985. *Dreamtime Nightmares*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra; L. Russell. 2002. *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies*. Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest; M. Scherer. 1992. *Still Loved By the Sun: A Rape Survivor's Journal*. Penguin Books, New York; A. Soueif. 1985. *Aisha*. Black Swan/Transworld, London; R. Sykes. 1997. *Snake Cradle*; 1998. *Snake Dancing*; 2000. *Snake Circle*. Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards; D. Tonkin and C. Landon. 1999. *Jackson's Track: Memoir of a Dreamtime Place*. Viking/Penguin Books, Ringwood; M.

autobiographies and life histories of Indigenous Australians, with some attention also to Native American life histories created from oral texts. These, I felt, offered the most useful and appropriate models. I paid particular attention to the life histories of Aboriginal people of mixed descent, written collaboratively, as I felt these might yield useful insights into the venture upon which Don Ross and I had embarked.³¹

Margaret Somerville, describing the way in which *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs* was constructed, notes that the primary talk around which the text was structured occurred in accounts of her life by the instigator and main subject, Patsy Cohen, accounts which were produced as long self-presentations consisting of many small stories organised into a larger narrative structure around a central event or relationship.³² No attempt was made to record a chronological or continuous life, Somerville admits. Later, Patsy Cohen asked Somerville to reorganise these stories so that instead of ‘wandering around and around’³³ they developed in a linear fashion according to the conventions of autobiography.

This methodology reflects the approach Don Ross and I adopted. Don’s spoken narratives also consisted mostly of clusters of ‘small stories’, the majority of

Tucker. 1977. *If Everyone Cared*. Ure Smith, Sydney; I. West. 1984. *Pride Against Prejudice: Reminiscences of a Tasmanian Aborigine*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra; R. Winters. (compiler) 1999. *Buibere: Voices of East Timorese Women, Vol. I*. East Timor International Support Centre, Darwin; A. Wright. (ed) 1998. *Take Power, Like This Old Man Here*.

³¹ In particular, I looked at the methodology employed in the following: R. G. Kimber. 1986. *Man From Arltunga*; C. McAdam (as told to E. Tregenza.) 1995. *Boundary Lines*; J. Wositsky (told by Bill Harney.) 1996; J. Bohemia and W. McGregor. 1995. *Nyibayarri: Kimberley Tracker*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra

³² P. Cohen and M. Somerville. 1990. *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs*. Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, p. 34

³³ P. Cohen and M. Somerville. 1990.

which related to a central theme, his working life as a stockman, and his instructions to me were to arrange the stories in such a way that a reader who was not familiar with the pastoral industry or Northern Territory life (often referred to by Don as ‘city folk’) would be able to follow them.

Some of the source material for the life history included responses to questions. The questions have been removed, except where their absence would seriously impair the intelligibility of the text. There has been no attempt to hide my collaborative presence, but ultimately, it is Don in whom the reader is interested. Some texts of similar content and subject matter were then edited together and thematic clustering and linear time sequences imposed to assist the reader. This creates a narrative flow that diverges somewhat from the original narrations.

Some texts created from occasions when I was trying to gain information and context, particularly in the early days of our collaboration when I was not very conversant with Don’s world, although very interesting in themselves, were not able to be placed in the completed life history without disruption to the organising principle, form or integrity of either the life history itself or of the original shorter texts themselves. They were so obviously dialogues that to remove the words of one speaker (myself) would distort unnecessarily the voice of the other speaker (Don). It was a cause for much regret, as these texts were often rich and revealing on many levels.³⁴ The text included below illustrates this point. It was created from one of the many occasions when Don and I talked about horses.³⁵

³⁴ Some of these have been included in this thesis.

³⁵ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 4 May 1998

Terry Whitebeach: Now, what happens if a horse is hurt or sick? Is that the horse taylor's job to look after them?

Don Ross: No, no, not really, anybody that understands a bit about horses could have a go.

Terry Whitebeach: What sort of things could happen to horses? They could fall—

Don Ross: Oh yes, if they break their leg you gotta kill them.

Terry Whitebeach: Did they get any sort of illnesses?

Don Ross: Oh, no, not really. Mostly only accidents. Bullock might put his horns through one. They get them in the tummy, you know. Well, they just put a hole in their belly.

Terry Whitebeach: Can they recover from that?

Don Ross: No.

Terry Whitebeach: How long do the horses keep on being stock horses?

Don Ross: Until they're old.

Terry Whitebeach: And then if they get lame or slow down—

Don Ross: Slow down, you put them off.

Terry Whitebeach: What happens to them, then?

Don Ross: They're just pensioned off. Let them loose. Let them go to their country. They got certain spots, you know, where they always stay. Horses. They go back—go back to the same place.

Terry Whitebeach: So they've got their country, the same way people have.

Don Ross: Just the same.

Another recorded conversation was so revealing of the man and his preoccupations and of our cordial method of collaboration that I included it as a prologue to the life history. It clearly demonstrates both that in old age Don's thoughts still primarily were centred around stock work, and that by

that stage he often relied on me to read his silences, and increasingly, to supply some or all of the words. (His breathing was becoming very laboured and it was often difficult for him to speak more than a few sentences at a time.)

DON'S DREAM³⁶

Don Ross: I was dreaming about bloody horses, stallions and all, last night. There must have been some around. I was catching 'em and breaking 'em in.

Terry Whitebeach: Still at work, even in your dreams?

Don Ross: Still at work.

Terry Whitebeach: Was it a good dream?

Don Ross: It was a good dream.

Terry Whitebeach: Because that's what you'd rather be doing.

Don Ross: Yes.

It is impossible to know the form the final text may have taken, had not our time of working collaboratively been cut short. After Don's death, as stated above, meetings with Don's family, with Kaytetye linguists at IAD and with Central Australian historian Dick Kimber became the main forums for discussions of methodology. In consultation with members of Don's immediate family, it was decided we would include material from interviews with family members, also linking and interpretive text and historical material from archival and other sources, but that I should remain primarily responsible for the structure and completion of the written text.³⁷ I felt the weight of this responsibility keenly.

³⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 10 June 1998

³⁷ The Ross family, however, remained the final arbiters of what was to be included in the final draft of the life history.

Previously, Don and I had checked the tape transcripts together, including those recorded prior to our working together. We clarified names, locations and other particulars, eliminating error and misunderstanding where possible. Where appropriate, explanations and/or additional information were added, and, after examining each piece of text with both family and community and the ‘distanced’ reader in mind Don then decided whether or not he wanted that text made public.

Although I later requested supplementary texts from a number of sources, family members mostly were reluctant to supply additional narratives.³⁸ The Ross family (at least, those of Don’s children and grandchildren who had decided to be involved in the project) had decided it was to be their father’s and grandfather’s story, told largely in his own words.

Blanche Ross, Don’s only surviving sibling, was contacted and asked for her input. In contrast to Don, Blanche had lived a much more traditional Kaytetye life. Blanche was unwilling to speak English, which effectively prevented my ready collaboration with her, and she preferred to use the time we had arranged, with some difficulty, for her to spend with Don, a few months before he died, reminiscing about family members and places of significance to them, in their youth, using an archival document – a census of Kaytetye workers on Neutral Junction station³⁹ – as the basis for their discussion, in which they were establishing the accuracy and inaccuracy of the information in the document, from

³⁸ The exceptions were Don’s sons, Graham Ross and Alec Ross

³⁹ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1 Item 1953/307 (1953–1954) Employment of Aboriginals–Wages and Conditions – Pastoral Industry Recreation Leave–Aboriginal Employees

their prodigious memory and shared knowledge of Kaytetye genealogies. This, I was given to understand by Don and other Kaytetye speakers present, was the almost coded conversation of close relatives, spoken in a language I did not understand, and, although the Kaytetye linguists present asked for clarification on some issues, protocol forbade too direct an intrusion. Thus, although this visit was of great significance for both Don and Blanche, for it was the last time they were to see each other, it yielded little that could be added to Don's life history, beyond clarification of certain family members' names and relationships. And although I felt a certain sense of frustration as an historian and writer, I fully supported their right to use the time in the way they saw fit. And it was an interesting example of what other scholars have noted as Indigenous people's agenda often being quite different from the overtly expressed agenda or intention of the researcher.

Other female members of Don's family, his daughters and granddaughters, declined the invitation to record memories of their father and grandfather. Although I tried to set up a number of situations in which they could speak, none of these interviews eventuated. Thus narratives from members of the Ross family other than from Don, Graham and Alec are limited to questions and brief comments made when family members were present during interviews, or to myself in phone calls and visits. As a researcher, those decisions frustrated me, as did the absences and silences they created or allowed, but as a human being I fully support the right of people to withhold or disclose information and opinion as they

choose.⁴⁰ Don Ross's life history is informed, thus, by its silences as well as its overt narratives.

The other voices that I desired to have had a more substantial presence in Don Ross's life history are those of traditional Kaytetye people. I felt it was very important that at least part of the text be Kaytetye, to clearly indicate that Don Ross lived in both Kaytetye and English speaking worlds. (To the end of his life he thought and spoke both in Kaytetye and English.) Accordingly I sought out Kaytetye texts – and included them either in the main text or as appendices, including transcripts of interviews recorded for the Kaytetye program in 1986, as well as narratives by Kaytetye people about life in the bush and aspects of stock and station life.⁴¹ But I experienced little success in obtaining interviews with Kaytetye people other than Don's immediate family. Unfortunately, by the late 1990s, most of Don's contemporaries and those who knew him well in his younger days had either passed away or were in too poor health⁴² to be interviewed. Even

⁴⁰ Indigenous biography and autobiography demonstrates these choices, as Jackie Huggins points out in *Auntie Rita*. The Holocaust literature is another fascinating example of the employment of such choices, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this.

⁴¹ For example, Peter Horsetailer. 22 April 1990. Recorded by Francis Good, Northern Territory Archives Service. Transcribed by and archived in the Northern Territory Archives Service, Darwin. (HORSETAILER, Peter. NTRS 226 –Oral History Interview – TS 591.); Daisy Kemarre. 1986. Recorded by Emily Hayes at Alekerange for the Kaytetye program, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA). (Also present were Amy Ngamperle and Katie Ampetyane.) Tape transcribed by Myfany Turpin. 2000. Translated by Emily Hayes and Myfany Turpin. Corrections by Daisy Kemarre; Tracker Mick. 1986. Recorded by Emily Hayes (Tracker Mick's cousin) at Alekerange for the Kaytetye program, CAAMA. Tape transcribed in 2000 by Myfany Turpin and translated into English in 2002 by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes. Corrections February 2002 by Jacob Peltharr and Cookie Pwerle at Stirling Station; Jackie Tywekertaye. 28 November 1997. Recorded by Myfany Turpin at Artarre (Neutral Junction Station) for the Kaytetye Dictionary Project, IAD, Alice Springs. Translated 4 December 1997 by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes; Jackie Tywekertaye and Tommy Thompson. 28 November 1997. Recorded by Myfany Turpin at Artarre (Neutral Junction Station) for the Kaytetye Dictionary Project, IAD, Alice Springs. Translated by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes 4 December 1997

⁴² For example, Hector Kemarre, one of Don's closest childhood friends, with whom he had shared many adventures as a boy, and a satisfying life as a stockman, and whom he admired greatly, was, in his later years, suffering from memory loss and senile dementia.

had they not been, they would have been constrained by cultural protocols from ‘telling someone else’s story’. Stockmen like (Warumungu) Dick Riley and (Kaytetye) Tommy Thompson were happy to narrate stories of their work as stockmen that included references to their relationship and to shared experience with Don Ross but did not pre-empt Don’s right to tell his own story. Nor did they offer judgements or interpretations of his life. (And cultural protocols would have forbidden me from seeking any, even if I’d been inclined.)

Kaytetye texts of interviews from the CAAMA Kaytetye program of 1986, oral history transcripts held by the Northern Territory Archives, and texts of interviews conducted with Kaytetye people at Barrow Creek and Artarre (Tara) Community, Neutral Junction Station by IAD linguist, Myfany Turpin, substantially filled the gap. These texts have been inserted, in Kaytetye, with English translations, in relevant sections of the life history, to provide both a linguistic and cultural presence and context for the English language narratives of Don, Graham and Alec Ross, offering an alternative view of life in Kaytetye country. They also will enrich the text, for Kaytetye readers and listeners of *Good One, Don Ross*.

During Don’s and my collaboration I also brought him archival documents and historical texts, including a number of photos, and we discussed the contents of these and he offered his ‘take’ on official or alternative versions of events in which he had participated or with which he was familiar, through the versions related to him by older family members. This was always a valuable through often surprising process as it evinced every kind of response from almost complete lack

of interest⁴³, to laconic comment⁴⁴, expansion of an account and addition of historical and anecdotal detail⁴⁵, to ‘the empire writes back’ kinds of stories and a steadfast refusal to believe documentary evidence, to convincing rebuttals of the written details of a particular account.⁴⁶

After Don’s death, endeavouring to fill in some of the silences and gaps in the life history with documentary evidence retrieved from archives and with material from history, literature and critical texts I also consulted historians such as Dick Kimber, family members and friends and acquaintances of Don Ross. Increasingly, the historical and literary issues the compiling of the life history had raised and continued to raise became the focus of my research. Significant wide-ranging conflicts in the area of Indigenous history⁴⁷ exacerbated my own inner conflict and ultimately, I was unable to resolve a number of dilemmas in regard to the presentation of the text of the life history within the body of the thesis. After consultations with Aboriginal Studies Press in Canberra and IAD Press in Alice Springs, it was decided, as stated above, that Don’s life history, tentatively entitled *Good One, Don Ross*, would be published by IAD Press,⁴⁸ in a form that was accessible to general audiences including Kaytetye kin of Don Ross, with a

⁴³ For Example, to the First World War, which was raging during his early childhood.

⁴⁴ For example, in defence of George Hayes, Don said, ‘He was all right.’

⁴⁵ For example, when looking at a photo of Aboriginal prisoners chained together, Don described a trip to Alice Springs as a child, where he saw such prisoners. He described the conditions of their imprisonment and labour, and was outspoken in defence of the prisoners.

⁴⁶ For example he challenged the accuracy of a positive account of Harry Henty’s life, and the ‘official’ version of the Coniston massacre. He saw the Kaytetye people as innocent victims and blamed the white men and the Warlpiri for Kaytetye suffering and loss of life.

⁴⁷ The so-called ‘History Wars’, focused largely around Keith Windschuttle’s assertions about Aboriginal history. See B. Attwood. 2005. for a discussion of the issues raised by ‘historical revisionists’.

⁴⁸ Projected publication date 2006

preface which gave the history of Don Ross's and my collaboration and joint authorship of the life history. And, to enable readers unfamiliar with Northern Territory pastoral and racial history to more easily comprehend the content and contexts of the life history, linking texts⁴⁹ were inserted into the narrative where appropriate, historical material included where relevant and a number of maps and photos included to inform the print text. Appendices were also added, containing Kaytetye cultural and linguistic notes; a glossary of terms; additional biographical details of people Don included in his stories; transcripts of oral histories by Kaytetye relatives of Don Ross; and appropriate archival documents.

The task of creating the written text varied greatly in complexity from section to section. For example, Don had a number of stories, set pieces, well known to his family and friends, that they frequently asked him to retell. He was happy to do so, enjoying both the retelling and the audience's enjoyment. It was not a complex matter to transpose these stories into written text. An example is the anecdote below, elicited by Don's daughter Ginger (Virginia).

Ginger Ross: Tell them about that big old German fella you fought at Barrow Creek.

Don Ross: Oh, that bugger. Yeah.

Ginger Ross: Right. Tell them the story. Yeah, that big German fella, you belted him one.

Don Ross: Mike Togan. Yeah.

Ginger Ross: What happened, Dad? Tell us that story.

Don Ross: Well, he was skiting about wrestling, see, and Sammy keep pushing me on, Sammy Sultan. It's a shame what you can bloody do. He was getting wild, he thought he was a bloody wrestler, but he had

⁴⁹ Such as was supplied, for example, by Jenny Green, in W. Rubuntja with J. Green. 2002

put a hold on me. I said, 'You got me, eh? You haven't, you know', I told him and I lifted him up and threw him on the floor on his face, this fella.

And he was getting a bit hot, you know. I said, 'Come on'. I kept right up him. And old Tom Roberts told me he went home and he sharpened a knife, a carving knife. He was going to stab me with that next time. He [Tom Roberts] never told me till he got on that bus and went, he told me straight away. He said, 'He's gone now and I'll tell you what he's been intending to do to you. He sharpened a butcher's knife, carving knife, real sharp. He was going to slaughter you with that'.⁵⁰

Stories such as the one above were very much part of Don's repertoire and were one of the reasons he gained his reputation of Territory 'identity' – Pop Ross. It was a relatively straightforward task to weave these stories into the extended narrative. This particular account of the Mike Togan story became part of a composite account derived from many accounts of, or references to, the same story. I placed it in a section of the narrative in which Don gives a very colourful account of some of the fights in which he had been involved as a younger man, despite his reputation for being a 'quiet bugger'. Interviews with family and friends uncovered an extensive repertoire of Don Ross stories, attesting to the vigour with which he had lived his life and to the impression his personality had made on those who knew him. A small number of these were included, in accordance with the Ross family's desire that Don's voice remain the dominant one in the narrative.

Certain of Don's stories, whilst they reflected actual occurrences in particular times and places, also seemed to me to have an exemplary character in that they represented the tenor of his working life and the conditions under which

⁵⁰ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin (Ginger Ross and Graham Ross also present) 11 October 1997

Aboriginal stockmen laboured in the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory. I requested fuller accounts of these. They clearly give the reader the measure of the man as well as a strong sense of times that are now past. These events and stories live on in the memory and stir the imagination, precisely because they contain elements that mark them out from the ordinary. This is what saves them and their particular details from being subsumed into a general formless, clichéd memory-mass. Eventually, in the curious transformation wrought by time, memory and art, the atypical comes to represent the typical, the extraordinary, the normal way of things.

The memorable droving trip from Ooratippra to Woodgreen where the cattle rushed (stampeded) most of the way is one such story. In a sense it is atypical, in that it was a particularly arduous trip, with lots of extra difficulties encountered and a greater than usual loss of livestock (which could account for why Don remembered it in such clear detail). The trip was terminated prematurely when Don requested permission to hold the cattle at Woodgreen and transport them the rest of the way to the railhead at Alice Springs by truck. But in another sense it is emblematic of the arduous and often dangerous working life of central Australian stockmen, and it demonstrates the skills, loyalties and tensions and attitudes of Don and his fellow stockmen, which is why I made the editorial decision to conflate those accounts into one, thereby creating an account modelled on the case study employed extensively in the social sciences. Don, in narrating the various versions of that story, was primarily operating from within Kaytetye conventions, by narrating from his lived experience particular events which were located in a

specific locality within a set of implicitly or explicitly culturally determined relationships. The first account Don gave me was very brief.⁵¹

Don Ross: I was going to tell you this story of me and old Dick, started with a mob, at Ooratippra. They were bastards of bullocks, they used to gallop all the time. By Jesus they were buggers of bullocks. They rushed bad. Gallop all bloody night. Never sleep. Me and old Dick. Old Dick's the one that stuck to me. Old Dick and I was out all the time.

Terry Whitebeach: So when did you rest?

Don Ross: A little bit in the daytime. Dinnertime.

Terry Whitebeach: So they'd pull up in the daytime?

Don Ross: Oh yes, they were all right in the daytime.

Terry Whitebeach: Wasn't that [the stampeding] dangerous?

Don Ross: Dangerous, all right. Some of them get crippled up. Hitting trees.

Terry Whitebeach: Did you go back and shoot these?

Don Ross: Just leave them.

Terry Whitebeach: Why did they rush?

Don Ross: Well, first time, we came to a bore and I just fixed that, I put new pipes, columns and rods down it, and pumped it nearly full it was. This bloody bastard of a bloke, the manager, went along and let all the water out.

Terry Whitebeach: Why?

Don Ross: Because I left there. I went to Ooratippra.

Terry Whitebeach: And he was angry?

Don Ross: He was angry I was working for Bland Oldfield – he was the manager of Ammaroo. He said he wasn't after me. He wasn't doing that to me, but the boss. But the boss had nothing to do with it either.

⁵¹ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 3 April 1998

I found the story interesting, but there were many things I did not understand. In retrospect one of the things most evident from my questions at this early stage of our collaboration was my relative lack of knowledge of the cattle industry and of droving. I set about rectifying this, and quickly discovered the truth of Bill Gammage's observation that informants prefer to talk to someone who knows than someone who doesn't and will adjust what they say to suit. The more you know, the more they tell, Gammage asserts,⁵² accurately, as I discovered when we later discussed aspects of rural life of which I had more experience, for example, fence-building.

It is important to consider both in relation to the construction of the narrative, and the content and means of relating it, the implications of Don's bilingualism and biculturalism. Colin Johnson points out that possession of two languages 'is not merely a matter of having two tools, but is the participation in two psychical and cultural realms'.⁵³ Despite close association throughout his life with non-Kaytetye speakers, Don Ross retained his native language 'all through, all the time', as he put it.⁵⁴ This had been no mean feat, particularly as Don was married for many years to Arrernte women who did not speak Kaytetye. 'Lorna [Don's first wife] might have understood some [Kaytetye]', Don said, 'but she never let on. She never spoke [it] in front of me anyway. Plenty Arrernte, she spoke'.⁵⁵ Neither did his second wife, Emily Furber, speak Kaytetye (or any other

⁵² B. Gammage. 1998. Crossing Borders. *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No. 20, p. 5

⁵³ C. Johnson. 1987. Captured Discourse, Captured Lives. *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 28

⁵⁴ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 10 October 1997

⁵⁵ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 6 March 1998

Aboriginal language) and his third wife, Grace Miller, was not Kaytetye, either. So, after leaving Neutral Junction station and working for many years with non-Kaytetye-speaking people, on stations that were located both within and without Kaytetye country, there was a time in which Don ‘came to bloody English all the time’,⁵⁶ as he explained to linguist Myfany Turpin. ‘I nearly forgot, when I was out this way, you know. Only talk Arrernte. I nearly forgot our language. I used to talk a few words and then couldn’t think of the others. I’d break out into bloody Arrernte. Explain it in Arrernte. That’s how I been, but I’m all right now. I can talk the old language right through now’.⁵⁷ Retaining his mother tongue and his identity whilst living in a largely white or non-Kaytetye world is just one of the achievements which reveal Don Ross as worthy of the sobriquet – ‘the versatile man’.

The linguistic differences between English and Kaytetye⁵⁸ give indications of the significantly different worlds inhabited by Kaytetye and non-Kaytetye people. As I am a monolingual English speaker I relied heavily on the expertise of IAD Kaytetye linguist Myfany Turpin to elucidate and explain some of these differences which she had discovered whilst working with Kaytetye speakers and linguists since 1996. The comments below were compiled mainly from information supplied by Turpin.

⁵⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 10 October 1997

⁵⁷ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 10 October 1997

⁵⁸ Myfany Turpin, IAD linguist, provided most of the Kaytetye texts as well as the information about Kaytetye language included in this thesis. For a guide to pronunciation and additional information about Kaytetye language, see: M. Turpin. 2002. *A Learners Guide to Kaytetye* and 2004. *Kaytetye Picture Dictionary*. See also Appendix 3: Kaytetye Language Notes, pp. 387–390

The differences between Kaytetye and English obviously affect both the transmission of the story and its accessibility to speakers of Kaytetye and to monolingual English speakers. An example is that the Kaytetye language is much more prescriptive of person and place than English. The English pronoun 'he', for example, is not nearly so precise and place indicators are not necessarily embedded in the linguistic structures. These are important cultural differences, with far-reaching consequences for the accuracy of texts cross-culturally constructed. In an English sentence by a native Kaytetye speaker, the pronoun 'he', for example, may occur several times and refer to a number of different people, male or female. In Kaytetye it would be obvious, linguistically, to whom the speaker was referring.⁵⁹ In English these details would have to be established by including qualifying information, and, in the cross-cultural situation, verified painstakingly, checked and cross-checked for accuracy, often with questions that might seem foolish and childish, or potentially intrusive and in some cases culturally unacceptable (such as mentioning the name of someone recently deceased) in order to create a text which is both accurate and permeable to the reader.

Time and place indicators are usually embedded linguistically or indicated non-verbally, in an Indigenous narrative. The narrator also may refer to a number of times and places within the same story, or even within the same sentence, without this being understood by the English-speaking listener. The geography and chronology would be clear to a 'Language'⁶⁰ speaker, but when the language of

⁵⁹There would also exist an established context of social and family relationships and their kinship ties to particular 'country', which would be well known to, and understood by, the listeners.

⁶⁰ In this context, a speaker of Kaytetye or other Arrandic languages.

transmission is the less-prescriptive English, and the story received by alien ears, and processed through a different world-view, confusion easily arises.

The work of translation is fraught with possible inaccuracies, misunderstandings and gaps, embedded as it is in two different (and not always mutually compatible) world-views and cultural practices. Myfany Turpin illustrates one example of this complexity. She writes:

The meaning of words such as ‘this way’, ‘here’ and ‘there’ are obvious in speech, but not on the printed page. We [Turpin and other translators such as Shirleen McLoughlin and Emily Hayes] have chosen to translate such terms by using a compass direction, as in the example below:

Start-lkepe nantew-apertame eylenye-ngerne.
start-then horse-again got-this way
Then we started mustering cattle again, heading northwards
Literally: Then we started mustering cattle again, heading this way.⁶¹

Word order obviously can influence comprehension of meaning. Don’s joke was that Kaytetye was a ‘backwards language’. He was referring both to the derogatory way Aboriginal languages were described by English speakers and also to the fact that in Kaytetye the words do fall in the reverse order to English. For example, the Kaytetye sentence ‘Arretyele anteyane artweye nharte’ means ‘That man is over there.’ Literally, the sentence reads, ‘Over there, man, is that’.⁶²

As with many bilingual people, features of one language often influence the other. Some features of Kaytetye crop up in the way Don's English departed in minor ways from Standard English, especially when he talked in English with Aboriginal

⁶¹ M. Turpin. 2001. Kaytetye Language Notes. Appendix 3, pp. 387–390

⁶² M. Turpin. 2001. Kaytetye Language Notes. Appendix 3, pp. 387–390

people. For example, in Kaytetye, if one is moving while doing something, then to be grammatically correct this movement must also be expressed. This is reflected in the following statement:

Yeah they cut it [the sugarbag] down and got a bloody quart pot full. We were eating it going along'. This would be presented in Kaytetye as 'Aynanthe aynter-apeyayne (We ate while going along)', and in Standard English as 'We were eating it as we went along'.⁶³

Another way Kaytetye influenced the structure of Don's English can be seen in the way Don sometimes omitted parts of the sentence that are already known, and put additional information at the end of the sentence, as one would in Kaytetye. 'Brand them then, next morning. Start them off, the cows in the yard'. In Standard English this would read: 'the next morning we would then brand them. We started with the cows in the yard'.⁶⁴

Separate from the issue of differences in language are basic issues like comprehension and accurate hearing of the words spoken. One example of this is that in the early days of working with Don I misheard the surnames 'Abbot' and 'Hablett' and assumed that Don was speaking about the same man. Both these men were unknown to me, at that stage. Also, Don sometimes dropped his 'aitches', which abetted my confusing the two names. Finally, by carefully going over the stories in which each of those two men had appeared, and with the aid of a series of questions I had devised as an editorial tool, I resolved my confusion and established the separate identities of Bill Abbot and George Hablett. The questions were very basic. Were you [Don] grown up at that time? Did that happen at

⁶³ M. Turpin. 2001. Kaytetye Language Notes. Appendix 3, pp. 387–390

⁶⁴ M. Turpin 2001. Kaytetye Language Notes, Appendix 3, pp. 387–390

Neutral Junction station or somewhere else? Was that when George Hayes was still at Neutral Junction station? Was it before that war [World War Two]? Was he [the person in question] a whitefella or a blackfella? Was he older or younger than you?

Questions such as these helped me elucidate particular details I hadn't grasped initially, and helped me arrive at the facts. In the example cited above, Bill Abbott was the English stockman who taught Don to read and write at night at Neutral Junction station and out in the stock camps, preparing reading and writing and arithmetic exercises for the boy, and explaining to him why it was important to be literate, and George Hablett was George Hayes' original partner of in the lease of Neutral Junction station, and the man left in charge of the station when George Hayes and his son took the cattle east for almost a year during a dreadful drought in the early 1920s, when Don was a small boy. The questions and other editing and checking devices served as ways of making sure that as far as I could ascertain I was writing down as accurately and unambiguously as possible the detail Don was narrating. And it was with the aid of questions such as these, and sometimes by a fortuitously uttered remark or an extra detail Don added in a subsequent retelling of a story, that I was able to grasp the context and narrative flow more exactly and precisely, so that I could create the final coherent text.

It is a complex task, I discovered, to create a text that is not over-burdened with interpretive annotations unnecessary for those culturally attuned, but which also is not opaque and inaccessible to the reader less familiar with the subject matter, the

historical and cultural contexts, and which is also faithful to the style, tone and voice of the narrator. Time will tell how successful my attempt has been.

On the second occasion the Ooratippra droving story was told,⁶⁵ our primary purpose on this occasion was to clarify details. Don used my questions as cues. He placed the emphasis, this time, on the issue of watering the cattle, because often the reason for their rushing was thirst. (My ignorance is still pretty evident in my clarifying questions.)

Don Ross: I was on the road with the bullocks. Just started. First lot of water I went to, bloody thing was empty. I just equipped it for the bloody mongrel. Got it pumping. Then he came along and let all the water out. I couldn't get any water for me cattle.

Terry Whitebeach: So you had to keep on going?

Don Ross: Yes, well I kept on. There was water in the Bundy you know. A deep creek, got to follow the creek, the bank is too steep and the cattle wouldn't go up there. It was late see. They wouldn't go up there. They got stirred up a bit. That's when they started galloping. They started that night.

Terry Whitebeach: So cattle can't go up steep banks. They have to have easy access?

Don Ross: Yes.

Terry Whitebeach: This creek was it deep in one part, or it went into a waterhole?

Don Ross: There was a bit of a waterhole, where the Bundy comes in. The Bundy is a big creek, and the main one is Waite river, and the junction there is called Bundy. Starts Bundy there.

Terry Whitebeach: So they couldn't get any water there either?

Don Ross: There was water there but the bastards wouldn't go up there.

Terry Whitebeach: So you had to go on to the next one?

⁶⁵ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 April 1998

Don Ross: Yes.

Terry Whitebeach: How long without water?

Don Ross: Two days.

Terry Whitebeach: They can manage that?

Don Ross: Oh yes, but they get very thirsty though.

Terry Whitebeach: Stay longer at the next place?

Don Ross: Yes. I got there early in the morning to the water and we stayed there till that afternoon.

Terry Whitebeach: Will cattle share a waterhole with other animals and birds?

Don Ross: Yes.

Terry Whitebeach: And were the bush animals frightened of people?

Don Ross: Yes. They were frightened of us because we kill them and eat them. I still went to his bloody bore anyway. I turned into his bore and gave them a drink there.

Terry Whitebeach: So can anyone use the bores?

Don Ross: Yes, as long as you git the water up there.

Terry Whitebeach: So it doesn't matter who establishes them?

Don Ross: Well, the station owners are all right, you know.

Terry Whitebeach: In the early days that was the cause of clashes with Aboriginal people wasn't it?

Don Ross: Yes.

Terry Whitebeach: Because Aboriginal people depended on those waterholes?

Don Ross: Yes, they did.

Terry Whitebeach: So how was that sorted out?

Don Ross: They used to frighten them away, poor beggars. They'd have to shift away.

A few months elapsed before Don told me the Ooratippra droving story again.⁶⁶ This time he began by repeating some of the details given in the earlier accounts, but added further explanations of what makes cattle rush, as well as details of an incident at the Sixteen Mile. Unfamiliar with the geography as I was at that time and not yet having a fully established routine of checking the times and places referred to, I assumed this incident to have taken place on the Ooratippra trip. Subsequent discussion established that these were two separate occasions. (Such misunderstandings occurred less frequently as I became more familiar with Don's narrative style.)

I was running the stock camp then at Ooratippra station, over East, over by the Queensland border. I took them, walked them down to Alice Springs, but they were rushing that bad. They gallop of a night. Bastards. I don't know what was wrong with them. Drove us bloody mad. We couldn't get a sleep. Gallop all bloody night until they got lame. A lot of them got lame, you know, in the leg, in the foot. They go just like lightning. Off they go. Galloping. One jumps and the whole bloody lot jump at once. By God they go too. But I can wheel them, if I've got a good horse. They run into trees, some of them get killed. Anything can start them, paper or anything blowing. Dogs start them.

One bugger at the Sixteen Mile, just as I was coming in, there was water there, plenty of water after rain. And this bugger, he was chewing a bag, and I went up to him and frightened him and he went. He wouldn't let go of that bloody bag. Chaff bag. People used to feed their horses along the way, you see, and they'd just throw the bag down anywhere. Bloody thing. I didn't see it before. And he wouldn't let go and he started running towards the cattle, the big mob. He was at the tail, you see, chewing this bag and he got frightened of it, you see, and he rushed straight into the mob and started them bastards off. I tried to keep him back from the mob when I started chasing him. I chased hell out of him till he let go of that bag. He stepped on it. Bloody useless bloody thing. He wouldn't let it go. He's dragging it, see. I reckon he must let it go, directly he put his foot on it. Before he got to the mob he was galloping with it. He was trying to get away from it. I chased him. The whole mob went. They

⁶⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 10 June 1998

were feeding nicely too. Too much no good. They fall away to nothing. If they're always frightened they don't feed properly either.

The next time we revisited that story,⁶⁷ I asked Don, 'Were these [cattle] the ones that used to rush?' so that I could establish the occasion to which Don was referring. Don had begun this session by reminiscing about his old mate Dick Riley and that had reminded him of the horrendous trip they had made together with the rushing cattle. In this account further details were added, and I also took the opportunity to clarify some parts of the story. Don was always very patient with this process, unless he was particularly unwell, or I was being especially obtuse.

Don Ross: Well, this old boy, he's up in Tennant somewhere, I want to see him. We brought a mob in from Ooratippra. And we had some yang yang bloody boys, bloody stupid. Warlpiri boys.

We used to call the horses that sometimes. 'Come here you yang yang bloody thing'.⁶⁸

One of the boys came into the camp and must have done something to frighten the horse, burnt him or something and the horse jumped back and started them off. He never told us anything about it.

You'd come into camp and the horse would get frightened of the fire or something and he'd pull back, and some of the bullocks would go through the fence. We built a fence where we camped. And some of them got in the fence, couldn't get back out again. The next day the boy told me that bullock went right along here pulling us. Well naturally, they want their mates, they want to get back in. It was too dark to see, so we lost them. We came back looking for them but we couldn't find them. About a dozen. Thirteen of them.

Terry Whitebeach: Were these the ones that used to rush?

Don Ross: Oh, they were rushing bad, that mob.

⁶⁷ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 19 June 1998

⁶⁸ I have been unable to establish the etymology of 'yang yang', although the meaning is apparent from the context. It may be a reference to the gang gang grey cockatoos and the Australian colloquialism 'galah'.

Terry Whitebeach: Something frighten them?

Don Ross: No, what started them was, we got to a bore and there was no water. The mongrel bloody animal of a manager let all the water out.

Terry Whitebeach: And so the bullocks were really thirsty?

Don Ross: They wanted a drink. He'd let all the water out.

Terry Whitebeach: Who was that fella?

Don Ross: Vivian Oldfield.

Terry Whitebeach: You thought he might have been a bit pissed off with the owner?

Don Ross: Yes, he was.

Terry Whitebeach: Then he made a problem for you.

Don Ross: That's right.

Terry Whitebeach: So the cattle went two days without a drink?

Don Ross: Yes.

Terry Whitebeach: So did you ever catch up with him?

Don Ross: No.

Terry Whitebeach: So who did you have with you that time?

Don Ross: I had Dick, and Banjo, from out there.

Terry Whitebeach: Kaytetye.

Don Ross: No, Alyawarr.

Terry Whitebeach: So that was his (Dick Riley's) country out there.

Don Ross: Yes.

Terry Whitebeach: So how many head of cattle did you have?

Don Ross: Two hundred and seventy odd. That's a lot, when they're rushing.

Terry Whitebeach: So you had those boys and one horse each?

Don Ross: We had four horses for night work and a mob of horses for the day – five or six to ride, each. We had to keep four horses in tack, in saddle. Those horses, we'd knock them up every night.

Terry Whitebeach: So how long does it take to bring the cattle from there to Woodgreen?

Don Ross: About a week. They rushed every night. Galloped every night.

From those initial four occasions and subsequent discussions we compiled a full account of that trip. When I read it to Don he expressed great satisfaction. Not only, I think, because we had managed over several retellings and discussions to retrieve most of the details, but because he felt I now understood clearly the dangers and difficulties he had encountered as a stockman, and had expressed appropriate admiration for his skills. (This was an old man, disabled and in failing health, recounting his vigorous working days as a skilled stockman.) We had accomplished a piece of mental archaeology and were pleased with our achievement. I would have liked to clarify a few additional details but when Don's health began rapidly to fail it became no longer appropriate (nor possible, towards the end) to expect him to focus on the minutiae of events in the distant past, nor to trouble him with further questions.

Nevertheless, the detail contained in the final version of the narrative included in the life history demonstrates Don's acute memory. As Somerville notes, the oral story form is a way of preserving the memories and meanings of life over a period of time and of a particular place.⁶⁹ Perhaps one of the reasons Don recalled that story so well was that he had told it so many times to an enthralled audience. He

⁶⁹ P. Cohen and M. Somerville. 1990. p. 80

was very disappointed, and more than a little rattled, to discover that his friend Dick Riley, who was younger than Don but possibly the last living stockman of that era with whom Don Ross had worked closely, was no longer able to remember in such acute detail the events of that particular trip. Dick could recall isolated incidents, but he had forgotten other details that Don had hoped to confirm with him. To remember is precisely not to recall events as isolated, Connerton says, it is to be capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences.⁷⁰ For Dick (and, towards the end of his life, for Don) to fail to remember did not so much deny the past as admit the unpalatable present – the reality of the failing body.

The final narrative of the Ooratippra droving trip, compiled from the transcripts of interviews above and additional material, is included below.

ME AND OLD DICK STARTED WITH A MOB AT OORATIPPRRA

Don Ross: Old Dick [Riley] was my right-hand man. He knew his work, yes, he was the best man. He was [at Arapunya] too. His woman's from over there you see, from Chalmers, so he stuck it out there. Chalmers runs with Ooratippra. All sheep country out there. [Dick's] much younger than me, about ten years. I was at Stirling a few years and I knew him long before that, you know. He used to work for Riley and Kennedy at Elkedra. Bill Riley reared him up from a kid, you know, made a good man of him too. All them brothers worked there, Nelson and Murphy, they're good fellas, good horsemen. And their father, Old Tim, he was a good man, and a good horseman. Their mother worked out on Elkedra and their father worked out there till he died, I think.

I was going to tell you this story of how me and old Dick started with a mob at Ooratippra, brought a mob in from Ooratippra. They were bastards of bullocks, they used to gallop all the time. By Jesus, they were buggers of bullocks, they rushed bad. Dangerous, all right. Some of them get crippled up hitting trees. Gallop all bloody night, never sleep, [only rest] a little bit in the daytime, dinnertime. Oh yes, they were all right in the daytime, but you can't see in the night. You

⁷⁰ P. Connerton. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 14

can't see where you're going. By Jesus, it's dangerous. You gotta wing them, gotta get behind them and wing them over. You can't get in front of them and stop them, they'll go over the bloody top of you.

One bugger at the Sixteen Mile [north of Alice Springs], just as I was coming in, there was water there, plenty of water after rain, and this bugger, he was chewing a bag, and I went up to him and frightened him and he went. He wouldn't let go of that bloody bag. Chaff bag. People used to feed their horses along the way, you see, and they'd just throw the bag down anywhere. Bloody thing. I didn't see [hadn't noticed] it before. And he wouldn't let go and he started running towards the cattle, the big mob. He was at the tail, you see, chewing this bag. And he got frightened of it you see, and he rushed straight into the mob and started them bastards off.

I tried to keep him back from the mob when I started chasing him. I chased hell out of him till he let go of that bag. He stepped on it. Bloody useless thing. He wouldn't let it go. He's dragging it, see. I reckon he must let it go, directly he put his foot on it. Before he got to the mob he was galloping with it. He was trying to get away from it. I chased him and the whole mob went. They were feeding nicely too. Too much no good [if they rush] they fall away to nothing [lose condition]. If they're always frightened they don't feed properly either.

Well, [it was when] I was running the stock camp at Ooratippra station, over east, over by the Queensland border, I took them [the cattle], walked them down to Alice Springs, but they were rushing that bad. They gallop of a night, the bastards. I don't know what was wrong with them. Drove us bloody mad. We couldn't get a sleep. Gallop all bloody night until they got lame. We lost some. Shouldn't have lost them, except for a bloody blackfella, he started them off. Well, he came into the fire, got off the horse and frightened the bloody horse somehow. The horse pulled back on the reins, just pulled away from him, I s'pose, scared the cattle and they rushed. I didn't know till later when I went back and had a look. We were camped close to a fence and they'd broken the fence. I had a truck, and Dick and I ran back and had a look at the tracks, but they were too far gone to catch up with then.

We had some yang yang bloody boys, bloody stupid boys. We used to call the horses that sometimes, 'Come here, you yang yang bloody thing'. [That boy who] frightened the horse, he wasn't a very good stockman. Didn't understand enough, didn't know how to work the cattle. He came into camp and the horse got frightened of the fire or something and [the horse] pulled back, and some of the bullocks went though the fence we'd built where we camped. Some of them got in the fence and couldn't get back out again.

The next day the boy told me, 'That bullock went right along here pulling us'.

Well, naturally, they want their mates, they want to get back in. [I told him], 'You call us when anything like that happens'.

It was too dark to see, so we lost them. We came back looking for them but we couldn't find them, about a dozen, thirteen of them. Couldn't hunt them. I'd left one bugger [one of the stockmen] already. He got crippled in the rush of the cattle, one of them Warlpiri boys. He fell off the horse, I think, so I sent him into town. The other one wasn't much good. New chum bugger. I didn't know him. It was the boss's trouble, he went and got the blackfella, see. He went and got him from here [Alice Springs]. Bloody boy never seen a bloody racing mob before, I don't think.

I had four boys [left] then, me and Dick and Banjo and this other fella, and the cook, Ronnie McCoy/Tilmouth. Old McCoy reared him up at the Bungalow, and when he grew up he went back to his mother's name. He's a coloured fellow, same colour as me, I suppose. There were only four of us left, the other fella got crippled, see. Sent him into Alice to hospital. Boss brought him in. He had a car, and brought him in, in his car. I didn't want him, I was finished with him. I finished with the Warlpiri boys, right here in Alice here, sent them back home. But Banjo and old Dick were station boys.

Only had two boys that I knew [on that trip], that's Dick and Old Banjo. Old Dick has been at it since he was a kid. I had Dick and Banjo from out there in Alyawarr country, and two hundred and seventy odd cattle. We had four horses for night work and a mob of horses for the day, five or six to ride, each. We had to keep four horses in tack, in saddle. Those horses, we'd knock them up every night. Dangerous work, all right, exciting. You need a good horse, all right. By Jesus, it's dangerous. I've had them [cattle] killed, you know, smashed to pieces when they rush like that. Break their bloody legs or something and they get trampled, that's the trouble. The ones behind 'em, they gotta go over 'em, trample 'em to death. A thousand in a mob. By Jesus, when they used to go, you could hear them galloping for miles. They make a noise. Go for their lives.

[Once] one Neutral Junction mob raced up to the Yuendumu turn off and I got into them with the whip. They got into the scrub there. One ran into a tree and crushed himself up to bits. He was nothing but blood and jelly. I cut him up the next morning. That night me horse got staked here [in the shoulder]. Mulga. I pulled it out. I must have pulled it all out because it [the wound] healed. Jet-black horse with white legs, Socks, his name was. He was a good horse. Stock horse. Big bugger.

WE STARTED AT THE STATION, DOWN BY THE SWAMP

This time I'm telling you about, me and Old Dick started at the station [Ooratippra] down by the swamp where those bullocks were. Caught them all at the water. We mustered there. We cut them out, put them out on the flat and cut the fats out of them, and watched them all night. They were fat bullocks.

We had another day mustering, then we started off. We camped on the station bore, one of the bores, bore fourteen I think it was. We started next day, a dry camp. Left at dinnertime [lunch time], the last watering time was dinnertime. The next day we went along and had a dry dinner camp. I was building on watering them later at night, but there was no water in the tank. So they were a very touchy mob that night, galloped all night. Oh, they were rushing bad, that mob.

What started them was, we [had] got to the bore and there was no water. I was on the road with the bullocks, just started. First lot of water I went to, bloody thing was empty. I couldn't get any water for my cattle. I had just equipped it, got it pumping. I [had] put new pipes, columns and rods down it and pumped it. Nearly full, it was. [When I was working out at] Ammaroo, that's when we done that bore, then I went to Ooratippra Station. I worked there then. I got the horses together then, fresh horses for the job of mustering the cattle. Anyway, when I got there [to the bore, there was] no water. Only windmill was there, no engine, see. Couldn't get it [the water] up. Bloody cattle wanted a drink badly. They were getting obstreperous.

I pushed on then. There was water in the Bundy, you know. The Bundy is a big creek. The main one is the Waite River and the junction there is called Bundy. There was a bit of a waterhole, where the Bundy comes in, a deep creek. [You've] got to follow the creek [bed]. The bank is too steep and the cattle wouldn't go up there. Some of them had a bit of a drink, in the waterhole, but they had to go up a bloody gully. Too deep. Frightened them. They wouldn't go up that bloody gully. There was water there but the bastards wouldn't go up there. It was late, see.

They got stirred up a bit. That's when they started galloping. They rushed all bloody night, that night. Took all night to get them. There's a coupla blokes out there all night with them, you know. They [the cattle] split sometimes, split into two or three mobs. I told the boys, 'Git into them with the whip. Git into the buggers. Take them round the flat and flog hell out of them!'

Anyway, we came on. We camped a dry camp. Two days [without water], they get very thirsty. And from there we travelled on to Honeymoon Bore. Jack Gorrey put that bore there. He was an Englishman. He owned Yambah station later. He had a honeymoon there when he was putting it in. (It's a joke, you know. Putting a bore

in – boring into a woman.) He had a young fella, John Gorrey, his son. John died in America.

The tank was full. I got there early in the morning to the water and we stayed there till that afternoon. They jump everywhere, go mad, the bastards, when they're thirsty, you know. They had a good drink. You can say they've all had a drink in a couple of hours. They quieten down then. I had dinner while they were on the water getting a drink. I let them camp there and had dinner.

And from there we went to the next bore. Only at night I camped there. Watered them and went on. [They were] still going. They still rushed a bit that night. They gave us hell, the bastards. They were determined to get away.

From there we went – where did we go from there – from Honeymoon? We were on the Waite River then. When we crossed that Waite River there were some flat rocks, and the cattle wouldn't go over it. They didn't like going across it. They didn't like going west, they just wanted to go east. They were a rushing mob. They like to go where they can smell things, where the wind's coming from. I got on my bloody camp horse and I flogged them across. Me and Dick got a fair few across and then I got wild and got on me bloody camp horse and I flogged 'em one by one. Flogged them across. They would not go.

Then after that we went to Waite River bore. That's the Sandover, Waite River there. I pulled up there [to] give them a spell, you know. They were getting lame, limping, with raw feet, so we camped. We were close to Utopia so I went in there and rang the boss. I got on the phone to the old fella [Rex Hall].

'Well', he said, 'take them to Woodgreen and truck them there'.

They got quiet, too. They were all right there. They got all right and then we just took them to the station then. I got a word with old Rex. I asked him whether it'd be all right for them to be trucked there, into the Alice, said too many of them sore foot. So he agreed with me there. We got them in there and put 'em on trucks. I walked them to the place where we had to truck them, then. They started that afternoon, that evening, to truck them in the dark. Bob Purvis done that, the owner of that place [Woodgreen station], he went by himself. I just drafted them, sent them into Alice. I was finished then. I went back home, and the plant. End of my trip, a bugger of a trip. [Took] about a week. They rushed every night. Galloped every night. We trucked them out and then we came back.⁷¹

⁷¹ Manuscript of *Good One*, Don Ross

One deep great regret I had was not having been able to travel with Don in Kaytetye country. It was an omission beyond our control, however. Don and I spoke from the beginning of going to Neutral Junction, but we were unable to gain the doctor's permission for Don to travel, although Don expressed himself willing to bear any risks that may ensue.

A whole narrative and cultural dimension is missing from the life history I compiled, except to those who know the country and can read the silences, because I was unfamiliar with Kaytetye country. Don Ross Don rarely used the Kaytetye names to places when he was speaking to me, because I did not know the language and was unfamiliar, mostly, with the culture, the landmarks, sites and locations of events in his stories. Thus, a certain degree of impoverishment of understanding of, and empathy with, events and contexts Don described must be assumed. Travelling in and knowledge of country enriches understanding and empathy and subsequently, the text of the narrative.⁷² Stories are located in country. Location – country - generates other stories. A lot of 'outsiders' difficulties [with Indigenous texts], Muecke claims, 'derive from the potential reader not knowing the country'.⁷³

A trip to Barrow Creek and Neutral Junction station which Myfany Turpin, two of Don's sons, Graham and Alec Ross, and I took together, a trip redolent with absence and silence, despite Graham's stalwart attempts to fill in the gaps, by

⁷² There is a great difference between receiving an account of a place and travelling to that place with someone whose home it is. The particular relationship Indigenous people have to country underlines this difference. I commiserated with Don that he no longer lived on Kaytetye country, and when we talked about Tasmania Don grieved for and with me that I was away from my home.

⁷³ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 13

relating stories from his own and his father's repertoire, made us very conscious of Don's absence, of the difference in understanding and quality of history which would have been transmitted had Don been with us. However it was an occasion for Alec (a member of the Stolen Generation) to revisit the place he had lived with his mother Weedah (Ouida), before he was removed by authorities, with the brother who had been largely responsible for reuniting him with his family. Thus the absences and silences allow new strands of narrative to be generated, to take the story in unexpected directions.

I have dealt in detail with the Ooratippra droving story because in lots of ways it exemplifies the issues involved in constructing the text of someone else's story. Wishing to stay true to both the word and spirit of the oral account stories I was acutely aware that, to quote Marcia Langton, 'When the cues, the repetitions, the language, the distinctly Aboriginal evocations of our experience are removed from the recitals of our people, the truth is lost to us'.⁷⁴ For two hundred years Indigenous people have had their stories and their experiences 'interpreted' by others. And now, by my reorganization of texts, my arrangement and ordering of the documents, I was entering this fraught territory of complicity. But, nothing can remain as it was in a given situation, for, as Carolyn Steedman says, the very act of reconstruction alters the accounts of the past, and thus the past itself.⁷⁵

Historians' work in the area of information is located at an important point in colonial relationships between white settlers and Aborigines in Australia, Goodall

⁷⁴ M. Langton. Cited by S. Muecke. 1992. p. 60

⁷⁵C. Steedman. 1992. *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing Autobiography and History*. Rivers Oram Press, London, p. 4

maintains. The politics of information control in this discipline have left most of the power in the hands of non-Aborigines and changing that involves more than the recording of Aboriginal voices.⁷⁶ Too often it has been a case of ‘what the black man says is one thing, what he feels is another and the white interpretation is generally yet another’, as Kevin Gilbert so bluntly put it.⁷⁷

The problem was and is, of course, for those constructing the narratives, that they have always been and will always be constrained by their own subject position in ‘narrating others’, even where they wish it were not so. And if the subject positions of writer and speaker diverge too widely, then it will be the more powerful and dominant ideology of wider society that will assert itself. Nicholas Gill explores this issue in his PhD thesis.⁷⁸ The narratives of the white pastoralists of Central Australia recorded by Gill are, he points out, underlain by the pastoralists’ beliefs that they are caring for country better than traditional landholders ever did and that their land-management practices are more viable than the policies of conservationists.

Who tells the story and how it is told are of crucial significance. Arnold Krupat makes the distinction between ‘Indian autobiography’, an original bicultural composite composition in which there is a distinct, if not clear division of labour between the subject and the editor responsible for fixing the text in writing, yet

⁷⁶ H. Goodall. 1987. p..31

⁷⁷ K. Gilbert. 1973/1994. *Because a Whiteman'll Never Do It*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. ix

⁷⁸N. Gill. 2000. *Outback or At Home? Environment, Social Change and Pastoralism*. PhD Thesis. Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra, p. 61

whose presence the 'I' masks,⁷⁹ and 'autobiography by Indians', which he characterises as the life stories of christianised or 'civilised' Natives, who, having internalised western culture and scripture wrote without mediation.⁸⁰ Krupat further maintains that Native Americans have had to make a variety of accommodations to the dominant culture's forms, capitulating to them, assimilating them but never able to proceed independently of them. This is also true of Aboriginal writers and narrators in Australia, and nowhere more apparent than in the lives, speech and writing of Aboriginal people who also have some European ancestry.

Don's oral narratives bear some, but by no means all, of the most apparent formal markers of conventional autobiography. The (more or less) linear narration of a chronologically structured life story⁸¹ is not a feature of Don's narratives, at least in their original state, as interview transcripts, but a claim to truth, often documented by 'verifiable' data and the unproblematic use of the pronoun 'I' to represent a seemingly continuous past and present self with scarce (if any) reference to the act of writing, certainly is.⁸² Elizabeth Tonkin poses the question:

How culturally specific is autobiography, or the presentation of one's life as a sequence, in speech or in writing? And how far does an active sense of individual identity develop with the aid of genres, whose existence gives people a model of how to represent themselves

⁷⁹ A. Krupat. 1989. *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*. University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 55

⁸⁰ A. Krupat. 1989. p. 55

⁸¹ A. Krupat. 1989. p. 59

⁸² S. Frieden. Transformative Subjectivity in the Writings of Christa Wolf. In J.W. Barbre et al Personal Narratives Group (eds.) 1989. p. 174

and which later, others will in turn develop so that a tradition emerges?⁸³

Whilst not addressing questions such as the one above, in the terminology employed by Tonkin, these and similar issues affected the way Don and I worked together to create his life history. As a writer I am conversant with and practised in the conventions of written English across a number of literary genres, including biography and autobiography, where the assumption is that the writer speaks across distances to an unknown reader, and the language and textual forms are shaped by the very necessity of making links with readers with whom the writer is not familiar.⁸⁴

Initially I attempted to set aside some of these conventions. I stayed as faithful as possible to the text of the transcribed interviews. I omitted prefaces and introductions, and instead invited the reader to encounter Don through his own relatively unmediated narrative. I placed the text in loosely chronological sequences, or 'clusters', whilst also leaving elements of the narrative to circle through a number of repetitions and enlargements of incident or theme, in the way I had received it as a listener. Each 'cluster' of texts (later to become a chapter) I divided into segments, prefacing each segment with a title in Don's own words, taken from the text. The titles would assist the reader, I felt, by providing a guide to the text that followed. And the fact that they were Don's own utterances in his own inimitable style of expression would evoke the oral nature of the original text and a sense of Don's living presence, and thus act as a unifying principle, or least

⁸³ E. Tonkin. 1992. *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 48

⁸⁴ A. Ravenscroft. 1997. Strange and Sanguine Relations: Aboriginal Writing in Western Book Culture. *Meridian*, Vol. 16, No. 2, p. 268

a connective device, in the written text. I included no interpretive text and no biographical or historical texts. Instead, I wrote a short afterword, outlining some of the issues I had encountered in compiling the text of the narrative. It is included below.

CONSTRUCTING THE NARRATIVE

‘Straightening out’ the narrative, and making it accessible to the reader (rather than the listener) may mean modifying the original circular telling of the story, even losing much of the sense of the circular way of telling the story; creating a hybrid form, just as the Native tongue and cultural forms modify the conventions of the adopted language (English) and conventions (autobiography).

The core of the story – the punch line or memorable part – the outcome – is given first, then the speaker circles back over the details, adding information with each new telling, adding names and family connections of those involved. Savouring the telling, adding other incidents involving those people mentioned, often incidents which occurred at other times, but which are linked to the main narrative by associations which may not be apparent to the outsider. These events may be separated by decades or they may be at different places and involve a number of different/other people. Only assiduous questioning on the part of the interviewer/outsider sorts out the strands of these layered interconnected narratives into an account accessible to the (distanced) reader.

This is the artifice/craft of biographical story writing – so that a reader who is outside the story or the web of connections can (at least partially) enter or follow the story. In one sense it falsifies the narrative, by making it conform to a model that does not reflect the teller’s reality or way of recalling events, from within an implied web of interconnections. The outsider can follow a single strand only a short way before it joins or intersects with a dozen other stories / details / strands / kinship ties / place names and significances / events.

Thus it is necessary to create a more two dimensional model, within the print medium, a more abstract model for the absent reader, to try to give a ‘taste’ or indication of something that cannot really be experienced by the removed / isolated / individual reader.

The more authentic experience is to be part of a living, breathing, ongoing, continually growing, recreating and recreated, lived narrative, which spirals endlessly back on itself, where the mind moves among past and present and picks up connections in a more

organic, less schematic way. A less authentic, but valid, experience, is to receive the ordered sequence of the narrative, second-hand, the strands untangled and arranged in ordered sequences. The reader thus gains understanding of sequence, historical and personal facts, whilst being denied the organic experience of the interweavings and connections, the richness of a particular context or perceived and understood subtext.⁸⁵

Most of the (non-Indigenous) readers of the early drafts of Don's life history expressed reservations at the methodology I had adopted. Examples of the comments/feedback I received are as follows:

Because you gave me no introductory note I went straight into Don's voice and his memories of early childhood, which had me working quite hard until I found the rhythm. The layering, circling and repetition of the narrative, which you comment upon at the end, took some getting used to but it paid off in terms of the achievement of a sense of the voice. Also, politically, of course you are respecting his story and part of that lies in the ways of telling.⁸⁶

This reader went on to say she found herself longing for time lines, family trees – supporting material (unnecessary for Kaytetye audiences) to elucidate the narrative. Another comment I received (from a different reader) on this early draft was:

While I appreciate the points made about the linear narrative I wonder if this is going to make the task of the reader more difficult than might be necessary. I would suggest that thought be given to a slightly more structured text that is based more than is currently the case on chronology and/or themes.⁸⁷

Eventually I came to terms with the fact that the final written text of necessity would be both an impoverished and an enriched version of the oral texts; a hybrid

⁸⁵ Terry Whitebeach, Personal Notes 1999

⁸⁶ Correspondence with Dr C. Hill, Deakin University 1 December 2000

⁸⁷ Correspondence with Professor D. Carment, Northern Territory University 2 February 2001

form which would exclude some material (derived from the thoughts and memories of the subject) and include other (documentary, interpretive) material which, though not generated by the subject, might help to illumine his narrative.

The concept of the interview as an act of collaboration between two people creating autobiography⁸⁸ retains or even underlines a sense in which the subjects make their own decision to tell the story of their life for their own purposes. I can only speculate on the reasons for Don's decision to embark on the project. As a writer and historian my objective was to represent Don's life history with integrity, remaining as self-conscious and transparent about my methodology and culturally determined predispositions as possible. By including (a limited amount of) interpretive text, I was accepting the fact that not all Don's stories would necessarily 'speak for themselves' nor would they provide direct access to other times, places or cultures.⁸⁹ Just as I had needed explication of certain facts and access to a wider historical context to appreciate the narrative more fully and to draw my own conclusions (some of which differed from Don's) about certain events and people I also needed to acknowledge and provide for this need in many of the readers. (For Kaytetye readers, of course, a leaner text would have sufficed, because they possess the cultural background and context to the narratives.) Increasingly, I was to discover that providing interpretive material within the narrative entailed a cautious juxtaposition of alternative truths.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ P. Hamilton. 1992. Inventing the Self: Oral History as Autobiography. *Hecate*, Vol. 16, Nos. 1-2, p. 113

⁸⁹ Personal Narratives Group. In J.W. Barbre et al Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. p. 264

⁹⁰ Personal Narratives Group. 1989. p. 264

Ellecke Boehmer⁹¹ reminds us that postcolonial texts emerge out of the specificity of local cultures and history/ies, cultures that are not always mutually intelligible. Obscurities and silences will exist no matter how much research is devoted to making lucid what is dim or giving voice to what is stilled. Post-modern and postcolonial critical approaches (emerging from European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world) in their concern with marginality, ambiguity, disintegrating binaries, are useful frameworks in which to consider cross-cultural collaborative writing. The editor of, or collaborator in, someone else's story, is in an ambiguous position, potentially involved in 'double-speak', and needs an acute sensitivity to the ethical, artistic and historical issues involved.

Given that the post colonial text is, as Homi Bhabha asserts, a hybrid object,⁹² then in seeking its complex goals, the text must adopt and transfer each culture's means of knowledge and value-formation. This back and forth, the assertion and reassertion of value and form, Ruppert says, is what creates multi-dimensional understanding for each reader.⁹³ Where the speaking subject's life is a balancing act of biculturalism, 'a complex counterpoint between partial origins' is present, which, 'opens up new numinous proportions...[and] far-flung regenerative, cross-cultural possibility', Guyanan writer Wilson Harris says.⁹⁴

⁹¹ E. Boehmer. 1995. *Colonial and Post Colonial Literature*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 230.

⁹² H. Bhabha. Cited by E. Boehmer. 1995. p. 230

⁹³ J. Ruppert. 1992. Mediation in Contemporary Native American Writing. *Genre*, No. 25, p. 323

⁹⁴ W. Harris. Cited by E. Boehmer. 1995. p. 230

Don Ross's narrative style, his choice of stories and the perspectives from which he told them were tempered by his dual racial and cultural heritage: he literally had inhabited both camps – moving between the temporary stock camps set up with Kaytetye fellow workers on branding and mustering trips and, when at home, the station homestead where he 'camped' with his mother and siblings, his white grandfathers and visiting pastoralists whilst his Kaytetye relatives ate their meals outside and slept either in the workers' camp or in the 'black' camp across the creek. Don was both a skilled and valued worker and he enjoyed his preferential treatment, whilst feeling the injustice of his traditional relatives' position. 'I didn't like it', he said, 'but I couldn't do anything'.⁹⁵ He understood his tentative position in the white world and had mostly accommodated good-humouredly its literal and metaphorical imperatives that he only 'speak when spoken to'.

Two examples illustrate this. Firstly, describing a mustering trip which had taken much longer than he had anticipated, Don explained that he set up camp on a neighbouring pastoralist's property and sent word up to the homestead to let them know that he was there. Later, the pastoralist said that Don should have camped up at the homestead with him.⁹⁶ Don told the story to illustrate what a good bloke that pastoralist was and how the pastoralist had treated him as an equal, but I saw the incident with a more jaundiced eye, (and perhaps through a late twentieth century consciousness) and felt annoyed that Don's acceptance should be

⁹⁵ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 20 March 1998

⁹⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 26 June 1998

contingent on the condescension of this white pastoralist.⁹⁷ Don did not articulate the reason he chose to stay with his fellow stock workers and I did not ask him for it. (His silences were often eloquent.) It is important not to lose sight of the fact that oral history accounts (and autobiographies) are constructed interpretations. The way some things are emphasised or played down can reveal a lot about the impact of the experience and the way it has been coped with. This is not just bias but possibly useful evidence.

A second example which provides valuable insight into Don's tenuous social position was the account he gave of his projected marriage. 'I could have married a white woman',⁹⁸ he told me, speaking of a time when he had two girlfriends, one Aboriginal woman (or 'half-caste' like himself), Lorna Purvis, and one white woman, Ruby Ridgelaw. Both wished to marry him, but his mother and a senior woman in Barrow Creek advised him, 'Stay with your own kind', and so he did.⁹⁹ He had had first hand experience of the results of transgressing race barriers. At eighty-four he conveyed vividly both his regret and his acceptance of the course of action he had taken. (It is of course debatable whether, and under what circumstances, Don would have been able to marry a white woman, and what consequences would have ensued if he had done so. But if in old age one cannot reflect on 'the road not taken' when can one? It is also characteristic of human reflection both to remember the course of action one took as the only one possible, as well as to measure one's possible actions in the light of present day

⁹⁷ I later revised my opinion after hearing and reading further accounts of Bill Heffernan (the pastoralist in question), who was known for treating Indigenous and non-Indigenous visitors with respect.

⁹⁸ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 26 February 1998

⁹⁹ See chapter 5 for a fuller discussion of this issue.

circumstances and possibilities).

The meanings Don assigned to his lived experience in general or to events in his life were rarely invoked or explicated overtly, although he was aware of other lives he might have lived. He was encouraged, in his teens, for example, by a visiting athlete, to try out for the Stawell Gift (a prestigious foot race)¹⁰⁰ but whether Don seriously entertained the possibility of leaving the station, or whether he was just musing over roads not taken, it is not possible for me to say. There is no doubt he was a superb athlete, both by his own admission and by the accounts of others, for example Bob Purvis.

Don Ross: Jesus, I could run. I used to win everything. They timed me, see, running, at sports. I was such a good runner the people wanted to take me away [to run in the Stawell Gift – a prestigious race, that attracted many competitors, and was held annually in Victoria] as they reckoned I was a sure bloody winner. I ran against a fella, Lyell Robinson, he was a runner from Adelaide and he raced me in his spikes, he had spikes on and I just pulled my boots off and I beat him. Oh, God Almighty, he kissed me. He wanted me to go with him see. He said, ‘You’ll win the Stawell Gift’. But the Old Man wouldn’t let me go.

Another one, a different bloke wanted me to run away. I was too bloody stupid, I didn’t think of the money I was going to get. I was about sixteen or seventeen. Bloody Boss wouldn’t let me go. I wanted to go but he wouldn’t let me, in case he never seen me again, I guess. I was disappointed. Well, I’d been told, you know.

Oh, God, yes, I could run and jump. I jumped five foot six, high jump at Barrow Creek. They reckon that’s as far as I could jump. Uphill too. I still won, handicapped with about eight inches I think. I had to jump eight inches higher than anyone to win. I forget what I jumped that year. That was the highest I ever jumped. I could run that’s for sure. Never been beaten.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 23 October 1997

There was another fella, he was from Scotland, young fella, just left school I think. And Old Bob Purvis was there. He became my father-in-law, after. The Scotsman asked me to race him.

‘Well’, he said, ‘I never been beaten’.

‘Well, you’ll be bloody beaten today’, Bob Purvis said.

‘By who?’

‘That boy there’.

It was me. Bob Purvis said, ‘He’ll beat you’.

Well, I beat him all right, from scratch. Next time I gave him a couple of yards, I think, a couple of foot or some bloody thing. And I beat him again. He didn’t know what to say. God, he looked a fool, you know. I forget his name. He was just there for the race meeting.¹⁰¹

Don Ross generally was given neither to abstract musings nor to proclaiming judgements on other people (perhaps both a cultural and personal characteristic of his); instead he ensnared this willing listener and participant in a complex web of humorous yarns, anecdotes and memories of the cattle industry, the life of a stockman, Kaytetye country and life, in which were embedded a closely-detailed but not always readily accessible (to her) plethora of names, relationships, testimonies of, and references to, Indigenous and non Indigenous Territorians past and present. Then he left her to create a parallel world – a written text – which replicated as far as possible the world Don Ross, ‘the versatile man’, had created with his words, a world in which he could and would continue to speak, both to family, and to the unknown reader, by means of a text, which aimed to merge

¹⁰¹ J.R. Purvis confirms that ‘Donald Ross was a superb athlete’. He said his father, Bob (R.H.) Purvis (the Sandover Alligator), who was also a sportsman, a gymnastics instructor and a boxer and wrestler, told him that Don Ross was a very athletic man. Bob Purvis ‘tried to get Don Ross to the 1936 Olympics. He took Don to Adelaide to try out for the team. Don had had an accident, and broken his collarbone, but even with his arm strapped up he had beaten the South Australian champion over the hundred yard sprint. He may even have been good enough for the Olympic team, but the sticking point was that Don was coloured. My father told me that same story many times’. Personal communication J.R. Purvis 26 March 2005

delegitimising influences while continuing oral tradition and culture:¹⁰² a text ‘substantially Native and substantially Western’.¹⁰³

No record, oral or written, is ever exhaustive. In her discussion of Auntie Rita, a life history written collaboratively by Jackie and Rita Huggins, editor Alison Ravenscroft maintains that there often existed two versions of Auntie Rita’s stories, a practised, well-rounded version but also an underbelly, which was not disclosed in the text.¹⁰⁴ Ravenscroft attributes this to the fact that Rita Huggins’ Aboriginal readership already knew that grim reality and also that Rita Huggins felt the constraining spectre of a less kind, less knowing white reader, for whom some stories were a potentially dangerous exposure. So the text was constituted as much around its silences as around its utterances.

Stephen Muecke pinpoints the dilemma for Aboriginal people, who have been both disallowed from speaking and who also have survived because they did not speak.¹⁰⁵ Don Ross had been on the horns of that dilemma more than once in his life. Jackie Huggins notes ironically, that, since the Mabo High Court decision of 1992 and the subsequent Native Title Act, her mother and others would now be pressured to remember their childhood memories, to help prove association with ‘country’, when, not so long ago, the protectionist and assimilationist policies of

¹⁰² J. Ruppert. 1992. p. 324

¹⁰³ J. Ruppert. 1992. p. 324

¹⁰⁴ A. Ravenscroft. 1997. p. 266

¹⁰⁵ S. Muecke. 1988. Aboriginal Literature and the Repressive Hypothesis. *Southerly*, Vol. 48, No. 4, p. 410

the day pressured the elders to deny and forget.¹⁰⁶ These memories and the telling of them would now be documented and form the basis on which land claims were won or lost. History, Huggins claims, ‘finds a way of reinventing itself for Aboriginal people, for better or worse’.¹⁰⁷ Muecke maintains that Aboriginal people may have learned to retain a judicious silence, in the face of the powerful demand, from white people for information about themselves, only giving out a certain amount of carefully constructed discourse – separating the public from the secret, and conceivably withholding a great wealth of information.¹⁰⁸

The omissions and inconsistencies in autobiographical accounts may be attributed to a range of factors, including race, culture and gender, the fallibility of memory, the way in which particular ‘personal myths’ are formed and framed by family and community constraints; the reassessments and reinterpretation of events at different times of one’s life. The life history of Don Ross makes no claim to being the ‘last word’ on the man. No biography or autobiography can make that claim. Each is only one version of a number of possible truths. What interested and excited him, what he found noteworthy or amusing, what he wished to relate in order to convey to me a sense of his particular life and characteristics, or to entertain me, what he thought city folks would or wouldn’t understand, and what might hurt or upset his children and other people, these were some of Don Ross’s criteria for deciding whether a certain story, anecdote or detail should be included or excluded. It was, after all, his life and his story: his right to decide how he

¹⁰⁶ J. Huggins, R. Huggins and J.M. Jacobs. 1995. Kooramindanjie: Place and the Post-Colonial. *History Workshop Journal*, No. 39, p. 179

¹⁰⁷ J. Huggins, R. Huggins and J.M. Jacobs. 1995. p. 179

¹⁰⁸S. Muecke. 1992. p. 128

wished to represent himself, publicly.

There was in fact not a great deal which, having disclosed to me, he then decided to exclude from the written text, but, later, I felt constrained to excise some personally and culturally sensitive material. The Ross family exercised the same prerogative. Over-scrupulousness was the guideline applied. I make no apology for that. I am very conscious of the vulnerability of Aboriginal people particularly to misunderstanding and vilification. They have been the subject of intense research, analysis and description for more than two hundred years and much of the material published has been written from racist or unsympathetic perspectives. Misunderstandings have abounded, stereotypes reinforced sometimes, even where the writer/researcher was sympathetic to the Indigenous subject of his/her research.¹⁰⁹ Muecke,¹¹⁰ in his article on Sally Morgan's *My Place*, discusses the non-disclosure by both Morgan's mother and grandmother of certain details of their lives. Sometimes the only way Indigenous people have exercised any power or control is to withhold personal information, he argues. It is ironic, as Indigenous scholars such as Jackie Huggins have suggested, that Aboriginal

¹⁰⁹ One of the many examples is Daisy Bates' writing (including her claim that Aboriginal people ate their babies) which is still generating misunderstanding, harsh judgement and vilification of Aboriginal people in some quarters. D. Bates. 1938/1996. *The Passing of the Aborigines*. John Murray, London. A more contemporary example is the 'New Age' fictional account (which purports to be autobiography) by M. Morgan. 1993. *Mutant Message Down Under*. Harper Collins, New York. Morgan describes her encounters and subsequent travels with the 'true' Aborigines of Central Australia, during which (supposedly) they imparted significant Indigenous spiritual teachings to her. In spite of many protests by Indigenous people, including those of a Central Australian delegation which traveled to the United States of America to meet with the writer and who subsequently received an apology from the author on an American television show, Marlo Morgan has not withdrawn the book, in fact she has subsequently written a sequel, and reaped handsome financial rewards. It is a cause for sorrow that many well-intentioned Americans, knowing little about Australian Indigenous culture, assume these books are based on fact. This book remains on sale in a number of venues in Australia, including the Alice Springs airport, where it is displayed amongst other more factual and credible accounts of Indigenous culture.

¹¹⁰ S. Muecke. 1988. p. 410

people like her mother Rita, were now being urged to remember and speak about what they were once supposed to forget.

History is full of silences people have maintained, for example, Holocaust survivors their experiences in Nazi camps, European Australians their convict forebears, or (as in my extended family) Aboriginal ancestry denied or hidden during and before Assimilation times. As Cherbourg resident, Lesley Williams, said, at the centenary of the establishment of the Cherbourg mission, in Queensland, 'our old people never spoke about it [the past]. We never spoke about it'.¹¹¹ But social and cultural shifts occur, which then allow what has been kept hidden to be spoken.

From the point of view of the historical record, I had regrets about the exclusion of some material which may have shed extra light on a particular historic period: as a writer I also had regrets about excluding material which may have enriched the life history and enabled the reader to engage more fully with that life history's subject and narrator. But I am very conscious that until recently Indigenous people rarely had an equal opportunity to put their perspective, or redress the imbalance created by insensitive, inaccurate or racist published material. And after Don's death, during the process of further editing of the tape transcripts, and of identifying the 'gaps in the record' and devising strategies either for filling these gaps, or providing explanations for why they could not or would not be filled, some material seemed too personal to be included unless considerable interpretive text was also included. This, I decided, would be an unwarranted intrusion and would

¹¹¹ L. Williams. 18 March 2005 *Message Stick*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation

distort the text of the narrative unnecessarily: Don Ross was the primary narrator of his own lively life history; he was not a case study in a social science research project.

As our relationship developed, the more formal interviewer/interviewee interchange which had characterised the earlier days of Don's and my collaboration metamorphosed more and more into the mutual exchanges of friends. It did not seem appropriate to me to consider everything spoken in that context to be automatically available for the public record.¹¹² (There are some comments I made to Don about my own life that I would not necessarily wish to see in print.) In the final months of visiting Don in the Old Timers' Home in Alice Springs, I rarely turned on the tape recorder. Sometimes we would discuss stories he had told me earlier, and a new detail or explanation would emerge that could be added to the text, but mostly he just enjoyed my visits, and the corned beef I brought him – he missed salted meat very sorely – as he laboured to breathe, sometimes drifting in and out of consciousness. Even the past eventually began to lose its interest as a topic of conversation for Don.

When he felt well enough I'd wheel him outside and we would enjoy the sunshine and birdsong together. Occasionally, I was reminded how robustly this man had lived his life and how vital his connections with the natural world still were. One morning, for example, while we sat in companionable silence, I thought Don had fallen asleep when suddenly he remarked, 'They're great workers, you know'.

¹¹² There are strong ethical issues involved and many different positions taken in this debate. Michael King's stance on this issue (M. King. 2002. Compassionate Truth. *Meanjin*, Vol. 49, No. 1., pp. 24 -34) is the one with which I find myself most in accord.

‘Birds?’ I asked. The air was full of the song of babblers, birds which live up to their common name, by trilling almost incessantly. Babblers build large communal nests and care for the young as a group. He nodded. ‘They do a good job [of building nests]’.¹¹³ And chuckled admiringly. Years of careful observation and a deep familiarity with the bush were the source of his succinct remarks.

After Don died it was months before I felt able to listen to the tapes and before I could begin to make the transition from present to past tense in writing about him. The successive drafts of the written text I completed seemed to me to convey very inadequately a sense of Don Ross and his life. The man himself had been so large and vital that the print text seemed a poor tool with which to attempt to give an impression of that vitality to the reader. I was struck also by the finality of the written word, the unnegotiability of it, and the possibility of misrepresentation it contained, as a medium. I became uncertain about the ability of the written text to represent the oral accurately. Would Don’s laughingly self-deprecating remarks about his prodigious skills and about his popularity with women, for example, remarks which were often endearingly humorous in their original oral presentation, sit starkly on the page as the boasts of an arrogant man, I wondered.

The intensity of this reaction has moderated as months and now years have passed, especially as readers who knew Don have assured me that the text does convey a strong sense of the man, but what has not changed is my desire that Don not be made unnecessarily vulnerable to misunderstanding and misjudgement by means

¹¹³ Personal communication 21 November 1998 Don Ross

of an artificial construct – a life history – to which the man himself no longer has the right of reply. My desire, in creating the life history, was to present what Michael King calls a ‘compassionate truth’.¹¹⁴ King says:

The scrupulous biographer is always trying to locate his [her] subject in the appropriate social, cultural and historical contexts...but within certain constraints. One is aiming at what I would call “compassionate truth”: a presentation of evidence and conclusions that fulfil the major objectives of biography, but without the revelation of information that would involve the living subject [or his family and community, I would add here,] in unwarranted embarrassment, loss of face and dignity, emotional or physical pain. Compassionate truth implies working from the record and following evidence to whatever conclusions it indicates, but having at the same time regard for the sensibilities of living people, including the subject, who may be characters in the narrative. And that conditions what evidence is cited and how it is cited and what conclusions are reached and how they are expressed.¹¹⁵

Wrestling With the Angel, King’s biography of Janet Frame,¹¹⁶ demonstrates this principle admirably. So, by featuring the stories Don Ross chose to tell, (and by selecting the interpretive text I chose to include very carefully) I felt I was honouring this principle. These stories for the most part consisted of fairly positive accounts of his working life as a stockman, station worker and owner. He occasionally mentioned hardships and troubles, and I did not doubt he had experienced his fair share, but I accepted that, like most people, he preferred to fashion the raw material of his experience into a positive account of himself. Like many senior Aboriginal men who had been pastoral workers, Don held the attitude expressed by Jack Sullivan in *Banggaiyerri*:

¹¹⁴ M. King, 2002. p. 24

¹¹⁵ M. King, 2002. p. 24, p. 34

¹¹⁶ M. King, 2000. *Wrestling with the Angel: A Life of Janet Frame*. Picador, Chippendale

Jack Sullivan: The story, what we did on cattle stations, mustering and branding and all that [is] better than that wicked turnout, all those murderings and fighting stories. I don't like talking about them, but still you know we had a few murderers. Cattle work was the best.¹¹⁷

Tim Rowse makes the point that for Jack's or anyone's world view to be enduring there must be a way of turning the raw material of experience into a positive account of oneself and those one loves and admires. You have to find a way to believe in what you did.¹¹⁸ Don usually put the most optimistic interpretation on events. When confronting the harsh reality of an event that appeared to me to have no redeeming features his reactions would vary from remaining silent and passing no judgement to commenting laconically or offering some ameliorating fact or interpretation. He appeared to hold very little resentment against the perpetrators of past injustices.¹¹⁹

It is important to realise, however, that as well as the hardships and discrimination they faced, Aboriginal stockmen of mixed descent occupied a privileged position compared with that of their traditional relatives, and Don's narrative reflects this: the breaking-in of horses, originally a white man's job, the bearing of arms, the allocation of tasks, payment for work, the way rations were received and eaten, access to alcohol, all these were markers of rank, and sources of pride and status. Don was proud of these badges of rank, and in speaking about these things, he sometimes exhibited the attitudes of the white pastoralists, whilst at other times he

¹¹⁷ B. Shaw. 1983. *Banggaiyerri: the Story of Jack Sullivan as told to Bruce Shaw*. Institute for Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, p. 128

¹¹⁸ T. Rowse. 1987. Were You Ever Savages? Aboriginal Insiders and Pastoralists' Patronage. *Oceania*, Vol. 58, No. 1, p. 89

¹¹⁹ One reader of the draft manuscript remarked of Don, 'He is so un-angry.' Correspondence with Dr C. Hill, Deakin University 1 December 2000. Others have commented on the lack of anger expressed by many older Aboriginal people.

expressed regret for the preferential treatment he had received and the lack of acknowledgement other Aboriginal stock workers had received. Apparently contradictory statements enable the reader to appreciate the complexity of the lived reality of people like Don Ross who were neither awarded the full privileges of Europeans nor subject to all the constraints experienced by their ‘full-blood’ relatives.

Don found his ambiguous identity difficult to speak about (as difficult probably as it would have been to navigate successfully, during his life) and preferred to tell cheerful yarns about the world of work. He rarely volunteered information about his wives, his family life or his feelings, although he would try good-naturedly to answer any questions I put to him, no matter how strange he may have found them. (I would have liked to learn more about his wives, his children, his domestic arrangements and his thoughts and feelings.) Other biographers have noted this gendered preference. Dick Kimber says, of Walter Smith:

He only occasionally mentioned members of the family for, despite the strong bonding, their life experiences inevitably meant long separations from one another and therefore individual rather than shared experiences on most occasions. Similarly, his two marriages are but very briefly mentioned as in part their recall causes him sadness, and in part his lifestyle and work meant that he spent much of his life away from home.¹²⁰

In the afterword of *Emerarra: Man of Merarra*, Jebb writes:

At times I tried to encourage [Morndi Munro] to put something in that I felt was lacking. The inclusion of his wives was partly a response to me as a female interviewer and to my own interests.¹²¹

¹²⁰R.G. Kimber. 1986. p. iv

¹²¹ M.A. Jebb. (ed) 1996. *Emerarra: A Man of Merarra: Morndi Munro*. Magabala Books, Broome. pp. 160-161

Walter Smith told his collaborator, Dick Kimber, 'Men talk a different way, like, when they're having a yarn they say some things they mightn't say when the women are around a bit'.¹²² Mary Jo Maynes, discussing the influence of gender on narrative form in her study of French and German working-class autobiographies,¹²³ noted that men were more likely to structure their narratives around their work lives. Further, that they created picaresque self-portraits, the roots of which lay in the earlier oral literary forms in which the English novel had its beginnings.

It is true that a long series often of humorous anecdotes relating the adventures of the 'hero' as he proceeds from encounter to encounter is an apt description not only of the plots of the picaresque novels of Sterne and Fielding but of the bush yarns of men like Don Ross. Both genres clearly exhibit characteristics of the oral narrative forms from which they originated.

As mentioned earlier, Don's narrative style was also informed by Indigenous oral traditions. Two significant ways in which Indigenous oral tradition shapes a story, Muecke explains, are that the oral Aboriginal version of a story places its emphasis in locating events in conjunction with the human relationships around which they occurred and that dialogue ('talk' or discourse) is used as a convention to represent the scene as relevant to the present time, as if the dialogue of the

¹²² R.G. Kimber. 1986. p. iv

¹²³ M.J. Maynes. Gender and Narrative Form in French and German Working-Class Autobiographies. In J.W. Barbre et al Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. p. 108

participants was still going on.¹²⁴ These two conventions can make the work of writing a version of the story which will be coherent and accessible to both Indigenous and non Indigenous readers, and which will remain faithful to the spirit, content and style of the original oral occasion, a nearly impossible task.

The approach I adopted, as explained above, entailed a number of compromises, as I came to terms with the fact that the voice of the unwritten self, once it is subjected to linguistic codes, literary conventions and audience expectations of a literate population, is never again the authentic voice.¹²⁵

In the oral tradition, Louis Owens maintains, context and text are the one thing.¹²⁶ The speaker and the listener are co-participants in the telling of the story.¹²⁷ In the Western literary tradition, as I have argued above, the existence of this unity within the dialogic structure of the story-telling occasion is not so apparent, easily recognised nor (until the advent of post-modern literary theory) so culturally admissible.

But since life history itself, as Langness and Frank point out, is the result of dual input from two individuals with their own past experiences, biases, needs and

¹²⁴ S. Muecke. 1983. Discourse, History, Fiction: Languages and Aboriginal History. *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, p. 76

¹²⁵ H.A. Baker. Cited by A. Portelli. 1994. *The Text and the Voice*. Columbia University Press, New York, p. 223

¹²⁶ L. Owens. 1992. *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman and London, p. 13

¹²⁷ L. Owens. 1992. p. 13

motives¹²⁸ it is up to both participants to work out what protocols can stand, without breaking down under the strain.¹²⁹

Creating a written text derived from oral occasions or performances by a speaker whose traditional way of ‘telling history’ is oral often assists the writer to detect the invariants of cultural genres.¹³⁰ Decisions must be made in the light of these discoveries. It is, of course, impossible to detect fully the way in which one’s cultural constructs affect the act of transposition of texts across cultures and genres. I inserted documentary evidence and interpretive comments in italic script at the beginnings and ends of chapters, and, where necessary, within the body of Don’s narrative, as much to support Don’s narrative, by creating a context for the reader unfamiliar with the historical and political realities in which Don’s life and narrative are embedded, as to corroborate Don’s account. Including these separate texts meant the need for more intrusive editing within the transcribed oral accounts was mitigated and the differences between the two texts were emphasised by the use of italic script as a visual cue for the reader.

Italic script was also used for alternative narratives, stories by Kaytetye people other than Don and his immediate family, that were included to fill in some of the gaps and to provide another view into Don’s world, a cultural and social context to his narratives. Because of the visual cue of the italics¹³¹ it is a simple matter for

¹²⁸ L.L. Langness and G. Frank. 1981. 61

¹²⁹ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 203

¹³⁰ D. Hymes. 1981. *In Vain I Tried to Tell You: Essays in Native American Ethnopoetics*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, p. 339

¹³¹ IAD Press will use a variety of fonts, rather than italics, in the published work.

the reader to engage, at least initially, only with Don Ross himself, as speaking subject, turning (or not as he/she chooses) to the supporting narratives of other Kaytetye people, to historical documents, or to the compiler's interpretative text, for clarification or additional insight and/or information should the need or desire arise.

Oral sources are considered by some to be intrinsically unreliable, despite the fact that, as many historians have pointed out, much of the history of literate cultures existed as oral history for long periods before it was written down, and that most written accounts of more recent events begin as spoken accounts, documents being often no more than transcriptions of oral accounts and occasions. Historians have taken documents over-literally, Elizabeth Tonkin claims.¹³² Documents, after all, are orality recorded. (And the purposes to which historical records are put, sometimes differ significantly from the purposes for which they were created.) But in literate cultures documents have been and still are attributed with more reliability and truth than oral accounts. The Personal Narratives Group claim that:

Far from encouraging our ability to think creatively about discovering the truths in personal narratives, our academic disciplines have more often discouraged us from taking people's life stories seriously. Disciplines have mainly done this by elevating some kinds of truth – the types that conform to established criteria of validity – over others. Generalisations based on these elevated truths become norms.... This serves...to control ultimately what constitutes knowledge.... This inevitably excludes certain experiences that require understanding. As appealing as it may be to some to carry out this Cartesian division of the world into discrete and knowable parts, the cost is high. It is devastating for those whose experience, history and perceptions – whose truths – are obliterated.¹³³

¹³² E. Tonkin. 1992. p. 114

¹³³ J.W. Barbre et al Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. p. 262

Historians such as Keith Windschuttle question the reliability and relevance of oral history, especially where it contests a received or accepted 'national' history. Windschuttle claims that to accept these accounts without documentary corroboration is to abandon the principles of empirical history.¹³⁴ Much of the oral evidence among Aboriginal people of violence on the frontier is 'mistaken', he argues, because their knowledge is less scientific, and emotive and parochial.¹³⁵ But, as Attwood and Foster attest, there are practitioners like Deborah Bird Rose who seek ways of reconciling the different settler and Aboriginal perspectives and representations so that both European and Aboriginal traditions are respected, thus enabling the vital work of cross-cultural communication to occur, on which any hope for reconciliation in a pluralistic democracy ultimately depends.¹³⁶

Bill Gammage, writing in 1981 about Melanesian oral traditions,¹³⁷ points out that in Papua New Guinea at that time written sources reflected European concerns, while oral sources mainly reflected Papuan New Guinean concerns. Oral and written sources are allies, he claims: each strengthens the other.¹³⁸ Gammage recognises the legitimacy of oral history, and argues in its defence:

¹³⁴ K. Windschuttle. Doctored Evidence and Invented Incidents. In B. Attwood and S. G. Foster. 2003. pp. 106–108

¹³⁵ Cited by T. Griffiths. The Language of Conflict. In B. Attwood. and S.G. Foster. 2003. p. 136. There is ongoing discussion about the position Windschuttle argues in articles, papers and books: 1994. *The Killing of History: How a Discipline is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists*. Macleay Press, Paddington; 2002; 1 March 2003. Social History, Aboriginal History and the Pursuit of Truth. *History, Politics and the Philosophy of History*. Blackheath Philosophy Forum. For examples of this discussion, see Electronic Transmissions, p. 458

¹³⁶ B. Atwood. and S.G. Foster. Introduction. In B. Atwood. and S.G. Foster. 2003. p. 21

¹³⁷ B. Gammage. Oral and Written Sources. In D. Denoon and R. Lacey (eds.) 1981. *Oral Tradition in Melanesia*. University of Papua New Guinea and the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, Port Moresby, p. 118

¹³⁸ B. Gammage. 1981. p. 118

The faults which critics use to condemn oral history can also condemn written history. Inaccuracies persist and multiply in written accounts despite theories that they need not, and in written history as in oral history evidence is in practice subordinate to interpretation. In fact the advantage of written history is not accuracy but convenience. Writing avoids the need to memorise, and so increases how much information can be passed on. Indeed perhaps it is because writing preserves more detail about more events that writers assume written evidence to be more accurate, whereas really a relative lack of detail does not bear at all on the accuracy of what is preserved orally, though it may make the interpretation of oral traditions more difficult for historians seeking accuracy.¹³⁹

In addressing the most common objection to the acceptance of life histories as valid historical documents – that they usually rely on verbal accounts that are difficult or impossible to verify¹⁴⁰ – it is important to acknowledge that there are factors which may affect the consistency and reliability of oral accounts.

Michael King, in an article on New Zealand oral history, lists four: failure of memory, confusion as a result of transmission through more than one person, the wish of an informant to appear in a more favourable light (by remaking the past) and the wish of a storyteller to point out maxims or morals.¹⁴¹ It must be remembered that none of these shortcomings is particular to oral accounts. Also, as King points out, particularly in a cultural context where oral rather than written accounts are the norm, oral accounts may be invaluable when they are available for key incidents for which documentary evidence does not exist.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ B. Gammage. 1981. p. 117

¹⁴⁰ L.L. Langness and G. Frank. 1981. p. 32

¹⁴¹ M. King. 1978. *New Zealand Oral History: Some Cultural and Methodological Considerations*. *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 118

¹⁴² M. King. 1978. p. 117

I am persuaded by the arguments of Gammage,¹⁴³ Oliver¹⁴⁴ and others, that oral and written evidence present very similar problems: if the item of evidence is authentic, its reliability is still to be tested – for bias, corruption in transmission, distance from the events it relates to and so on.¹⁴⁵ And it is worth noting that when the cultural context traditionally has been one of oral transmission, as with most Indigenous cultures, people may wield that tool with considerable skill.

But what may differ (and may confuse people operating from a different cultural perspective) is the use made of the oral account, the occasion and reason for its transmission and the different values placed on aspects both of practice and content. It must always be held in mind that what we may call our data are often really our own constructions of other people's constructions.¹⁴⁶

To illustrate this point: I formed the habit, early in our collaboration, of bringing Don local histories, books about Northern Territory history and the pastoral industry, and, on various occasions, documents from the archives which we would examine together and discuss. He was always very interested in what other people 'made' of things, as he put it, but was not intimidated by 'official' or sanctioned versions of events, or formal documents, and if he felt he had first-hand knowledge that refuted what was in those documents, he said so. I read him a

¹⁴³ B. Gammage. 1981. p. 101

¹⁴⁴ W.H. Oliver. 1978. New Zealand and Other History. *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 101

¹⁴⁵ W.H. Oliver. 1978. p. 101

¹⁴⁶ C. Geertz. 1975. Cited by H. Creamer. Aboriginal Perceptions of the Past: the Implications for Cultural Resource Management in Australia. In P. Gathercole and D. Lowenthal. (eds) 1990. *The Politics of the Past*. Unwin Hyman, London, p. 132

number of telegrams in which his grandfather, George Hayes, sought permission to use government wells, because (allegedly) his cattle were perishing. The replies disputed that claim,¹⁴⁷ which amused Don greatly. It was all part of the cut and thrust of pastoral life of these times. When I discovered in the archives a letter written by George Hayes in his own hand¹⁴⁸ I felt I had made a coup. I took the photocopy to Don, expecting a strong reaction. Don merely glanced at the letter and said, 'George Hayes didn't write that. It's not his writing'. The signature was 'George Hayes', he admitted, but the body of the letter was not in George Hayes' handwriting. 'Manager wrote it', he said. 'The Old Man would have been out mustering and signed it when he come back to the homestead'. The 'facts' the written document appeared to verify had been so easily refuted by one to whom the real facts were known. Nevertheless, the document remains in the archives, with the only person qualified to dispute what it appears to bear witness to, that it is a letter written by George Hayes senior, no longer alive to refute that 'fact'. A small and insignificant example, perhaps, but one which nevertheless demonstrates that the faith some historians place in written accounts and their concomitant lack of faith in oral accounts may be based on cultural constructs, rather than empirical evidence, at least some of the time.

Another example of this disjunction is more sobering in its implications. I obtained a copy from the archives of the Patrol Officer's account of the names and status of Kaytetye people living on Neutral Junction station in 1953. As mentioned above, this document was studied intently for several hours by Don

¹⁴⁷ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS A659/1 Item 1944/1/4431 Use of Government Bores

¹⁴⁸ Appendix 4, pp. 391–392

Ross, his sister, Blanche Ross, his niece, Emily Hayes, Institute for Aboriginal Development linguist Myfany Turpin, and myself, at the end of which time dozens of annotations to these notes had been made, based on the at times heated discussions of Don and his relatives, regarding the errors contained in that document, errors created through language differences and gaps in cultural understanding. At the end of this session (quite a lot of which I did not understand, not just because a large part of the discussion was in Kaytetye, but because it referred to extensive networks of kin most of which were unfamiliar to me, and the information about whom I did not have the cultural knowledge to grasp nor cultural tools to process) it was impressed on me just how important (and difficult) it is to record or transcribe information accurately for the descendents of the people who held/hold all this material in a great mental library, but whose children's children may not necessarily be so fortunate.

So, throughout the time I was creating the written text, I maintained an ambivalent attitude towards documentary evidence. On the one hand it helped to fill in some of the silences and gaps in the oral record. For example, documentary material facilitated a wider understanding, beyond the laconic account given by Don, of the factors which forced him to sell Neutral Junction station. But, it also had the ability to create ambiguity and uncertainty, unless I was able to establish some sense both of the original circumstances in which the documents had been created and of the agency of the documenters. (And I did have occasion to seek oral confirmation and explication of information recorded in documents. Much of the Northern Territory's history is still in the minds and memories of its citizens.)

A final example: the official documentary accounts of both the Coniston and Barrow Creek massacres differ so significantly from the accounts given by Indigenous people that one is prompted not to take them at face value, but to investigate further historical factors which may perhaps shed light on this discrepancy. Comparing documentary and personal and oral accounts of events and lives is always useful: creating dialogue creates new possibilities and potentially new interpretations.

Arnold Krupat names autobiography the West's most obviously dialogic genre in which conversation between *historia* and *poesis*, documentation and creation, is always in progress, but he argues that it is the distinction between truth and error, not fact and fiction, that seems more interesting to Native expression.¹⁴⁹ Don, as a member of a so-called marginalised minority, took it for granted that quite a lot of what was written down was incorrect. And his narrative both interrogates the dominant view of historical events and invites further dialogue with it, and also constructs itself within the parameters of a particular and divergent world-view.

Print encourages a sense of closure, Walter Ong says,¹⁵⁰ but dialogue as an oral form (even when transcribed) can engender open literary endings.¹⁵¹ Multiple and open endings are implicitly dialogic in that they defer the task of making ultimate

¹⁴⁹ A. Krupat. *The Dialogic of Silko's Storyteller*. In G. Vizenor. (ed) 1989. *Narrative Chance: Post Modern Discourse on Native American Literatures*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, p. 59

¹⁵⁰ W. Ong. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*. Methuen, London / New York, p. 132

¹⁵¹ A. Portelli. 1994. The Peculiarities of Oral History. *History Workshop Journal*, No. 12, p. 88

decisions to the reader. ‘Curlew – He Made that Death’,¹⁵² the final story in the text of Don Ross’s life history, illustrates this point. As a closing utterance (a literary choice, rather than a reflection of ‘historical fact’) I felt it would serve to keep the reader aware, to the end, of the complexity of Don Ross’s inner and outer worlds. The narrative is an interweaving of Indigenous and non-Indigenous narrative conventions, subject matter and world-views, an open-ended dialogue between a number of discourses, with radical discontinuities between them clearly in evidence. Nevertheless, it is a rich and coherent narrative.

Don Ross: Curlew, he made that [death]. Curlew, he the one that said, ‘No, him die. This human’s dying, see. He die for good’.

And this other thing [animal¹⁵³] was saying, ‘No, let him go for two or three days, let him come back again’.

‘No’, he [curlew] says, ‘die for good. He gotta die. Yes’. And he had a stick and he threw it in this hole. That’s it, he made that death, that’s why they [Aboriginal people] don’t like him. Don’t like that bloody curlew.

‘Only let them go [be dead] for a week or something’, [the other animal said].

But old curlew wouldn’t have that; he said it could die for good. He had a stick. He said, ‘No, he die for good’. He threw the stick, threw it in a hole. [So, the human] stayed dead. That’s him, that bloody curlew. They [Aboriginal people] had no time for him at all.

One time at Barrow Creek, at Burns Well, Pat Burns was putting it down [sinking the well], see, and he had two blackfellas there. Old Donald was one.¹⁵⁴ And he seen this curlew going to two old fellas sitting under a bough shed. Old Donald, old blackfella that was working there, and this bloody curlew was walking up to them. That’s a bad thing, too. And he went up there and he got a boomerang out of

¹⁵² Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 15 May 1998

¹⁵³ Don could not recall which animal it was.

¹⁵⁴ Donald Pwerle, from Artarre, Artweyelpelaynenge. He was one of the Aboriginal men who used to carry the mail on foot, in the early times, to Home of Bullion, taking nothing with them but a tomahawk or knife.

his swag and he took this bloody thing [curlew] right off the ground. Tore him to pieces, with one boomerang. He [Old Donald] was real savage.

Well, this Old Pat Burns then said, 'You want him that one, he good tucker'.

'No, 'im no good, that one, 'im no good that one, 'im smell'em deadfella'.

By geez, they don't like him. They don't like that bird. You hear 'em [curlews] singing out. They're bastards of things. They're skinny-legged bloody things, bigger than magpie but skinny legs. Sort of greyish colour. All over [Australia], I think, all over, they don't like him. That's a Dreaming thing. They call it Dreaming.

He [curlew] been say, 'No, let 'im die for good'.

He done that. So, when he come around, people gonna die. Well, those three fellas died, out of that camp, even the boss man. They took him to Oodnadatta. He went out later and died. Pat Burns. The place is called after him. And the two old blackfellas died. Well, the two old fellas, they was old fellas, under the shady tree, under the bough shade, sitting down, and the bloody curlew was going straight up to them, and this old fella went and got a boomerang. Killed him. Took him right off the ground. He come down in feathers.

Pat Burns just got crook there. He wasn't too young. He got sicker and sicker. Yes. He smellem deadfella, that bird. That's why he comes near you. He knows you gonna die.¹⁵⁵

By placing that story at the end of the narrative (both for its subject matter and its stylistic characteristics) I felt it would most tellingly leave the reader with a strong impression of Don's relationship with both cultures and his style of self-disclosure, self-reflection and way of telling a life story, as well as indicating the end both of Don's life history as well as his life. It would also allow (and require) the reader to ponder the complexity of Don Ross's life and world, to take his/her own measure of Don Ross, 'the versatile man'.

¹⁵⁵ Ms *Good One, Don Ross*

CHAPTER 2

CROSSING BORDERS

Good history clusters at borders, between past and future, between cultures, generations and genders, between not knowing and knowing. There we make the unheard of familiar, think in ways unimagined, explore worlds undreamt of. Minds expand, imaginations soar, lives are enriched. To make strangers friends even if but for a few hours, to see through them the world afresh and more clearly, are gifts so precious that the barriers between us should always be met gladly, the bridges always sought, the borders always crossed.¹

Life histories, whilst focused largely on the perspectives of one unique individual, may also illuminate to some degree the teller's sociocultural milieu. They contain much subjective material, but also exhibit what Shaw calls a time-depth² so that a personal history also reveals matters relevant to a group's local history from their point of view.³ Thus, individual life histories are also to some extent communal histories.

European 'settlement' of Australia has resulted in different but overlapping histories, and only when this is recognised and Indigenous history is reclaimed at the local level, Taylor maintains, is there any possibility of the overlapping histories becoming a shared history.⁴ Shared in the sense of coexistence, not of uniformity of content, methodology, purpose or philosophical basis, because, as

¹ B. Gammage. 1998. p.6

² B. Shaw. 1982/1983. Writing Aboriginal History for the East Kimberley: Methodology and Themes. *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No 5, p. 76

³ B. Shaw. 1982/1983. p. 76

⁴ P. Taylor. 1996. *Telling It Like It Is – A Guide To Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History*. Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, p. 8

Sissons, Langton, Huggins and others have reminded us, we cannot translate other histories into our own. We can merely juxtapose them.⁵ Life histories have a significant role to play in recounting Indigenous historical narratives and perspectives, provided there is a transparency about their production, an acknowledgement of the ‘double gaze of both subjects.’⁶

Don Ross’s life history is particularly interesting in this regard: it gives the reader clues to how he perceived his own participation and that of Europeans and Kaytetye people in the developing Northern Territory pastoral industry and demonstrates how he chose to relate that story to a range of listeners. It adds other voices, other perspectives to the complex picture of coexistence of Central Australian Indigenous people with their white allies, enemies, neighbours, relatives and bosses in a particular historical period. The ‘telling of history’, whether it is oral or written, is not and never has been neutral, Binney reminds us. It always reflects the priorities of the narrators and their perceptions of the world,⁷ which often, however, may resist simplistic or essentialist analyses. If we consider that perhaps the most significant factor in any human being’s life is survival, then, given the ambiguity of Don’s position in the world he inhabited, and the violence and racial prejudice of that world, it becomes evident why he decided ‘to stick by the whites’.⁸ He very quickly understood that, as he himself

⁵ Cited in J. Binney. 1987. Maori Oral Narratives, Pakeha Written Texts: Two Forms of Telling History. *The New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 21, No. 1, .p. 28

⁶ Prell, R.E. 1989. p. 255

⁷ J. Binney. 1987. p. 28

⁸ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 14 April 1998

put it, to be Aboriginal ‘was a bugger of a life’.⁹ But it is/was never quite that simple for Don, never a black or white choice, so to speak. A reader of the early manuscript of the life history commented upon a ‘disappointing absence of a conscious politics of race...within Don’s perspective’.¹⁰ This reader further acknowledged, Don Ross ‘also seems quite racist at times himself which is uncomfortable for the reader.’¹¹ Don Ross was not a polemicist nor a political commentator, but a skilled stockman and a man whose Aboriginality does not easily lend itself to an essentialist definition of race or Indigeneity. He was not an exponent of an essentialist or hybrid Aboriginality, he was a man telling his life history as he saw and understood it, looking back from the perspective of old age. Aboriginal people are frequently expected to bear the responsibility for speaking on all Aboriginal issues and expounding on all matters Aboriginal, in a way that non-Aboriginal people are not expected to – an inherently racist and unrealistic expectation. Don Ross’s life history is able to illuminate historical conditions and issues, but from within understanding and perspectives that are particularly his own, demonstrating prejudices and misunderstandings as well as insights and ‘truths’. The thesis explores some of these.

At the Oral History of Australia Association’s conference, *Crossing Borders*, in 1997, Mamaku artist and writer, Pat Torres, called for ‘a change in the content and contexts of Australia’s historical narratives’,¹² and for historians to ‘cross the

⁹ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 10 April 1998

¹⁰ Correspondence from Dr. C.Hill, Deakin University, to T. Whitebeach 10 July 2000

¹¹ Correspondence from Dr. C.Hill, Deakin University, to T. Whitebeach 10 July 2000

¹² P. Torres. 1998. *Crossing Borders. Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No. 20, p.2

borders of self-perpetuating myths that suit the colonising peoples, and [to] gaze into another view of historical correctness... We now have a voice',¹³ Torres says.

Indigenous histories are juxtaposed beside the histories of imperialist nostalgia built on the customary narratives of the colonising invaders of this country, narratives which served only certain events and protagonists and arranged them in an appropriate order to suit those that held the power and control within this country and largely existed to perpetuate the status quo.¹⁴

But, one must not expect homogeneity of content, focus or emphasis in these histories, although the injustice and racism suffered by Indigenous people is a common thread in most life histories. Western history, Muecke claims, 'achieves a truth affect because it seems embedded in time and removed from variable perceptions of the subject of 'talk''.¹⁵ But this notion of truth increasingly is being contested, by groups whose world-views, cultural perspectives and competing narratives are equally valid. These contradictions in what constitutes history, either written or oral, cannot easily be resolved. The structures and events have been bonded culturally, in time and place.¹⁶ As Binney and other scholars claim, European forms of writing history must be considered just as subjective in their criteria of what is important and relevant as the oral forms which traditionally contain/ed and constitute/d the histories of Indigenous peoples.¹⁷

¹³ P. Torres. 1998. p. 2

¹⁴ P. Torres. 1998. p. 2

¹⁵ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 65

¹⁶ J. Binney. 1987. p. 28

¹⁷ J. Binney. 1987. p. 28

The personal accounts of members of non-dominant social groups, delegitimised by some for challenging the prevailing hegemony, may be particularly effective sources of counter-hegemonic insight in their exposure of the viewpoint embedded in dominant ideology as particularist rather than universal, by revealing the reality of a life that does not conform to these generalisations.¹⁸ These personal accounts are valuable cross-cultural documents or conversations, whether they utilise a collaboratively ‘authored’ hybrid form, such as life history, or a single genre traditional to Western literature such as autobiography, employing the conventions of the dominant culture and infusing and informing them with the equally valid world-view and/or traditions of an/other social group. Don Ross’s life history both confirms and challenges some commonly held beliefs and assumptions of Australian frontier history, and the way he perceives the past and conceives his memories of it and the way in which he recounts those memories have their bases in both European and Aboriginal rhetorical, epistemological and ontological traditions (as demonstrated in this and following chapters of the thesis).

Don Ross’s life history contains many examples which confirm the generally accepted narrative line of Australia’s frontier history as ‘advance Australia fair’. Don Ross never overtly questioned the right of Europeans to annexe Kaytetye and other Indigenous groups’ country for running cattle. Even when describing the way the pioneer cattlemen shot the Indigenous owners of the country they had annexed, and the way they just ‘took’ young men from the tribes and trained them as stockmen, or took young women as stockwomen or for sexual purposes, Don rarely offered any moral judgement or conveyed a sense that these actions may

¹⁸ B. Attwood and S.G. Foster. Introduction. In B. Attwood and S.G. Foster. (eds) 2003. p. 6

have been wrong. Instead, in these narratives he included himself in the heritage of the hard-living, hard-working (and hard-drinking) pioneers of the pastoralist industry, relating with gusto his own and his ancestors' tales of derring do, of facing flood and drought and distance, overcoming great hardship to make good against the odds. In these narratives the original owners become the shadowy opposition to this heroic endeavour, to be despatched with gun, or 'tamed' to become good or 'quiet' blackfellas.

The life history also contains evidence of opposing, equally dearly held world views, but one must read closely, be more informed and familiar with Indigenous perspectives in order to detect these, for Don usually demonstrated the courtesy of most Indigenous narrators by judging nicely what should or should not be spoken, in order not to bring shame into the conversation being conducted with people who may not be as deeply encultured. Some aspects of Don's life I would not have found out from himself, even if I'd asked him, probably; for example, it was Don's family and friends, not Don, who supplied examples of his generosity to his Kaytetye relatives and other people, and his honouring of reciprocal responsibilities.

These contested world-views and concepts are of interest and significance in contemporary historicizing because they offer no easy resolution, no final transparent narrative line, or definitive 'truth'. Western historians are heirs to the proposition that historical truthfulness is a matter of reconstructing, as best as is possible, a past event or series of events, Deborah Bird Rose says. But this does not exhaust the task of history, she maintains. Equally significant in Aboriginal

oral histories, is what Rose calls 'faithfulness to the moral content of events'¹⁹ in stories, which may reveal understandings otherwise unavailable to non-Aboriginal people.²⁰

Within traditional Aboriginal (oral) culture there was/is a clear understanding of the authority of a storyteller as 'boss' of particular knowledge or information, of his or her right to relate a particular story and for a particular group to hear that story, and an understanding of both the conventions of, and cultural conditions for, the telling of those stories, and of the function of particular narratives. 'Trustori', eye-witness accounts (or accounts properly authorised, by means of relationship with the place and with the eye-witness or participator) of events located in particular geographical spaces and linking present and past within a continuum or web of human relationships, were/are delivered in an interactive situation, were/are responded to, affirmed or modified in the light of experience, changed conditions and events and the reception of the story by the group.

The writing of autobiographies, biographies and life histories of and by Indigenous Australians (collaboratively, or individually) has had its impact on that tradition. Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another.²¹ The written word has its own narrative and linguistic conventions, which differ from the conventions of oral discourses. It can never fully represent the oral occasion which generated a particular telling

¹⁹ D.B. Rose. *Oral Histories and Knowledge*. In B. Attwood and S. Foster. (eds) 2003. p. 123

²⁰ D.B. Rose. 2003. p. 123

²¹ W. Ong. 1982. p. 43

of a particular story. The employment of genres outside traditional Indigenous cultural norms has required and created a confluence (or at least an uneasy alliance) of different cultural practices and conventions. I have argued that this hybridisation of styles and practices is a particularly apt vehicle for transmitting the narratives of 'mixed-race' Aboriginal people, who have been required in their lives to accommodate the cultural mores and traditions of at least two races or cultural groups. Native American writer Gerald Vizenor describes these narrators as 'word hunters in transitive memories...wild word hunters, with new metaphors on separation'.²²

The notion of hybridity may be a useful way of speaking about the shifts and melding of cultural forms in those supposedly post-colonial times, Cowlshaw says.²³ It certainly reflects the lives of some life history narrators. Nellie and Tex Camfoo, whose life history Cowlshaw compiled,²⁴ took pride in being blackfellas at one time and being whitefellas at another. So did Don Ross. Nellie Camfoo told Cowlshaw, 'I can go blackfella or whitefella way',²⁵ an assertion Don Ross also made.

But shame can also attach to both in particular times and places, Cowlshaw notes, because the different cultural codes are vehemently despised or lauded according to circumstance.²⁶ The life history of mixed race persons, situated on both sides of

²² G. Vizenor. In B. Swann and A. Krupat. (eds) 1987. p. 106

²³ G. Cowlshaw. 1999. *Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas*. Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, p. 293

²⁴ G. Cowlshaw (ed.) 2000.

²⁵ Cited by G. Cowlshaw. 1999.

²⁶G. Cowlshaw. 1999. p. 294

the frontier, may therefore function as powerful deconstructive tools as well as reminders of particular historical circumstances, which have been omitted from ‘authorised’ versions of history. In the world of stockmen, for example, the space between the races was always well occupied. In the outback the familiarity of ‘those in-between’ as well as the slippage of practices across the boundaries meant that racial domains were not distinct or evocative of the same fears as in towns, Cowlshaw notes.²⁷ Don Ross and Tex and Nellie Camfoo were three of the many who had to deal in some way with the complications and contradictions of the racialised circumstances of their lives.²⁸ Their life histories bear witness to these.²⁹ Their particular accommodations were predicated upon having varying legal status throughout their lives, negotiating their immediate social environment, with its intimate web of relationships, and accommodating the mores of the wider culture in which they lived.

Personal narratives, viewed by some as valid historical sources, reveal truths from real positions in the world through lived experience in social relationships, in the context of passionate belief and partisan stands. They recount efforts to grapple with the world in all its confusions and complexity and with the normal lack of omniscience that characterises the human condition.³⁰ This is why we value them.

²⁷ G. Cowlshaw. 1999. p. 185

²⁸ G. Cowlshaw. 1999. p. 185

²⁹ Other examples are listed in the Bibliography

³⁰ J.W. Barbre et al: Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. p. 263

One of their signal attractions, Pascal says, is that they offer unparalleled insight into the mode of consciousness of other men (sic).³¹ They satisfy an interest in seeing with the eye of the other.³² But, some historians mistrust these subjective, informal, oral accounts because they may not necessarily reveal truths of the types that have conformed to established criteria of validity. Indigenous people's life histories may require a greater than anticipated shift in cultural orientation for some to perceive the view they offer. The non-Indigenous reader may need to rethink the meaning of both historical activity and the conventions of biography and autobiography, in order to accommodate and understand what is being communicated.

Brumble offers an example in a life history compiled from oral narratives, in which a Sioux warrior tells his life story by describing his deeds, rather than through a more confessional mode in which he discusses his motives and personal thoughts and feelings. As a reader/listener, we must understand, Brumble says, that we are being allowed a glimpse of the way he sees himself. In this case you might say that the warrior is providing evidence of his personality by telling us nothing of his personality.³³ In Don's life history the greater proportion of the narratives relates to his and others' stock work. This demonstrates where his interests and priorities lie, shows the reader how he sees himself, what he considers may be spoken in public and also indicates, both through their presence and absence in the text, the possibility of other narratives. Don Ross does not

³¹ R. Pascal. 1960. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, pp. 182–183

³² D. Brumble. 1988. p. 46

³³ D. Brumble. 1988. p. 46

present himself as a spokesman for Aboriginal concerns, for the gradual accession of the rights of Indigenous people, so, examining the text of his life history for such definitive evidence dooms the searcher to disappointment.

It is the work of the writer to communicate the life-story in the spirit in which it has been told to him/her, and in a way that opens up to the reader the possibility of entering unfamiliar terrain, of seeing either another world or the same world from a new perspective. It is the work of the reader to derive meaning from what has been communicated. But it is important, as stated above, to focus one's attention also on the conditions that created these narratives, the forms that guided them and the relationships that produced them, as these are all part of what is communicated in a personal narrative.³⁴ Autobiography is the type of literary discourse in which readers have regularly looked for models of the self, but the literary forms themselves, Somerville argues, constitute the narrative that it is possible to express within them.³⁵ Certain literary forms enable particular discourses or narrative constructions and constrain or disallow others. Life history, as a hybrid genre, employs the conventions of both auto/biography and oral narrative, to create a hybrid literary construction – based in the oral, and close to it, but existing as written literature.

Oral testimony, from which most life histories are constructed, is located by definition in the spoken word, and foregrounds the issue of the culturally prescribed and inscribing nature of language, and the interaction between language

³⁴ J.W. Barbre et al: *Personal Narratives Group*. (eds) 1989. p. 262

³⁵ M. Somerville. 1990. p. 39

and memory.³⁶ The oral history method, as the memory of the past condensed, leads us back to language, Murphy says, before leading forward to the meaning of the past in the present.³⁷ Further, Portelli reminds us, writing and voice, seeing and listening, are not representations of one another, they are autonomous, interrelated manifestations of language, imagination and memory.³⁸ Bakhtin³⁹ describes language as lying on the border between oneself and the other, being dialogically created (a cultural given, for many Indigenous peoples). To use language, Bakhtin maintains, is to engage in a power struggle, for language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions. It belongs to the other and expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated business. This underlines the 'profoundly social practice'⁴⁰ of the construction of oral testimony, as discussed earlier in this thesis.

Oral history cannot be treated merely as a repository of fact. It tells us less about events as such, Portelli asserts, than about their meaning.⁴¹ And oral history transmits its messages through artistic means.⁴² Oral recollection inclines toward the figurative rather than the specific, thus metaphor, Murphy says, is a dominant

³⁶ J. Murphy. 1986. The Voice of Memory: History, Autobiography and Oral Memory. *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 87, p. 164

³⁷ J. Murphy. 1986. p. 164

³⁸ A. Portelli. 1981. The Peculiarities of Oral History. *History Workshop Journal*, No. 12, p. 98

³⁹ M. Bakhtin. 1972. Cited by W.L. Andrews. Dialogue in Antebellum Afro-American Autobiography. In J. Olney. (ed) 1972. *Metaphors of Self: the Meaning of Autobiography*. Princeton University Press, New York, p. 91

⁴⁰ E. Tonkin. 1992. p. 12

⁴¹ A. Portelli. 1981. p. 99

⁴² E. Tonkin. 1992. p. 12

mode in which oral history functions. Metaphor transfers meaning from the familiar to the unfamiliar, and hence by reclassifying reality expresses a creative intent: it fuses art and communication and condenses meaning in the service of memory.⁴³ Olney calls autobiographical writing ‘a metaphor of self at the summary moment of composition’.⁴⁴ Memories are recycled, images persistently return, in typical scenes and episodes, which reveal the identity of the writer/teller, to himself/herself first and then to the listener/reader.⁴⁵

Life history, biography and autobiography are all predicated on the fact that the narrator knows the outcome of the story, so that the narrative provides not so much an account of what happened, but a teleological intervention into a life, an attempt to create meaning from memories of the events of a life within the parameters of a personal myth. Don’s life history contains numerous accounts that testify to the validity of the sobriquet – the versatile man – bestowed on him by others, and to which he frequently referred. It is the central personal myth of his life history. It reflects the way he characterised himself when considering memories of the events of his life from the vantage point of old age – it provided a way of reliving, remaking the past with that doubling facility by which affective experiences are identified later, but preserved in the mind and reported to an enquirer, thus allowing them to differ strangely from the way they were first experienced and perceived.⁴⁶

⁴³ J. Murphy. 1986. p. 161

⁴⁴ J. Olney. 1972. p. 35

⁴⁵ J. Olney. 1972. p. 166

⁴⁶ F. Kermode. 2001. Palaces of Memory. *Index on Censorship*, No. 1, p. 88

Don's acceptance of the title ascribed him –the versatile man – enabled him to assign particular meaning and value to his life, to celebrate his successes and perhaps to come to terms with more difficult, dislocated or contradictory memories. It emphasised the opportunities his contested identity had afforded him, rather than the limitations it had imposed, and it gave him a sense of accomplishment, which ameliorated to some degree the diminishing possibilities old age had brought to bear on him.

The notion of identity depends on the idea of memory and vice versa, Gillis notes.⁴⁷ The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered [and forgotten] is defined by the assumed identity.⁴⁸ And, as noted above, identities and memories are highly selective, inscriptive rather than descriptive, serving particular interests, [needs] and [or] ideological positions.⁴⁹ It may be argued that just as Aboriginal memory has been sustained through community and culture, we also see its re-invention through memory writing and other cultural forms – autobiography, novel, reminiscence, film,⁵⁰ just as we may see the struggle for domination over remembrance⁵¹ in the contested accounts of Australian history since European arrival.

⁴⁷ J.R. Gillis. *Memory and Identity—the History of a Relationship*. In J.R. Gillis. (ed) 1994. *Commemoration: the Politics of National Memory*. Princeton University Press, New York, p. 3

⁴⁸ J.R. Gillis. 1994. p. 3

⁴⁹ J.R. Gillis. 1994. p. 4

⁵⁰P. Hamilton. In K. Darian-Smith & P. Hamilton. (eds) 1994. p. 13

⁵¹ J. Le Goff. Cited by J. R. Gillis. 1994. p. 56

Life histories have focused and perhaps extended the possibilities of biography and autobiography as a form, by problematizing the notion of the self. It is a discernibly dialogic self that is to be discovered in most life histories, whether those life histories are individually or collaboratively produced. The self in Native American autobiography (and Indigenous Australian autobiography, one could claim), is not necessarily constituted, Krupat says, by the achievement of a distinctive, special voice that separates it from others, but rather, by the achievement of a particular placement in relation to the many voices without which it could not exist.⁵² (There are exceptions of course.) The story does not belong to, nor is it constructed by, a single narrator. It is dialogically created and in turn it creates a context for the telling of further stories.

Don's life history demonstrates the concept of a self constituted within a network of relationships (particularly discernable in conversations and interviews with other Kaytetye people), a subject position not constituted exclusively from the private, individualised, confessional self of the Western tradition of autobiography dating back to St. Augustine. He inhabits and utilises both Indigenous and Western traditions: his life history is the story of one individual, but it is also informed by Kaytetye cultural traditions and mores, which, in story telling, are predicated upon being the rightful story teller, in a shared oral occasion.

⁵² A. Krupat. 1989. p. 133

Muecke's discussion of the conventions of Aboriginal oral narratives⁵³ offers useful ways to consider life histories such as Don Ross's. The oral Aboriginal versions of stories, Muecke writes, place the emphasis on locating the events in conjunction with the human relationships around which they occurred, such as, who was there, who they were related to.⁵⁴ This is clearly evident in Don's narratives, which are peppered with names, dialogue and brief (almost cryptic, on occasions) reference to people and stations and kinship links and events, references which took me a long time to unravel into meaningful sequences for myself, after Don's death, when to my astonishment I discovered the roll call of characters inhabiting his stories included most of the major pioneers of pastoral industry, government, police, explorers, public figures and major players black and white, and a great number of events of significance in Central Australia's history since 'contact'.

Unlike conventional Western historical discourse, Muecke notes, in Aboriginal accounts dialogue (talk, discourse) is used as a convention to represent the scene as relevant to the present time, as if the dialogue of the participants was still going on. Dialogue is where the story is located, rather than description and building up the 'scene'. Aboriginal history relies on the word. Muecke notes that stories are often introduced with the formula, 'Ill give you the word on that one'.⁵⁵

Dialogue involves two active participants, one of whom is the holder and teller of the story, the other of whom is the receiver or listener. The listener is positioned

⁵³ S. Muecke. 1992.

⁵⁴ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 71

⁵⁵ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 71

in two ways, Muecke says, firstly, as the receiver of a new (true) story in which the narrator retraces once more the words of the original participants; and secondly, as a participant who must respond actively. The listener is thus linked, personally, in a line of custodianship, via the previous narrators, back to the original event.⁵⁶

One of the main problems for Aboriginal history, Muecke states, 'is to authenticate the appropriate discourse for its transmission'.⁵⁷ Life histories such as Don Ross's do not necessarily provide direct access to other times, places or culture, particularly to what 'outsiders' imagine to be the 'given' reality of another culture, and are often not accepted as valid historical documents, in a discourse that may be unwilling to allow the validity of other ways of 'doing history'.

Trying to convey the truth about a lived reality is a complex task. Recalling the past is not a simple act of going back to an earlier time and place and reading off the contents of the scene that emerges.⁵⁸ Already, in the creation of the written text of an oral life history there is a double act of authorship: the narrator is faced with the problem of choosing a form which will convey, as far as possible, a recognisable reality to the recipient of the story, who may have shared none of the actual experiences being described, nor be aware of their cultural dimensions, and the writer who receives the story must encode it in the written form so it will represent faithfully the original and so it may be decoded by the reader. The

⁵⁶ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 71

⁵⁷ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 60

⁵⁸ D. Spence. 1982. *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth*. W.W. Norton, New York, p. 93

degree of effort that will be required by the reader, or the difficulty presented to him/her, in this decoding, are matters of contention.

‘What do I see and how shall I describe it?’ are problems faced by both the narrator and the writer, in deciding what aspects of experience are to be transformed into words and which words are needed to convey them.⁵⁹ In the creation of a text which conveys the ‘truth’ of an individual, a community, a series of events, what Portelli calls the ‘shuttle work’⁶⁰ needs to be done with consciousness and attentive caution, in order to hold together complex and shifting realities.⁶¹ The word text, Somerville reminds us, comes from the root meaning, to weave, and is more compatible etymologically with oral utterance than with writing.⁶²

Truth, that elusive historical goal, can lie in the intersection of narrator and discourse, where we have to see how accounts are authorised, Tonkin writes.⁶³ The act of authoring is a claim to authority. How it is achieved varies generically and politically and culturally, as does the kind of truth claimed, expected or

⁵⁹ D. Spence. 1982. p. 40

⁶⁰ A. Portelli. 1994. p. 215

⁶¹ M. Somerville. 1990. p. 41

⁶² M. Somerville. 1990. p. 41

⁶³ E. Tonkin. 1992. p. 8

accepted.⁶⁴ The creation of Don's life history from narratives orally transmitted across cultural divides entailed 'cautious juxtaposition of alternative truths'.⁶⁵

One aspect of the issue of the 'cultural divides' and 'alternative truths' with which Don and I grappled is contained in the section of the life history describing Don's loss of Neutral Junction station. According to one reading of events, his purchasing the station in 1947 could be viewed as evidence of his success in the European world and his selling the heavily mortgaged station in 1951 and returning to working for a boss as failure. Don and I discussed the reasons for his selling the station. The key factor which led to his selling the station, Don believed, was his being forced by the agents into taking on Ken Milnes as his partner in the station. On this point, Don and I appeared to share a similar concept of causality.

But, in trying to ascertain the degree of choice Don actually had had in this matter, by asking him to expand on the very brief answers he had given initially to my questions, I became aware of assumptions on which I was basing my questions – that by assiduous research it would be possible to get to the bottom of what really happened, to ascertain the facts which constituted an objective reality, and that Don understood and attributed motive and causation in the same way as I did. That there would emerge one unified and indisputably 'factual' account.

When I asked Don why he signed the agreement with the agents, Bennett and Fisher, allowing Ken Milnes to enter a partnership with him, he provided further

⁶⁴ E. Tonkin. 1992. p. 8

⁶⁵ Personal Narratives Group. Truths. In J.W. Barbre et al: Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. p. 264

details of events, rather than an explanation of motive and intent, as I understood them. The station got further into debt, he said, when Ken Milnes borrowed £500 against the station, on at least three separate occasions. Why had he allowed this, I asked, why had he signed the document for Ken Milnes to get the £500, if he knew the money would be gambled away? Don's answer was, 'Because he had no money, poor bugger'.

Don's action was predicated on a sense of reciprocal obligations and responsibilities (as well as unequal power relations), which operated against the European principles of thrifty business operations within the parameters of which white station owners like his grandfather George Hayes had operated, principles and values that Don purported to share. In the information he gave, the stories he told, in the answers to my questions I sometimes discovered significant differences in the way he and I constituted our realities. And, increasingly, I came to realise it was a complex and multi-faceted world Don inhabited and that his negotiations with it were carried out at a number of different levels.

Historical research has added much to collective knowledge of the past and helped to change many outdated and demeaning stereotypes of Aborigines, even awarded a 'place of honour' for some Indigenous people and their ancestors⁶⁶ but, as Geertz,⁶⁷ Creamer⁶⁸ and others have admitted, academic scholarship has by no means always been helpful to Indigenous people. Who owns and controls the

⁶⁶ H. Reynolds. 1982. *The Other Side of the Frontier*. Penguin, Ringwood, p. 199.

⁶⁷ C. Geertz. 1975. *The Interpretation of Culture*. Basic Books, New York, pp. 131–132

⁶⁸ H. Creamer. Aboriginal Perceptions of the Past: The Implications for Cultural Resource Management. In P. Gathercole and D. Lowenthal. (eds) 1990. p. 10

present (or the future) by manipulating perceptions of the past, or versions of the past, is, as it has always been, a matter of vital concern.⁶⁹

Whilst the ‘black armband’ historians have been accused of presenting a subjective as well as an unduly pessimistic picture of Australia’s colonial history, Indigenous life histories, narratives incorporating personal and community memories, are increasingly corroborating their accounts, at the same time offering a range of new insights and different cultural positions and perspectives from which to view the past. And historians who call for ‘objectivity’ (in the face of what they consider an excessively subjective approach, or a ‘fabrication’ of history) may in fact be calling for a specific form of bias, Humphrey McQueen says.⁷⁰ Objectivity, he claims, is simultaneously the barricade behind which the defenders of the status quo conceal their prejudices, and the challenge that they throw at those who overtly reveal certain, and only some, preferences.⁷¹ Conversely, an unnecessarily naïve notion of the role of memory in constituting accounts of the past, or an uncritical acceptance of the validity and relevance of any and every oral account of past experience, may be of as much disservice to the usefulness of a life history as is an inappropriate, culturally-specific construct of the self who is the speaking subject of the life history.

⁶⁹ D. Carment. 2001. *A Past Displayed: Public History, Public Memory and Cultural Resource Management in Australia’s Northern Territory*. Northern Territory University Press, Casuarina, p. 1

⁷⁰ H. McQueen. Taking a Strong Stand. In D. Duffy, G. Harman and K. Swan. (eds) 1973. *Historians At Work: Investigating and Recreating the Past*. Hicks, Smith and Sons, Sydney, p. 207

⁷¹ H. McQueen. 1973. p. 207

Memory, the great organiser of consciousness,⁷² is both malleable and flexible, or, as Attwood puts it, ‘can be notoriously unreliable...[and] often littered with inconsistencies and distortions, silences and omissions’.⁷³ Memories of an experience are restructured in the light of present experience and may be altered by a revision of recollections. What seems to have happened undergoes continual change. We heighten certain events in recall, then reinterpret them in the light of subsequent experience and present need. Thus, the ‘bad old days’ may become intolerable, in the course of time, within the memory, or the ‘good old days’ appear as idylls of bliss. The ‘truth’ in fact probably is an uneasy mixture of the two. Memories are restructured to allow for the ways these experiences are narrated now, either individually,⁷⁴ or as a social group.⁷⁵

The Stolen Generation narrative is a contemporary construct which gives many Indigenous people a way of remembering and speaking about very difficult life experiences, and offers them a way that is both tolerable and coherent, of framing their lives. It locates their own memories in a historiographical context. But, like all constructs, it contains the possibility of constricting or constraining disparate narratives into a single orthodox formulation (as did previous orthodoxies, such as notions of ‘the dying race’ and the ‘stone age primitive’) thereby impinging on the

⁷² D. Lowenthal. 1985. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 206

⁷³B. Attwood. 2005. p. 173

⁷⁴ J. Douglass. In K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton. (eds) 1994. p. 241

⁷⁵ And in relation to social, historical or political circumstances; for example, Connerton notes two instances of ‘organised oblivion’ in Czech history, in 1618 and after 1948. 1989. p. 14. Also, Bozon and Thiesse document the suppression of memories of success in the narrative of decline of a rural area. M. Bozon and A.M. Thiesse. 1986. *The Collapse of Memory: The Case of Farm Workers (French Vexin, pays de France)*. *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 2, pp. 237–259

liberating possibilities it appears to offer. If the new orthodoxy forces individual memories to yield to an accepted and acceptable collective memory, the narrator is effectively prevented from having the discursive space to give social value to those experiences which do not fit the recognised agenda for the group.⁷⁶

The accounts given by Alec Ross, Don's eldest son, of the events and consequences of separation from his family, illustrate this problem. Removed from his Kaytetye mother whilst his father was on a droving trip, Alec was taken first to the Bungalow in Alice Springs, then to the mission on Croker Island, and later evacuated during World War 2 to Otford, south of Sydney, where he lived till adulthood. His story, like that of many others of the Stolen Generation, is a complex and paradoxical one. He has been asked to tell it on many occasions. In 1999 Alec recorded an account that has been reproduced in this thesis.⁷⁷ I have also read transcripts of interviews Alec has given local newspapers and seen television interviews in which he has featured and have observed the variations over time and in response to the particular event or situation in which the account was given, in the conclusions he has drawn and the significance he has accorded certain aspects and details of his accounts.

Like every member of the Stolen Generation, Alec has a difficult history to accommodate. It is a complex ongoing task for him to both accommodate and grieve his removal from family and the subsequent cultural dislocation suffered, whilst appreciating the relationships, connections and opportunities the new life

⁷⁶ J. Douglass. In K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton. (eds) 1994. p. 241

⁷⁷ Interview with Alec Ross by Terry Whitebeach 15 March 1999

had offered. And it is no clichéd story that Alec tells, for he robustly refuses both a hapless victim role or the lucky escape version of his story, preferring an account that fits neither yet contains elements of both. With courage and integrity he continues to juggle, with what Hamilton calls ‘a complicated weaving of memory and history,’⁷⁸ not just the losses and the gains but the conflicting feelings which have resulted and accrued from the dislocation he suffered as a young child. Don’s account of the loss of his son Alec also contains the same balancing act of contested narratives.⁷⁹

Memories contain each individual’s negotiations with the world⁸⁰ and the social and cultural organizations of the times determine the framework into which detailed recall must fit. This is the built-in-bias that groups exert on memory content, Lowenthal maintains.⁸¹ Thus, ‘memory work’ is embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten) by whom and to what end.⁸² Nowhere is this more apparent than in the conflicting memories of two individuals whose worlds overlapped in some way. An example is the very different memories Don Ross and Maudie, Stan Brown’s stockwoman from Dorisvale, held of Stan Brown, their one-time boss. Don considered Stan Brown a good friend, but Maudie said he was a bad man. Both based their views on their personal encounters with Stan Brown. Maudie told Don, ‘You don’t know

⁷⁸P. Hamilton. *The Knife Edge: Debates About Memory and History*. In K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton. (eds) 1994. p. 11

⁷⁹ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 25 October 1997

⁸⁰ J. Douglass. 1994. p. 231

⁸¹ D. Lowenthal. 1985. p. 197

⁸² G. Le Goff. 1994. Cited by J. R. Gillis. 1994. p. 3

Stan Brown.’ Don claimed, ‘I know him.’ But their knowledge differed according to the divergent cultural and gendered constructs and constraints in which Don and Maudie operated, and was predicated on differences in their relationship with Stan Brown and in the treatment meted out to each by him. Stan Brown took Maudie from Dorisvale against her will and brought her south, making it impossible for her to return to her own country. Rumour has it that he burned the soles of her feet to prevent her walking home, through ‘enemy’ territory. She worked as a stockwoman out in the camps, but undoubtedly Stan Brown required of her other ‘duties’ in addition to stock work. Don saw Stan as a fellow station owner and a boss who, although he was tough, was a long-term employer and somewhat of a benefactor. In Stan Brown’s defence Don claimed Maudie was valued as a stock worker and treated well. But he was able to see my point when I protested at Maudie’s treatment by Stan Brown.

Another striking example was Don’s descriptions of his fellow Aboriginal stockmen, which sometimes were couched in the patronising terms of the white narratives of frontier history and on other occasions with the warmth and the respect accorded to relatives and skilled co-workers. Thus, sites of contested and contesting memories are ideal locations for reappraising historical accounts and for admitting (and hopefully, celebrating) diversity and complexity, and for resisting narrative closure, a process which may lead to the repression of contradictions and the affirmation of false alternatives, in the service of ideology.⁸³

⁸³ S. Frieden. In J.W. Barbre et al. Personal Narratives Group. 1989. p. 174

The focus in academic research (particularly in social science) on the process of remembering, both individually and collectively, and the relationship of memory to place and identity has facilitated the production of more inclusive histories, and brought into the public domain conflicting interpretations of past events. The practice of oral history also has changed the relationship between past and present in historical research⁸⁴ by using ‘the evidence of memory’ to observe precisely the relationships and the processes of memory and history – the ‘then of happening and the now of recall’.⁸⁵

Memory is thought to operate along mechanisms which ‘telescope, superimpose [and] fuse’ Passerini argues.⁸⁶ And thus a number of events and the understanding of such events, imaginary and real, can be reduced to an interpretation which in memory can appear as a single event. There are of course, different levels of memory, a superficial memory for ‘public’ consumption, in which stereotyping occurs, and a series of levels that more directly reflect ‘private’ experience.⁸⁷ (There may be discordances between these levels. Sometimes Don Ross saw himself having choices he did not have, in actuality, and there are discrepancies, as with all memory work, between accounts and interpretations.) And the ‘work of forgetting’, Passerini asserts, as well the ‘work of remembering’, is part of the

⁸⁴ P. Hamilton. 1994. p. 14

⁸⁵ M. Frisch. Packaging the Past. In R. Rosenzweig and S. Benson. (eds) 1986. *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, p. 12

⁸⁶ L. Passerini. 1983. Memory. *History Workshop*, No. 15, p. 195. Cited in J. Gregory. 1989. The Deconstruction of Memory: Exploring Childhood Memories of Class. *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No. 11, p. 72

⁸⁷ L. Passerini. 1983. p. 72

reconstruction of memory, and experiences and events that have been forgotten leave their traces in silence',⁸⁸ as this thesis demonstrates.

Oral history underlines the interpretive aspects of history in a much more blatant way than do other historical sources, Gregory maintains.⁸⁹ Oral histories, which have been produced in Australia in increasing numbers from the 1960s, do not 'fix' the past, in the way more traditional written history does. Consequently, Hamilton claims, historians collecting oral histories were able for the first time to assist in creating historical sources (and resources) in the present and thus they became aware of the 'retrospective and fluid' character of memory.⁹⁰ Oral history creates its own documents, documents that by definition are explicit dialogues about memory.⁹¹ For that reason, some historians have considered them illegitimate, or at least very limited, sources of historical 'truth' or fact. (It is almost a given that *all* historical evidence should be treated with caution.) Many historians have pointed out that memory is ahistorical, even antihistorical, in some critical senses, Attwood writes.⁹² Peter Novick has observed, 'Historical consciousness, by its nature, focuses on the *historicity* of events – that they took place then, not now, that they grew out of circumstances different from those that now obtain. Memory, by contrast, has no sense of the passage of time; it denies the 'pastness' of its objects and insists on their continuing presence'.⁹³ But that view only holds if one

⁸⁸ L. Passerini. 1983. p. 72

⁸⁹ J. Gregory. 1989. p. 71

⁹⁰ P. Hamilton. In K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton. (eds) 1994. p. 14

⁹¹ M. Frisch. In R. Rosenzweig and S. Benson. (eds) 1986. p. 13

⁹² B. Attwood. 2005. p. 174

⁹³ P. Novick. Cited in B. Attwood. 2005. p. 174

delegitimises, or refuses to admit to the discourse of history Aboriginal discourse, with its particular practice of ‘telling history’ and the linguistic and cultural parameters within which these narratives are placed. It’s not that Aboriginal do not understand the passing of time: Don Ross obviously understood that he was no longer young and fit and able to work as a stockman; and the title of the collection of Indigenous histories compiled by Peter and Jay Read, *Long Time, Olden Time*, bear witness to the Indigenous sense of ‘pastness’, but the way of recounting history within a narrative framework that brings the past and the present together, so that the past exists now in an unbroken continuum is a culturally based practice that grows out of a particular ontology and epistemology: and as hard to grasp for people who see history as a linear and temporally sequential narrative as is other cultural givens, such as the responsibility of ‘singing up’ country in order to sustain its efficacy and health. Cultures meet on some points, diverge on others: and the epistemological position of a person (narrator) situated on both sides of a cultural divide is deeply ambiguous and complex – or if one is to celebrate rather than problematize it – richly multifarious in its influences and discourse.

Oral history, transcribed and collated into written texts is the inheritor of this Pandora’s box of problems and possibilities. The collaborative act of interviewing, one of the means by which oral histories are produced, is a contested terrain, what Murphy calls ‘a border country...between record and interpretation’.⁹⁴ The successful writer [of Indigenous life histories], Ruppert says, creates a text that merges delegitimising influences while continuing oral

⁹⁴ J. Murphy. 1986. p. 163

traditions and culture.⁹⁵ This may present difficulties for a reader whose cultural expectation requires fixed meaning be discernible in an historical text, because concern for fixed meaning is not typical of oral cultures at all, Krupat claims.⁹⁶ Audiences for oral performances are very little concerned with interpretive uniformity or agreement of any exactitude as to what a word or passage means. These are the worries of book cultures, Krupat says.⁹⁷ Interestingly, the post-structuralist insistence on interpretive openness and undecidable meanings in print texts coincided, Ong says, with the first moments of ‘secondary orality’ in the West, with the technological shift from print to electronic retrieval systems that are not exclusively nor irretrievably text-based,⁹⁸ making this development a potential site, perhaps, for a convergence of the paradigms of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures?

Being involved in assisting a senior Aboriginal person to tell his or her story to a wider audience was an enriching but challenging experience. When telling ‘someone else’s story’, one potentially wields a two-edged sword. It was with the understanding that cross-cultural collaborations for the writing of life histories may be sites for the continued oppression and misrepresentation of Indigenous people but that they also may become occasions for the cross fertilisation of literary traditions, the creation of new forms, new understandings and shared histories, and from a belief that Indigenous narratives may constitute significant

⁹⁵ J. Ruppert. 1992. p. 324

⁹⁶ A. Krupat. In B. Swann and A. Krupat. (eds) 1987. *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*. University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 118

⁹⁷ A. Krupat. In B. Swann and A. Krupat. (eds) 1987. p. 118

⁹⁸W. Ong. 1982. p. 3

historical documents, that, within a context of genuine and cordial friendship and from a great love and respect for this particular individual, I compiled the life history of Alexander Donald Ross.

CHAPTER 3

BOTH SIDES OF THE FRONTIER

That which is perceived as individual experience becomes a collective expression with the public act of autobiography, a voice that carries a sense of life at that time. Authors of autobiography offer their individual specificity to the community, where private experience is adopted and validated as community history.¹

Personal narratives of non-dominant social groups...are often particularly effective sources of counter-hegemonic insight because they expose the viewpoint embedded in dominant ideology as particularist rather than universal, and because they reveal the reality of a life that defies or contradicts the rules.²

AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT³

Even the most private of lives is lived out within a context of political and historical events and movements, and consequently each life mirrors some of the concerns of its times, the values, issues and conflicts of its cultures and era. Don Ross's is no exception. The Ross family recognises the significance of Don Ross's life history to themselves, to the Kaytetye and wider Aboriginal communities and to the Northern Territory historical record. Don's life spanned the greater part of the twentieth century and the events of his life, the constraints and possibilities he

¹ S. Frieden. In J.W. Barbre et al. Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. p. 186

² Personal Narratives Group. 1989. Introduction. In J. W. Barbre et al. Personal Narratives Group. (eds) 1989. p. 6

³ In this thesis Indigenous historical interpretations and accounts have been privileged in most cases over their non-Indigenous counterparts, to assist in redressing the imbalance created by more conventionally accepted or authoritative historical accounts in Western society and to foreground Indigenous concerns, views and constructions of events.

experienced and attitudes and beliefs he expressed show him to be very much a man of his times, influenced by particular historical circumstances.

At the time of Don's birth contact between Europeans and Aboriginal people in Central Australia was already one of conflict.⁴ The recently arrived strangers took the land they wanted to run their cattle and set up their towns. As C.J. Rowe wrote in 1883, 'In young colonies the land is everything'.⁵ The colonists, ignorant of the country and the traditions, rights and responsibilities of those who had inhabited it for millennia before them, also were imbued with the idea of the inferiority of the black races⁶ and either refused to countenance, or were unaware of, prior ownership. The land was settled, Rowley writes, either at the point of the gun or against the background of Aboriginal knowledge of what the gun can do.⁷ In the Northern Territory, as elsewhere along the Australian frontier, in no case was pacification established before settlement.⁸

An editorial in the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 23 October 1875 stated:

⁴ Many historical texts contain accounts and discussions of conflict during 'contact times' in the Northern Territory, including: B. Attwood and S.G. Foster. (eds) 2003; T. Austin and S. Parry. (eds) 1998; R. Broome. 1982. *Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Dominance 1788–1980*. Allen & Unwin, North Sydney; R. Kimber. (no date). *The End of the Bad Old Days: European Settlement in Central Australia 1871–1894*. Occasional Papers No. 25, State Library of the Northern Territory, Darwin; A. McGrath. (ed)1995. *Contested Ground: Aborigines Under the British Crown*. Allen & Unwin, North Sydney; D.J. Mulvaney. 1989. *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia; A. Powell. 1982/1996. pp. 100-165; P. Read and J. Read. (eds) 1991; H. Reynolds. 1982; C.D. Rowley. 1970. *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, Aboriginal Policy and Practice. Vol. 1*. Australian National University Press, Canberra

⁵ Rowe, C.J., 1883. *Bonds of Disunion*. London, p. 264. Cited in G. Greenwood. 1955/1974. *Australia: A Social and Political History*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. 78

⁶C.D. Rowley. 1970. p. 4

⁷ C.D. Rowley. 1970. p. 214

⁸ C. D. Rowley. 1970. p. 151

We are invading their [Indigenous people's] country, and they have a perfect right to – and it is natural that they should – do their best to obstruct our passage through it. They look upon us as enemies and we must do the same.... We must go into actual warfare with them and fight them on their own principles. Shoot those you cannot get at, and hang those you can from the nearest tree as an example to the rest; and do not let the authorities be too curious and ask too many questions of those who may be sent to perform the service.⁹

The 'frontier' period of Northern Territory history had its harsh realities for both the newcomers and the Indigenous inhabitants. The European settlers found life isolated and arduous, transport and communication presenting major difficulties. Roads were few and ill made and transporting goods and people to the new settlements was a lengthy and expensive business. Food supplies might take over a year to reach their destination and cartage was £70 per ton, about \$20,000 in today's currency.¹⁰ The first effective communication system to be established was the Overland Telegraph Line in 1872. The fledgling pastoral industry in Central Australia, which had begun with high hopes, was experiencing major setbacks, including problems with climate and the transport of supplies, equipment and stock over vast distances, and from the depredations of Aboriginal groups whose food and water supplies pastoralists had threatened or destroyed. Successive governments legislated to regulate and control the lives and movements of the Indigenous people whose land Europeans had annexed.¹¹

⁹ Cited by W.R. Wilson. 1995. p. 113

¹⁰ R. G. Kimber. (no date) p.3

¹¹ Beginning with the *Northern Territory Aboriginals Act (1910)* and continuing through successive legislation until the *Welfare Ordinance* of 1964 signalled a relaxation of restrictive laws and represented advances in equality and civil rights for Indigenous people. C.D. Rowley. 1971. *Outcasts in White Australia: Aboriginal Policy and Practice, Vol. 2*. Australian National University Press, Canberra, p. 384

These three significant and interconnected factors had far-reaching ramifications and thus profound effects on the life of Don Ross – the problem of communication over vast distances, which led to the establishment of the Overland Telegraph Line, with its repeater station at Barrow Creek, Don’s birthplace and the traditional country of the Kaytetye people (in fact, the repeater station was located close to a sacred waterhole, a fact not noted in most historical accounts), the development of the pastoral industry in Central Australia which both annexed land traditionally held by Indigenous people, and employed these same people in the new land practices, and the institution of a series of legislative and administrative measures which defined the status of the Indigenous inhabitants and effectively controlled their activities and regulated their relationships with the non-Indigenous inhabitants of the Northern Territory.

This chapter considers the involvement of Don Ross and his family in the ‘settlement’ of the land by Europeans, the establishment of the Overland Telegraph and the establishment and development of the pastoral industry in Central Australia. Chapters four and five consider the legislation which governed Aboriginal people’s lives until the 1960s.

White ‘settlement’ of Central Australia began relatively late in the colonial period of Australia’s history, almost fifty years after the establishment of Hobart Town in 1804 and more than seventy years after the establishment of the first British colony in New South Wales in 1788. The European presence in Central Australia not only has been comparatively recent but much smaller than elsewhere, Peter

Read states.¹² Peter Horsetailer, a Kaytetye senior man of Tara [Atarre] Community,¹³ in 1990 recalled how his father acted as a guide to Charles Chewings in 1909, in the same way Aborigines had helped white men in the Sydney region a hundred years before.¹⁴

Peter Horsetailer: Yeah well two men bin comin' with camel from Alice Spring. They come here and findem old feller mine, my father, longa Barrow Creek. Longa old Telegraph Station. They bin pick'em up that old feller. They ask'em him, 'You want like to show us country to go longa desert? We tryin' look that gold.'

'All right then,' my father said, 'all right, I'll take you. But you know'em all that country to go through with the camel because I don't think we can get water now. I-I can show'em where we can get water.'¹⁵

John McDouall Stuart and his party had been the first (documented) Europeans to encroach on Western Kaytetye country. That was in 1860. The party had been hired by land speculators J.J. Chambers and W. Finke to explore the land north of the South Australian colony declared under the Foundation Act of 1834 to be 'waste and unoccupied'.¹⁶ Stuart noted, 'Native tracks quite fresh in the scrub plain. We also passed several old worlies'.¹⁷ On 23 April two and a half miles from a point he took to be the centre of Australia, Stuart nailed the British flag to a

¹² P. Read. Northern Territory. In A. McGrath. (ed) 1995. p. 271

¹³ A Kaytetye community excised from Neutral Junction station

¹⁴ P. Read. In A. McGrath. (ed) 1995. p. 271

¹⁵ G. Koch. (ed) 1993. p. 18

¹⁶ Cited in R. Hagen and M. Rowell. 1978. *A Claim to Areas of Traditional Land by the Alyawarra and Kaititja*. Central Land Council, Alice Springs, p. 11

¹⁷ W. Hardman. (ed) 1865. *The Journals of John McDouall Stuart during the years 1858, 1859, 1861, & 1862*. Saunders, Otley and Co., London, p. 164

pole on top of a 'high mount' he named Central Mount Sturt¹⁸ (later renamed Central Mount Stuart). From Central Mount Stuart he followed a large creek, which he named the Hanson, where he observed many tracks and fires, which led him to assume the area supported a large population of Indigenous people. On his final journey in 1862 he once more crossed the Hanson, where he encountered Kaytetye people. On his return to Adelaide Stuart reported the Northern Territory to be rich pastoral country. Seven months later the South Australian Government provisionally annexed the Centre as a dependency, and it remained so for the next forty-seven years.¹⁹

OVERLAND TELEGRAPH²⁰

Before the completion of the Overland Telegraph Line news could take months to reach Australia, as the only means of communication was by sailing ship. Government decision-making in the colonies was a lengthy business. The second half of the nineteenth century saw dramatic improvements in communications worldwide. As there was already a submarine cable from Great Britain to Java, it was planned to extend this cable to Australia. In 1865 Charles Todd established a telegraph line between Adelaide and Port Augusta. There was great competition among the colonies to complete the 3178 kilometre overland line from Port Augusta to Darwin, and in 1870 South Australia won the contract.

¹⁸W. Hardman. (ed) 1865. pp. 165-166

¹⁹R. Hagen and M. Rowell. 1978. p. 12

²⁰ The construction of the Overland Telegraph Line is documented in many publications, including: F. Clune. 1984. *Overland Telegraph: an Epic Feat of Endurance and Courage*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney; A. Giles. 1995. *Exploring in the 'Seventies and the Construction of the Overland Telegraph Line*. Friends of the State Library of South Australia, Adelaide; P. Taylor. 1980. *An End to Silence: the Building of the Overland Telegraph Line from Adelaide to Darwin*. Methuen Australia, Sydney; A. Thomson. 1999. *The Singing Line*. Chatto & Windus, London

In 1870 Charles Todd, postmaster-general of South Australia, had appointed John Ross (Don Ross's paternal great grandfather) as leader of the party which was to survey the route for the constructors of the Overland Telegraph.²¹ (This decision was to have singular ramifications for later generations of Rosses: it was the historical event which led to the intersection of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous branches of the Ross family.)

Ross mounted three expeditions for the Overland Telegraph project. In general, he followed John McDouall Stuart's (qv) route north, except that portion which passed through the MacDonnell ranges in Central Australia. During the first expedition, between 14 August and 13 October 1870...Ross named the Fergusson Ranges, Phillipson Creek, Giles Creek and the Todd River. He failed to find a suitable route through the Fergusson Ranges....

Starting again on 16 November 1870, Ross failed again to find a suitable route through the MacDonnell and Fergusson Ranges. This time he explored the area to the west of the MacDonnell Ranges, penetrating as far as Central Mount Stuart, and retrieving a message left there by Stuart. Ross's third expedition, north to the Roper River, started on 17 March 1871.... [Ross was without a surveyor on this expedition.] During his third expedition, Ross passed close to the site of Alice Springs and met the party led by the surveyor W.W. Mills (qv) nearby. Mills later claimed to discover the site of Alice Springs.... Ross's exact route is difficult to reconstruct – his personal diary was lost, and, because he did not have a surveyor with him, no accurate map was made.²²

In the 1871 expedition John Ross and four others intruded into western Kaytetye country whilst surveying the country around Central Mt. Stuart for the proposed Overland Telegraph Line. Ross continued northwards, blazing the trail for the Overland Telegraph. He discovered a shortened route to the Roper River. Finally, he reached Port Darwin, becoming the second man to cross Australia coast to

²¹I. Brolly. John Ross. In D. Carment, R. Maynard and A. Powell. (eds) p. 253

²²I. Brolly. John Ross. In D. Carment, R. Maynard and A. Powell. (eds) 1990. p. 253-254

coast, passing through the Centre.²³ In all, John Ross made nineteen separate expeditions by horse and camel, apart from the Overland Telegraph path finding, exploring the mountains and plains.

Recognition of his achievements was slow in coming, however. In 1949 E. Dixon Esq., Waite River station, erected 'a fine cairn', on the plaque of which are the following words: 'In memory of John Ross Explorer – Pioneer, who, with Harry Giles, Crispe and Hearne, passed by on December 22nd 1870, naming the river the Waite'.²⁴ Eight years later, 7 September 1957, on Anzac Hill, Alice Springs, a 'Plaque of Memorial' to 'John Ross, Members of the Overland Telegraph Line Exploration and Construction Parties 1870–2 and All Pioneers of Central Australia 1870–1920'²⁵ was unveiled. Don and his family have always genuinely believed that John Ross was the one who found Heavitree Gap, which provides a passage through the MacDonnell Ranges, and that he was the first white person to enter Alice Springs. Historical records do not substantiate this view, of which Mrs. A. V. Purvis of Woodgreen station was one of the main proponents. She published an account in the *Centralian Advocate* Alice Springs 26 August 1955, which claimed that John Ross 'actually found the springs named "Alice", on the 18th March, 1871.' The Royal Geographic Society (South Australian Branch) investigated the claim, and in April 1957 published a report that substantiated the claim that John Whitfield Mills had led the first European party to Alice Springs.²⁶

²³ I. Brolly. John Ross. In D. Carment, R. Maynard and A. Powell. (eds) 1990. p. 253

²⁴ John Ross file, Alice Springs Collection, Alice Springs Public Library, Alice Springs

²⁵ Order of Ceremony, Alice Springs Collection, Alice Springs Public Library, Alice Springs

²⁶ This report and the correspondence of the Northern Territory Administrator, Mrs. Purvis and other members of the John Ross Memorial Association, the Director of Education, the Minister for

Within the Ross family John Ross was attributed with having ‘discovered’ Alice Springs. That story had been handed down from generation to generation. Don had first heard it from his grandfather, Alec Ross, and had told it to his children. The Purvis family also believed this to be factual. The Purvises, of Woodgreen station, were connected to Don by marriage. (Lorna Purvis, Don Ross’s first wife, was the niece of the owner of Woodgreen Station, Bob Purvis, who was nicknamed the Sandover Alligator, because of his ability to eat a whole kid at one sitting).²⁷ Graham Ross said:

Saddest thing about it all is that we know, Mrs A.B. Purvis, who’s a historian, and Mrs Jose Petrick,²⁸ they all know that the first white man in Alice Springs was John Ross. They all know that. And even John Ross spoke to his son, Alec, and Alec said it himself. But John’s horse bolted, his packhorse and all his diaries were lost.²⁹

Graham Ross later suggested that the loss of the John Ross’s diary, which would prove that claim, might have been the result of foul play. He felt that robbing John Ross of the recognition he was due was further evidence of the lack of recognition his family in particular had been awarded and the way that the achievements of those not born with a silver spoon in their mouth went unrecognised and

Territories and the Royal Geographic Society are held in the Alice Springs collection and in the Northern Territory Archives CRS 55/1450.

²⁷ D. Ross. Cited from manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*. ‘[Sandover Alligator] was a big man. He could eat the leg of a goat at one feed. “I’ve had elegant sufficiency of abundance,” he’d say. Those were his exact words. He was a well-educated man, and funny, he could make me laugh all day’.

²⁸J. Petrick. 1996. *The History of Alice Springs Through Landmarks and Street Names*. Self-Published, Alice Springs

²⁹ Interview with Don Ross and Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 26 February 1998

unrewarded, particularly by the British.³⁰ Bob Purvis, too, was very sensitive to slurs that had been cast on his mother's reputation as an historian.

I searched for verifying documents, but found no substantiation of the Ross's story. I discussed the matter with Dick Kimber, a Central Australian historian of some repute, who also is a friend of both the Purvis and Ross families, and his interpretation of the documentary evidence available further persuaded me that William Whitfield Mills, rather than John Ross, had been the first of the surveyors to pass through Alice Springs. But Dick Kimber demonstrated an understanding of the circumstances in which the misapprehension had arisen,³¹ and he sympathised with the Ross and Purvis families' desires to see greater recognition of what John Ross had accomplished.

The assertions of Don Ross, Graham Ross or Mrs Adele Purvis did not prove they had scant regard for the truth or were poor historians, Dick Kimber maintained, they merely showed that the telling of history is always potentially liable to bias and misunderstanding, and the facts must be examined carefully for biases and assumptions. The fact is John Ross could have been the 'discoverer' of Alice Springs, but he was not, one must conclude, after a careful examination of the relevant documentary evidence. This demonstrates how persuasive and pervasive to our knowledge and understanding of the past are the stories we grew up with, how we may take them as historical givens, incontestable truths, upon which we

³⁰ Personal communication with R.G. 'Dick' Kimber 2000

³¹ A coup for those who believe that oral evidence is inherently unreliable, but perhaps a more complex illustration of a singular response to discrimination and marginalization.

uncritically build opinions, philosophies, world views and ‘true’ versions of our own and our communities’ history.

But, although John Ross may not have been the first European to pass through Alice Springs, and despite the fact that he was strongly criticised at the time for failing to find a pass through the Range, his achievements were considerable. He was the first white man to strike the Todd River and its major tributaries, the Georgina and Love’s Creek, and he penetrated the East MacDonnells and suggested the possibility of there being gold there. For his bush skills and his redoubtable achievements as an explorer, John Ross is an ancestor of whom the Ross family justifiably may be proud and one, perhaps, who has not been given due credit.

The Overland Telegraph Line, with its chain of repeater stations for transmitting messages by hand with a Morse key from one section to the next was constructed under gruelling conditions for the white men unfamiliar with the harsh country and arduous travelling conditions they encountered. They were beset by lack of water and threats from the Indigenous inhabitants, by shortages of food and supplies and problems of navigation and orientation of the vast, hot, unfamiliar and largely uncharted territory they were traversing.

But the Overland Telegraph Line paved the way for colonising much of the Northern Territory. With its many mounted police and linesmen it provided Europeans with a secure base upon which to take land for setting up the pastoral and mining industries. With this came increased contact and conflict with the

Indigenous people, the consequence of which was, to quote Tim Rowse, that ‘violence became a mode of government’.³²

The Barrow Creek repeater station, located in Kaytetye country, came into existence with the arrival of the Overland Telegraph in 1872. The station consisted of a main building containing the repeater equipment, a Post Office and residential accommodation. The outbuildings constituted a store, stables, a smith’s shop and a plant room. The station functioned as a communication link, part of a stock route and overland route for travellers.³³ Many telegraph workers grazed herds of cattle around the telegraph station, and drovers watered their cattle on the stock route to Alice Springs. Aboriginal people camped or were employed as stock workers and domestics.

Until the arrival of Europeans and their stock a fresh water spring on the site had always ensured a plentiful source of water for the nomadic inhabitants of that area. And, in good seasons, game was plentiful. Anna’s Reservoir, where the explorer Stuart had obtained water in 1860, was chosen as the homestead site of the Barrow Creek Pastoral Company, but skirmishes between the Anmatyerr and the white settlers initially forced the settlers to withdraw.

³²T. Rowse. 1998. p. 7

³³ D. Carment. 1991. *History and Landscape in Central Australia*. North Australia Research Unit, Australian National University, Darwin, p. 15

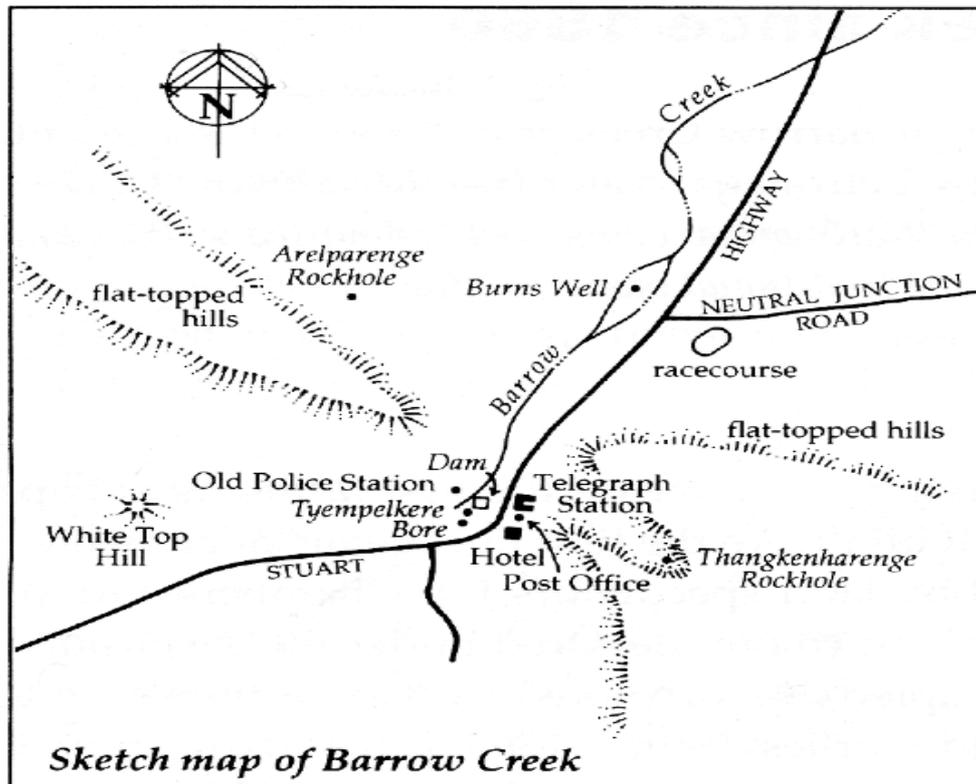


Figure 3: Sketch Map of Barrow Creek, drawn by Brenda Thornley. Grace Koch. (ed) 1993. *Kaytetye Country*. Institute for Aboriginal Development Press, Alice Springs, p. xi

In the ensuing history of Barrow Creek and its environs water remained a contentious issue: Indigenous inhabitants found themselves in unequal competition for the dwindling water supplies with Overland Telegraph workers, drovers and station owners.³⁴ In his report to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals, regarding the Barrow Creek ration depot, Patrol Officer T. G. H. Strehlow stated:

It must be stressed again and again that today practically every permanent surface water of any size and every piece of good grass and fodder country in Central Australia has been leased out by the

³⁴ A prodigious correspondence concerned with stock routes, wells and bores in Central Australia is held in the National Archives of Australia, Darwin and Canberra. See bibliography.

Government to white station owners. Insecure waters, such as doubtful soaks and tiny rock holes are of no use in times of drought either to the wandering natives or to the game hunted by them... The Government...has parcelled out every useful portion of the natives' tribal territories to a handful of white settlers.³⁵

Such photos are important signifiers to the consciousness of the time. The Europeans are named, but, typically, the identities of the Indigenous men are unrecorded. Yet these men would have been valuable to the Telegraph station workers, useful for their knowledge of country, for their skills and labour and possibly for their roles as cultural mediators.



³⁵ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F126 Item 13 T.G.H. Strehlow to Chief Protector of Aboriginals 13 December 1938

Figure 4: Barrow Creek Telegraph station circa 1900 Gillen Collection South Australian South Australian Museum, AA 108

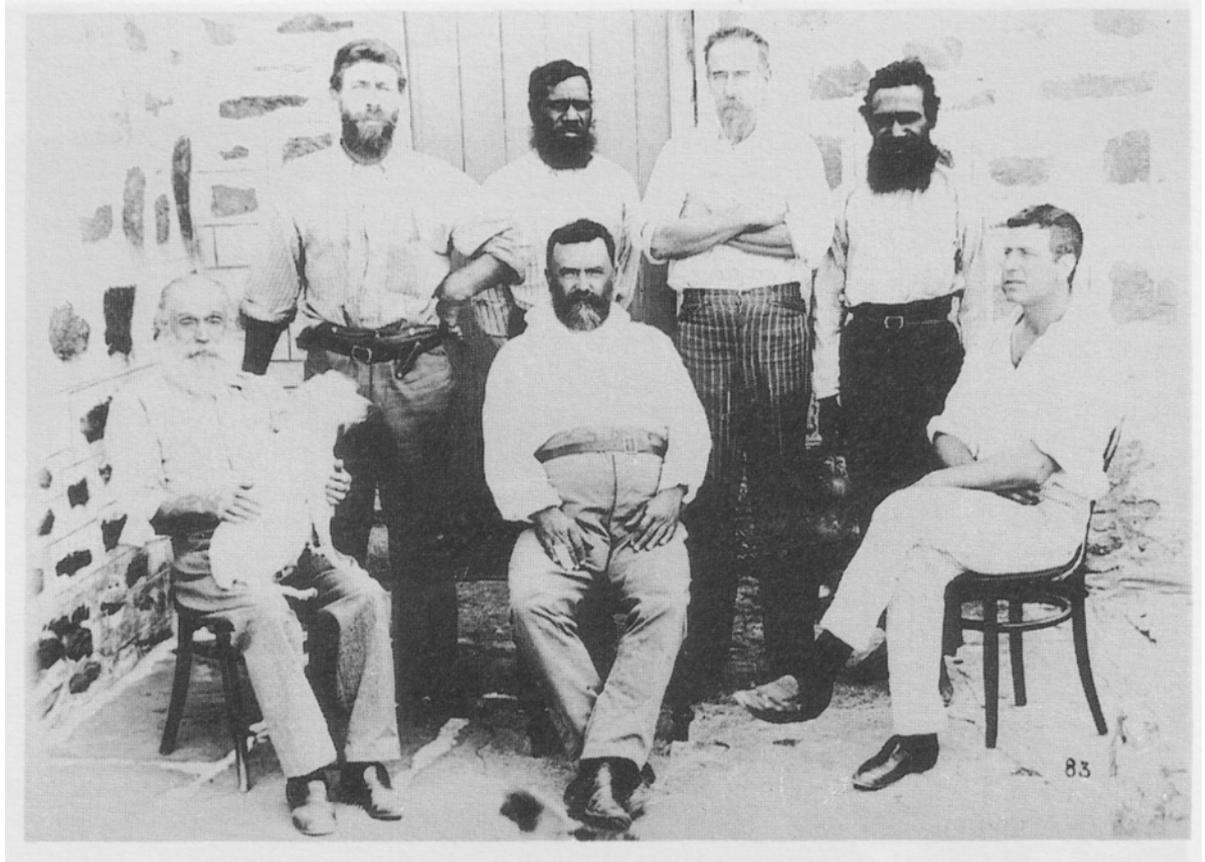


Figure 5: Staff and others at Barrow Creek Telegraph Station. Back row: George Hayes (Don Ross's maternal grandfather), (unidentified), W. (Bill) Curtis, (unidentified). Front Row: Charles Tomlin, Frank Scott, Harry Henty. (Bradshaw Collection, Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory (CCNT) ASTS 2/24 ASTS 83)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASTORAL INDUSTRY

The real economic progress of Australia began with the expansion of the pastoral industry, Greenwood claims.³⁶ 'The pastoralist, more than anyone else, has

³⁶ Greenwood, G. 1955/1974. p. 2

moulded the development of Australia.³⁷ In the second half of the nineteenth century, pastoralism began to expand into the Northern Territory, from the southern states into Central Australia and from Queensland to the Top End. In 1872 Ned Bagot and Joseph Gilbert sent cattle north from their South Australian runs in the charge of their sons.³⁸ They were followed rapidly by a succession of men who glimpsed the possibilities of running cattle in Central Australia. The earliest stations were established along the Overland Telegraph Line and its vicinity and in the courses of the rivers and creeks of the central ranges. These were stocked in the period between 1873 and 1889.³⁹

Don Ross's European grandparents were pioneers of the Northern Territory cattle industry. George Hayes, Don's maternal grandfather, brought a mob of cattle up from South Australia, which he ran along the Frew River in Alyawarr country, before he began working as a linesman for the Overland Telegraph station. In

³⁷ Greenwood, G. 1955/1974. p. 47

³⁸ A. Powell. 1982/1988. p. 92

³⁹ The pastoral industry in Northern Australia, its beginnings, development and its employment and treatment of Indigenous workers, are documented and discussed in a number of publications, including: P. Brock. Pastoral Stations and Reserves in South and Central Australia 1850s–1950s. In A. McGrath, J. Huggins and K. Saunders. (eds) 1995. *Aboriginal Workers*. Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Sydney, pp. 102–114; R. Broome. 1982. pp. 120–142; G. Cowlshaw. 1983. Blackfella Boss: A Study of Northern Territory Cattle Stations. *Social Analysis*, No. 13, pp. 54–68; V. Fletcher. 1997. Good Years and Bad Governments: the Northern Territory Pastoral Industry 1900–1910. *Journal of Northern Territory History*, No. 8, pp. 13–26; N. Gill. The Contested Domain of Pastoralism. In D.B. Rose and A. Clarke. (eds) 1997. *Tracking Knowledge in Northern Australian Landscapes*. Australian National University North Australia Research Unit, Darwin, pp. 50–67; G. Gough. 1993. *Visible and Invisible: Aboriginal People in the Economy of Northern Australia*. North Australia Research Unit/Nugget Coombs Forum for Indigenous Studies, Darwin; M.A. Jebb. (ed) 1996; 2002. *Blood, Sweat and Welfare: A Memory of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers*. University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands; C. McAdam and E. Tregenza. 1995; A. McGrath. 1987; F. Merlan (compiler.) 1996; P. Read (ed.) 1979. *A Social History of the Northern Territory: No. 9: Pastoral Stations*. Northern Territory Education Department, Darwin; P. Read. and J. Read (eds.) 1991; D.B. Rose. 1991; F. Stevens. 1974. *Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle Industry*. Australian National University Press, Canberra; H. Wharton. 1992. *Unbranded*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia; H. Wharton. 1994. *Cattle Camp: Murrie Drivers and Their Stories*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia; J. Wositsky. Told by Y.B. Harney. 2001.

about 1910 he took up the Neutral Junction Station lease. Don's paternal grandfather had been involved in early exploration and later managed Crown Point and other cattle stations before settling on Neutral Junction station in his old age.

In an interview in 1986 Don Ross recounted, in Kaytetye, to a Kaytetye-speaking audience, on the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) Kaytetye radio program, George Hayes' pioneering days as a cattleman. (An excerpt is reproduced below.)

Don Ross: George Hayes-pe Barrow Creek-laperte aneyayne linesman-rtame re aneyayne. Warrkarreyayne. Tneyel-aperte eletnherre job-pe kwereyenge, ntharlartelke alpenhengerne eyntemapertelke. Linesman atanthe anenyayne ape buggy-wanenye nantew-akake-rtame apeyayne line telegraph line arteyaynepe. Nantew-akake-rtame mpwareyayne packhorse-akake mpelarte.

Old George Hayes was the linesman at Barrow Creek. Later he left his job and went to live at Neutral Junction Station for good. As a linesman they travelled on horses – no buggies – to check where the line had broken. They only had packhorses.⁴⁰

In 1998, Don Ross expanded on the earlier narrative, recalling other pioneers of the cattle industry as well as some of the 'rough justice' meted out to Aboriginal people during those 'frontier' times.

Don Ross: My old grandfather, Old George Hayes, he was a drover: [circa] 1882 they left with the cattle, from Stuart Creek [South Australia], Overland Telegraph mob. They brought 'em up. Old George Hayes was only a young man then. He wouldn't be in his twenties I don't think. That was a long time ago. Old Man told me that. Old Man Hayes was with one mob and they went to Frew River.⁴¹ He wasn't at the Frew River long. He mighta been there a couple of years. He finished up [living] at Barrow Creek, see.

⁴⁰ Interview by Emily Ross. Translation by Myfany Turpin

⁴¹ See Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS A3/7 Item NT 1918/532 J.T.Beckett Chief Inspector for the Aboriginals Northern Territory Annual Report for 1915, pp. 44–45

Old Frank MacDonald, old Scotsman, was with [the other] mob, with the Coulthards, those brothers. They went to Elkedra, that mob. A thousand cattle each, I think they had. Frank MacDonald worked out there at Elkedra for a while. Alyawarr lived out there. They'd kill you, all right, so they [white cattlemen] used to shoot them [Alyawarr]. He [Frank MacDonald] used to see them coming down with the firestick. They were looking for him, to kill him. And I said, 'Did you shoot at 'em'? He said, 'Did I? I threaded the bastards, just like putting thread through a needle'. He got through the lot, he reckoned. He used to see them coming down with the firestick. They were looking for him, to kill him.

He stopped a while [at Elkedra], then drifted away from there. He was gone by the time Riley and Kennedy had Elkedra.⁴² Long time after, he went south and worked. He managed a station somewhere around Coober Pedy, I think. He came to Neutral, after. He rode a lot with me, you know. He was a man about eighty then, I think. I used to tell him to stop home, but he wouldn't, he'd sooner go out riding.⁴³

When Don was a boy, the old cattlemen often told stories about the frontier times. MacDonald would have felt no compunction about boasting to Don Ross about killing Alyawarr tribesmen. Frank MacDonald 'talked to me as a white man', Don said, and told the young boy scary stories, 'just to put the wind up me, I suppose, try to'. Don initially related Frank MacDonald's story with a child's relish for adventure, but, upon reflection, concluded, 'He was an old bugger'.⁴⁴

Twice I checked with Don for confirmation of the reasons for killing Aboriginal tribesmen. Both times Don Ross was clear in his reply, positioning himself with the white pioneers against the myall tribesmen.

⁴² The Elkedra lease had been taken up in 1889, by the Willowie Land and Pastoral Association, but it was abandoned within eight years. In 1921 linesmen Michael Kennedy and Bill Riley took up the lease. T. Thompson and M. Turpin. 2003. p. 38. Bill Riley was a linesman, stockman and general postmaster at Powell Creek before taking up the lease at Elkedra Station. P.A. Scherer (compiler). 1993. *Sunset of an Era: The Heffernans of Ti-Tree: A True Account of Station Life in the Outback*. Tanunda, p. 16

⁴³ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*. Compiled from interviews with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 April 1998 and 29 May 1998

⁴⁴ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 27 May 1998

Terry Whitebeach: Frank MacDonald just shot any Aboriginal people?

Don Ross: Well, they were out to kill them [the whitemen], you know.⁴⁵

Terry Whitebeach: Frank MacDonald shot the Alyawarr people because they wanted to kill him?

Don Ross: 'Course they would. They'd kill you, all right, so they [whitefellas] used to shoot them [blackfellas].⁴⁶

Don recalled the fear of Aboriginal people his grandfather and most Europeans experienced in those isolated cattle runs at that time. The constant danger along with the isolation may have contributed to George Hayes' decision to relocate to Barrow Creek.

Don Ross: George Hayes would come in for the mail, you know, on his own from Frew River. He was frightened, you know, frightened of the blacks. It's lucky he wasn't attacked. He camped at Ipmanger [the site of Murray Downs station, in later years] once and he reckoned he got the biggest fright of his life. Well, he slept with a loaded revolver in his bed and this bloody dog, a dingo, come and smelled him in the face. He thought it was a blackfella see, and he shot it, bang! with his revolver, a 450. Bloody big slugs. Well, that's what he fired that night. He had that old revolver still, on Neutral Junction. I used it a lot of times too, for brumbies - wild horses.

When Old George Hayes left Frew River he took a job at Barrow Creek Telegraph Station. He worked as a linesman at Barrow Creek. Twenty-five years he was there, on that place. He was head stockman there and a linesman too. He was a hard-working man. They worked hard in those days. He had a lot of stock there, cattle and horses.⁴⁷ Great cattle. Belonged to Barrow Creek Pastoral Company and Willowie Pastoral Company, I think. Good cattle country you know, round Barrow. They had the Bean Tree, the big waterhole. It would last eight months with bloody thousands of head of cattle on it. Used

⁴⁵ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 April 1998

⁴⁶ Interview with Don Ross by terry Whitebeach 14 June 1998

⁴⁷ In 1882, the Barrow Creek Telegraph station property of 25 square miles [64 square kilometers] was stocked with 5,000 cattle. Warumungu Land Claim Commissioner's Report, 1988. Central Land Council, Alice Springs, p. 45

to have good feed and creeks, big trees growing everywhere, and up in the hills, further up the creek eight or nine miles, was the spring water. It ran down the creek, over flat stones. It was a bit brackish. Good country but it couldn't run too many cattle, you know. Too stony.⁴⁸

The 1915 Annual Report for the Northern Territory confirms Don Ross's assessment of the stock carrying capacity of that country. It states:

In this district waterholes, which formerly were regarded as permanent, have been filled in with drift sand by the encroachments of stock, and the natives, who continued to stay in the vicinity, have had to rely upon the stock wells sunk by the Government.⁴⁹

Don Ross described with admiration his grandfather's establishment of Neutral Junction station. He was uncertain about the date the lease was taken up, except that it was before he was born. Possibly, the date had not been mentioned to him. Precise dates featured very little in Don Ross's narratives, which were focused around memorable events in his personal (largely pastoral) world.

Don Ross: Old George Hayes took on Neutral Junction Station while he was out at Barrow Creek. He took up that bit of country [circa 1910]. He reckoned he only had five hundred pounds when he bought that lot of land, and he survived on it. He worked both places for a few years. He was out there with Old Pepperill. Old Jim Pepperill⁵⁰ pulled out from that place and went to Murray Downs, took that up and left him [George Hayes]. The brand used to be HPT then, and when he (Pepperill) got away the Old Man changed it to GHT, George Hayes Territory, you see.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁴⁹ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A3/7 Item NT 1918/532. Northern Territory of Australia, Report for the Year 1915. J.T Beckett. Report on Aboriginal Department p. 45

⁵⁰ Spelled either as 'Pepperill' or 'Pepperell', in various documents.

⁵¹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

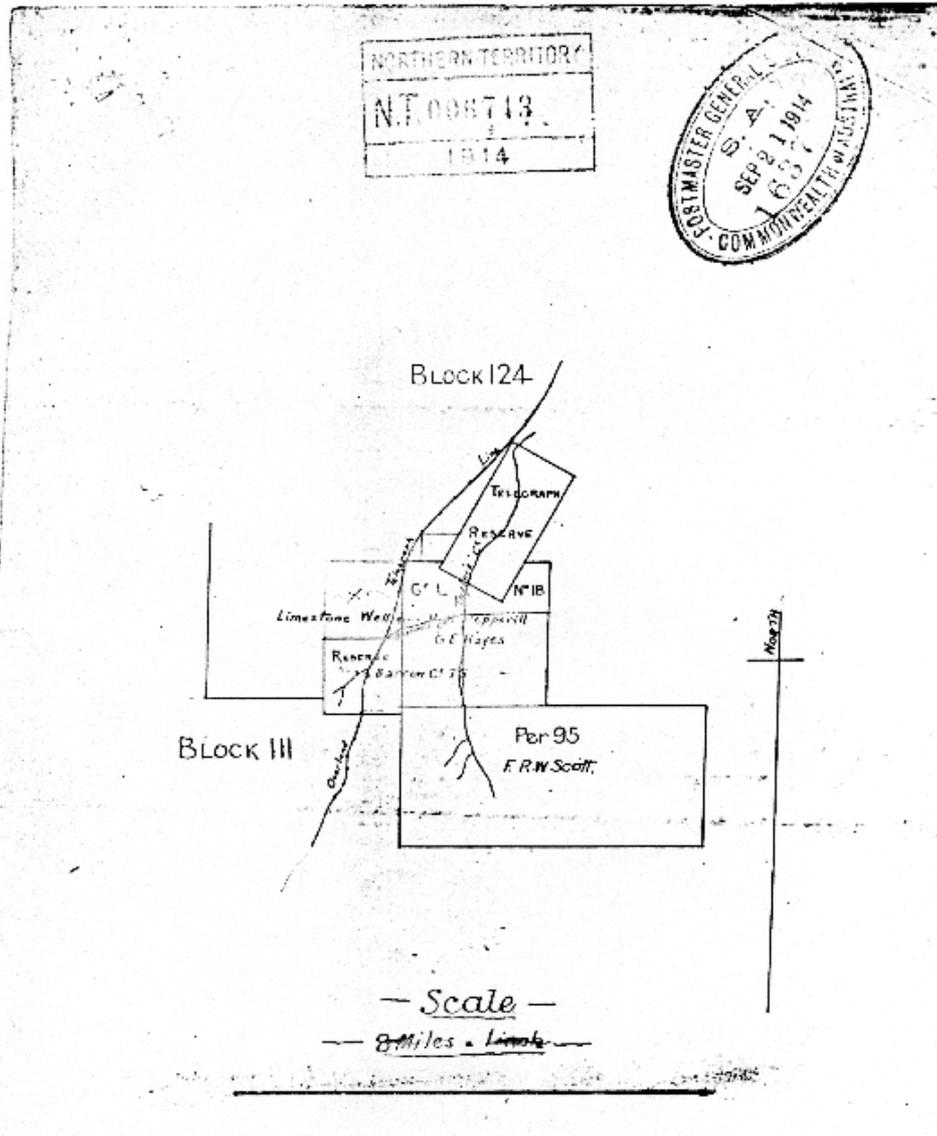


Figure 6: Scale plan of George Hayes' and 'Jim' Pepperill's Pastoral Lease, Neutral Junction station, Central Australia, showing adjacent pastoral leases. National Archives of Australia CRS A3, Item N.T. 1918/532

1917

Barrow Creek Telegraph Reserve tinted Blue
Additional Land required by the PMG Dept tinted Red

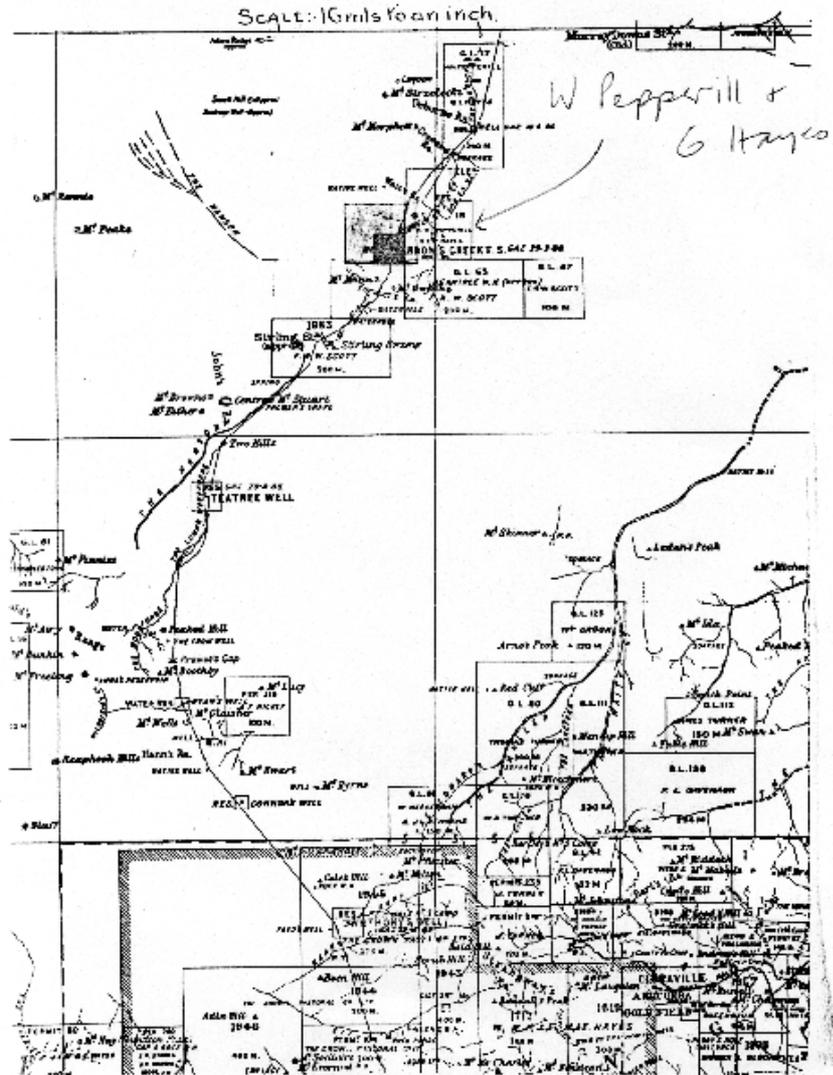


Figure 7: Map of Central Australia and part of northern South Australia, showing George Hayes' and W. (Jim) Peppercorn's original pastoral lease, also other pastoral leases held in 1917. National Archives of Australia CRS A3 Item N.T. 1918/532

George Hayes later applied to the Director of Lands in Darwin for additional leases in his name alone on 'pastoral block 339, comprising three hundred and twenty four square miles, including the eastern portion of Grazing Licence no. 18 and the Telegraph Reserve to the North, Crown Lands to the East and a small portion of the Southern boundary of Grazing Licence no. 17'.

He further requested that they be classified as third class, at a rental of one shilling per square mile, for a period of forty-two years. The negotiations apparently were of a protracted nature, for his letter of 3 March 1919 expresses great frustration:

This is part of the block I showed the Administrator over when he visited the district last year and he agreed that I held a large area of Range and poor country, I then explained my reason for doing so I E [sic] to enable me to keep the blood stock apart from the Draught, fencing being out of the question as the price of wire was prohibitive... I wish you to please expedite and finalise matters in connection with the leases as it has now nearly cost the value of the country in wires and agency.⁵²

An accompanying letter, supporting his application, lists George Hablett as the registered partner of George Hayes.⁵³ (Don's childhood memories are of George Hablett as just 'an old whitefella' living on Neutral Junction.)

Pastoralists, particularly those such as George Hayes, Frank Scott, Billy Weldon and George Hablett, who conducted their operations often on limited capital and on rangeland of variable quality, seemed to be engaged in ongoing disputes about

⁵² Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F27 Item PL 2380, 1915-1925 p. 2

⁵³ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F27 Item PL 2380, 1915-1925, p. 3. In relating the history of Neutral Junction station, Don did not mention his grandfather's partnership with G. Hablett. Archival research revealed its existence to me. As Don was very young at the time of the partnership, he may not have been aware of it, or it may have been such a 'given' to him, that he had not thought to mention it. Another explanation is that he may have chosen to highlight only his grandfather's achievements.

the classification (and subsequent rental costs) of many of their grazing leases, maintaining that in dry seasons the already low carrying capacity of marginal land was severely reduced.⁵⁴

It was ‘only a new place, Neutral Junction in those [early] days’, Don recalled, ‘pretty wild’, with ‘plenty of bush tucker’ available. Basic accommodation – a drop-slab shed with a tent in it – was constructed by George Hayes, for Hettie Hayes and the children (Graham Ross remembers John Ross’s bagpipes hanging on the wall), and for the workers, windbreaks and their food cooked in an outside kitchen for them by Hettie Hayes. The workers’ Kaytetye relatives lived in a ‘native camp’ on the other side of the creek from the ‘homestead’.



Figure 8: George Hayes’ original house at Neutral Junction station, with recent additions. (Grace Koch April 1991) Reproduced with permission of Grace Koch

⁵⁴ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F27 Item PL 2380, 1915-1925 (un-numbered pages)

Daisy Kemarre recalled those early days of working for whitefellas like George Hayes, and travelling out bush with Blanche Ross, Don's sister.

Daisy Kemarre: Barrow Creek-le nthelarte aynanthe artnwengepe akelyepe alkenharrenhe. Anenhe aynantherre-ee. No work yet. Artnwenge-aperte akelye aynanthe alkenharrenherre. Wele Camel-akake apenhengerne yeah ngkarte inenge. Artnwenginenge aynekanthe akarr-akarrinenye waylpelelepe akarretnyenyerre, methethe-letyampe aynekanthe akarretnyenyerre. Methethepe alwengkinenyerre arritne kwerarte methethelepe elkemene. Renhelarte aynkanthe akaltyineyayne papewe aynekanthe learnem-learnem-aylenye.

We all grew up at Barrow Creek. We lived there. This was before there was work for Aboriginal people. One day when we were just little kids, missionaries came with camels. They rounded us all up together, just the children (to take us to the mission). There was a white man and a white lady rounding us up. I forgot her name, she was an old woman. She used to teach us about the Bible.

Eltyemwerneyele aynekanthe cuttemout-aylenyerre elperaperte artnwenginengepe aynekanthe arlwenertame alperineyayne wele Barrow Creek-warle. Arlwene-rtame aynekanthe alperinenyerre. Nthelapertame aynanthe aneyayne alkenharrenhe aynanthe arkwentyarte aynernanthe amenhengamerne. Elkemene angwel-angwele tyarengarte kwereyenge-areng Ngamperl-areng cousin kwereyeng-amerne, atherre. Elweme aweyewe-therraperte cousin kwereyenge therraperte. Tyarengatherrarte. Aylewaypmerr-nge aypmerr-areng. Yew-yewe aylewe aypmerr-areng-aperte. Renharengarte. Alkaperte. Granny ayleweyeng-areng-aperte.

One day a policeman came and suddenly scattered everyone. The policemen took us back to Barrow Creek. All the children were taken back to Barrow Creek. That's where we all stayed and grew up. We grew up with our two mothers, two Penangke sisters. The children belonging to that poor old woman from that country over there, who has passed away, are Blanche and her sister's two cousins. Those two cousins have passed away now. Those two were from here, Barrow Creek. They were the children of your mother's mother, Emily; Emily and me, so we both call her Nanna. Yes they were our Nanna's children, her two daughters that grew us up.

Kwerepenhartepe aneyayne aynantherre nthelarte-ee, wele aynanthe alpenhe tyangkwerarte Neutral-warle. Nthelarte aynanthe aneyayne intemartelke nthelaperte. Anenhe aynanthe-ee artnwengepe aynanthe alkenharrenhe arleyakewartetye aylpaty-akake arrenhe-tyampe aynanthe nthelaperte. Play-arreyayne aynanthe wele erltaye cow-lke ilenyey-aytneyayne pweleke whitefella-areng Atnekwerterrp-areng

aynanthe ilenyey-aytneyayne. Apeyayne aynanthe ilenyey-aytneyayne aynanthe-ee kweretheyapertelke wele aynernanthe apeyaynenke. Anenhe aynanthe-ee nthelaperte-ee wele kweretheyartepe aynekanthe artnwenginengelke arelhinengelke alkenh-alkenhe aylpaty-akakinenge aynekanthe alperinenye. Bottom Bore-arle ntharlarte arntwe tangkwele atye yathewethe ayenge alpenherre Taylor Crossing-warle.

We stayed at Barrow Creek for some time, and then we went back to Neutral Junction station. We stayed there for a long time. We stayed there until we were teenagers. We used to play there and go and get the milking cows that belong to Atnekwerterrpe – Old George Hayes. Every day we would gather his cows and bring them in for milking. We went on foot, bringing in all the cows. Then we went from there. All the woman, children and teenage girls were taken to Bottom bore. At Bottom bore I would draw the water for the cattle and then return to Taylor's Crossing.

Rlwampelepe aynekantheyenge ileyenenyerre erlkwenge Atnekwerterrpe-wanenyeye arrengeye ngkeyengelepe. Renharte aynanthe alpenhengerne ration-lke aynanthe ileyern-alpenhe. Rlwernep-aperte aynantherre ilenyerre atnwenthe-lke, tyanywenge matches aynanthe ilenye. Nthelarte aynanthe aneyaynenke arleyakinenge aynekantherre akarrineyayne rlwampelepe. Nhartepe aynanthe warrkarreyayne pwelekelke aynanthe akarrineyayne wethapenye cow-inenge. Milking cow-inenge aynanthe yatheyaynenke pakete-warle. Yatheyayne aynanthe-ee kweretheyaperte aynanthe apmere-warlelke anteth-antethanenhe nthetheyartepe aynanthe getaway-lkarrenherre bush-warle.

So then we came back to the station. Our boss, that old man George Hayes, Emily's grandfather who passed away, went and got us. We came back to the station for rations. We only got a bag of flour, meat, tobacco and matches. We stayed there. The white man would gather all us teenage girls together. Then we would work gathering the milking cows. We would milk the cows. We milked into buckets. It took a long time. After milking the cows we stayed a while in the camp, and from there we ran away into the bush.

Bush-warlelke aynanthe alpenherre Bottom-Bore aynanthe alpenherre nthewarlarte-ee intemapertelke. Erreyakwerre aynanthe ileyayne no alpenke aynanthe-ee right up aynanthe alpeyenteyane Arrelthatnengele enwey-alpenhe. Arrelthatnenge-theyepe aynanthe enwenhe. Taylor Crossing aynanthe enwey-alpenhe. Taylor Crossing-theye aynanthe apenk-ee conkerberry-lke ayntel-ayntel-arrenherre. Anngaytetewe-le aynanthe two night aynanthe enwenhe. Kweretheyartepe aynanthe alpenhe-ee Karlkareng-warlelke. Karlkarenggelke aney-alpenhe nthelarte. Old well-le aynanthe government angwerl-angwerlarre angeyayne. Dry Well. Nthelarte aynanthe aneyayne, aherre aynanthe ayneyayne arlewatyerre aynanthe ayneyayne. conkerberry aynanthe ayneyayne nthetheyartepe anatyelke

apmenyeyaytneyayne kweretheyelartepe, anatyepa apmeyayne intemarte. Renhe aynanthe alpenhe arntwepe aynekantheyenge finish-arrenhe soakage-pe. Wele aynanthe alpenhe Bottom Bore intemaperte alpenhe Bottom Bore-warlelke.

We ran away into the bush near Bottom Bore and stayed there for a while. We dug up bush onions there. We didn't go back, we kept going right back up to New Barrow and camped there. Then we went and camped at Taylor Crossing. We left Taylor's crossing and picked conkerberries as we went along. We camped at Anngaytetewe on the Taylor creek for two nights and from there we went back. From there we went to Karlkareng and camped. There was an old government well there dug by that poor old man who used to work for the government. It was dry. We stayed there and ate kangaroo and goanna. We ate conkerberries and from there would go out for the day and dig for yams. We stayed around there digging for yams until our soakage dried up. Then we headed back to Bottom Bore to stay.

Arleyake akelyertame aperineyayne. Blanche tangkwe nharte. Nharte tangkwele aperineyayne arleyake akelye kwerart-angkwerre. Aperineyayne-ee kwereyenge angwerle-angwerle-lepe. Renhe tangkwerle aperineyayne, aherrelaperte kwere alkenhinenyerre, anatyela, ilperalkele kwere alkenhinenye, Blanche tangkwele. Wele rlwampele kwere enthweyaynertame kwatyewarleyele, Atnkwerterre angwerl-angwerle ngkarrengape. Eletnheyenenherre ayenge alhamparrenhe aynangkerre alhamparrenhe atye altyarrenhe atyeyenge kwenyele wenhe. Renhelarte erlkwe aperinenyerre arreyenenhe kwere, warrkewelke aynekanthe ileyaytenyerre warrkarreyayne aynanthe intemapertelke nthelarte, station-le garden-lke wateremayleyayne. Garden wateremayleyayne-ee. Nthelaperte aynanthe aneyayne. Sick of it-arrengela aynanthe nhartepe ayterwenenherre-apertame. Wele aynanthe alpenherre-ee. Anatyelke aynanthe ayntel-ayntel-arreyayne. Aywerrerelepenhe-apertame arlwene-apertame aynanthe alpenhe. Arlwene-again aynanthe alpenhe. Aney-alpenhe-apertame kwerelapertame aneyalpenhe elkwerre. Aneyayne aynanthe-ee. Kwerele Alangkwelelke aynanthe anteyane Alangkwe-theye aynanthepe anatyepa ayneyayne. Kwerelartepe aynanthe aherre-aperte ayneyayne, alewatyerre ayneyayne ilperalke ayneyaynenke. Eylperalkewepe artheyayne properly-rtame. Atnwenthepe artarreyayne alekele-rtame atnheyayne. Aleke kangaroo dog-le aynekantheyenge aperineyayne.

We had a young girl with us. It was Blanche. Blanche was the only young girl with us. She went with us teenage girls. Her poor mother, who has passed away [now], only had her to look after. We took her to grow her up on good food, kangaroo meat, yams and sugarbag. Only Blanche. Her grandfather, the whitefella Old George Hayes, that arrangeye of yours, Emily, was looking for her. Old George Hayes took my father back, my poor old father who I lost recently. He took him back to the station and put him there to work. He took us back to

work too. We stayed working at the station for a while watering the garden. All day we used to water the garden. We got sick of it so we set off again. We went back into the bush. We would get yams to eat as we travelled along, going north again. We went back and camped at the same spot halfway. Then we stayed at Alangkwe, on the Taylor creek and from there we used to go out and dig yams to eat. We would eat kangaroo, goannas, and chop down sugarbag all the time. Our dogs would bring back kangaroo meat for us there. They were good hunting dogs.⁵⁵

George Hayes (who was referred to by Don and others as ‘Old George Hayes’, to distinguish him from his son, ‘Young George Hayes’) was a great lover of horses and named the new station after a horse, Neutral. Don’s account of the naming of the station shows his double gaze: from both European and Kaytetye eyes.

Don Ross: Station was named after a thoroughbred, a mare called Neutral. At first the station had no name but afterwards Old George Hayes called it Neutral, after that mare. She was a great mare. Old George Hayes won the Darwin Cup with Neutral. He walked the horses all the way up there. Walked them with the mail horses, I suppose. Long way all right, rough old track to Powell Creek then on to Darwin. Then had to walk her right back. She had to walk all the way. But he won the races, won the cup up there. That was before my time, before I was born, when she won that cup.⁵⁶ Neutral died there, poor old thing, at the right of the Junction, at the two creeks, the junction there, of the Taylor and the other creek at Artarre.

The Taylor is the big main creek; the other’s only a little creek. You cross it before going into Barrow Creek. Artarre, that’s what you call the community. Artarre – emu tail-feather. Supposed to have been two blackfellas whistling over there at that junction. That’s why Neutral Junction is called Artweyelpelaytnenge. They were whistling there and these other mob heard them and seen them and they put that

⁵⁵ Excerpts from an interview recorded by Emily Hayes at Alekerange in 1986 for the Kaytetye program, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association. Also present were Amy Ngamperle and Katie Ampetyane. Tape transcribed by Myfany Turpin in 2000 and translated by Emily Hayes and Myfany Turpin. Corrections by Daisy Kemarre. The tapes are archived at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra.

⁵⁶ Don inherited a love of race horses and horse racing from his grandfather. He retained that interest for most of his life. Graham Ross recalled, ‘White Hill was Dad’s race horse training camp’. Graham recounted an occasion when ‘one whitefella snuck over and smashed the horse’s leg with a crank handle. The horse was a favourite for the Barrow Creek races’. Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 6 February 1999

Artarre on, now. They was going to fight. Neutral Junction, that's its whitefella name.⁵⁷

George Hayes had chosen well the site for his station homestead. It was in fact a place where Kaytetye people traditionally had camped throughout the centuries, a place where water was plentiful.

Don Ross: We had good waterholes, we'd get eight and nine months water off them. They'd last that long with a lot of cattle on them. That old Taylor Creek runs past the station. Then, when it's coming on hot, they [the creeks and waterholes] dry up and you've got to shift the cattle onto bores. Water them yourself. It was no good. I got sick of it.

At Neutral Junction, there was a soak. A spring, they called it, it wasn't a spring at all, it was a soakage. It used to last a [fair] while – all year round, that water, never go dry. It's good water, rainwater, see, soakage water. Near the soakage, you just put a forked tree up and you get a long stick out of it and just hang on top of that water and the rest hanging: help you pull the bucket up. You don't have to pull it, the stick pulls it up, but you gotta pull the stick down, pull the weight down to the water and then that pulls it up – the weight of the log and beam.

Luckily we had a soak. You can water a lot of stock with that, you know. They done one at Bullocky Bore, at Ti-Tree there. I don't know what it [the soak on Neutral Junction Station] is like now: they [Kaytetye people] don't dig it anymore. I don't think they are allowed to get water from the station. They gotta get their own water. They just used to fill up the cans. It's better than bore water. That bore water is not too good. I've tasted that water, that bore is not much [good]. The well is all right. Station well is beautiful water. I put a[nother] well when I was living there, across the creek, you know, from the main homestead. I put a well down there and it was bloody brackish water too, and it was only just from the other side of the creek, from the river water.

Some of the bores had good water. Well, the one at Taylor Crossing was brackish water, very salty water, but the cattle liked it. They loved it. [Later on] we had a windmill and an engine to pump water up. It was quicker. I left the engines out at the bores, just covered them over. And you'd clean them up and start them up again before you started using them. Things went wrong, but I'd fix them up.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁵⁸ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

A reliable water source was essential for the success of pastoral enterprises such as George Hayes', whose leased land was only marginally suitable for cattle grazing: most of the first class land had already been annexed. From their ethnographic expedition of 1901–02, Spencer and Gillen had reported, 'Barrow Creek lies at the heart of the continent, where the rainfall is very precarious and uncertain'.⁵⁹

Don's grandfather Old Alec Ross, who lived on Neutral Junction station in his old age and looked after the garden and whom Don remembered as a kind old man, all crippled up, and with a lot of dogs, had worked in the fledgling Northern Territory pastoral industry most of his life. He had also taken part in explorer Ernest Giles' expeditions to the western interior of the continent of Australia as well as in Giles' two successful east-west crossings of the continent in 1867 and 1875.⁶⁰

In speaking of his father and grandfather Don said:

My father was Alec Ross. White one. Scots one, too. I never had much to do with him. He was only up here a little while, anyway. He worked all over. He was knocking around with his father, my old grandfather [Alec Ross senior], that's how I came to know him. I remember him getting thrown from a horse one morning. Horse called Stanley, thoroughbred horse. It bucked with him, bucked him to buggery. Knocked the part right out of him. Jesus, it bucked with him and threw him. He was hurt all right. He couldn't get on again. I was too young to get on the horse, then. I'd have loved to – I'd have pizzled him up! No horse could throw me. He wasn't around much when I was a boy. When I was born he went across to the west, Western Australia, then across to Queensland, with camels. Barrow Creek, that's where he took off. He did stock work, any sort of work.

⁵⁹ B. Spencer and F.J. Gillen. 1928, p. 405. Cited by H. Koch, G. Koch, P. Wafer and J. Wafer. 1981. *A Claim to Areas of Traditional Land by the Kaytej, Warlpiri and Warlmanpa*. Central Land Council Submission, Alice Springs, p. 22

⁶⁰ I. Brolly. Alexander Ross. In D. Carment, R. Maynard and A. Powell. (eds) 1990. p. 254

He went across country, yes, and he took camels to a place called Annitowa. The old man [Old Alec Ross, Don's grandfather] took up that country one time and he [Alec Ross, Don's father] was there too. They couldn't get any water, so they put down wells and they put down bores, and then a camel threw him [Old Alec Ross] and nearly broke his leg. That's when he left. He left the bore; and the plant there – the hand bore –he left it in the hole. [Later on] me and Old Yank Lyon pulled it out. I worked there too, after. Stan Brown bought it, took up that bit of country there. It was a long way out – near the Queensland border.

Old grandfather, Alec Ross, was knocking around Undoolya for a while. He managed that station at one time, out from Alice, and Kidman's station,⁶¹ out from Oodnadatta, out east. It's a big station.

He went south in the end and got married and came back again, with his wife. He had three children, two girls and my father, Alec. The children lived in Adelaide; they went to school there. He managed Crown Point for years, with his wife [Fanny]. When they were finished they came up to Barrow Creek. They were travelling around. They didn't stay at Neutral Junction: it was only just starting up when they were around. But they came up to Neutral Junction afterwards, when it was well established. He lived there till he went away down south and died, poor thing. He managed Stirling station at one time as well. That's the last station he managed, but only for a few years, then it changed hands.⁶²

⁶¹ It is typical of the way Don reminisced and included me in his world that in casually dropping Kidman's name into the story he assumed a familiarity which was not always the case. I had heard of Sir Sidney Kidman (1857–1935) of course, the biggest landholder in Australian history, and who was as famous for his frugality as for his wealth. I was to discover that his interests in the Northern Territory at various times included outright ownership or shares in Huckitta, Stirling, Owen Springs, Crown Point, Bond Springs, Hamilton Downs, Austral Downs, Newcastle Waters and Victoria River Downs. P. Forrest. (Sir) Sidney Kidman. In D. Carment, R. Maynard. A. Powell. (eds) 1990. pp. 166–168

⁶² Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

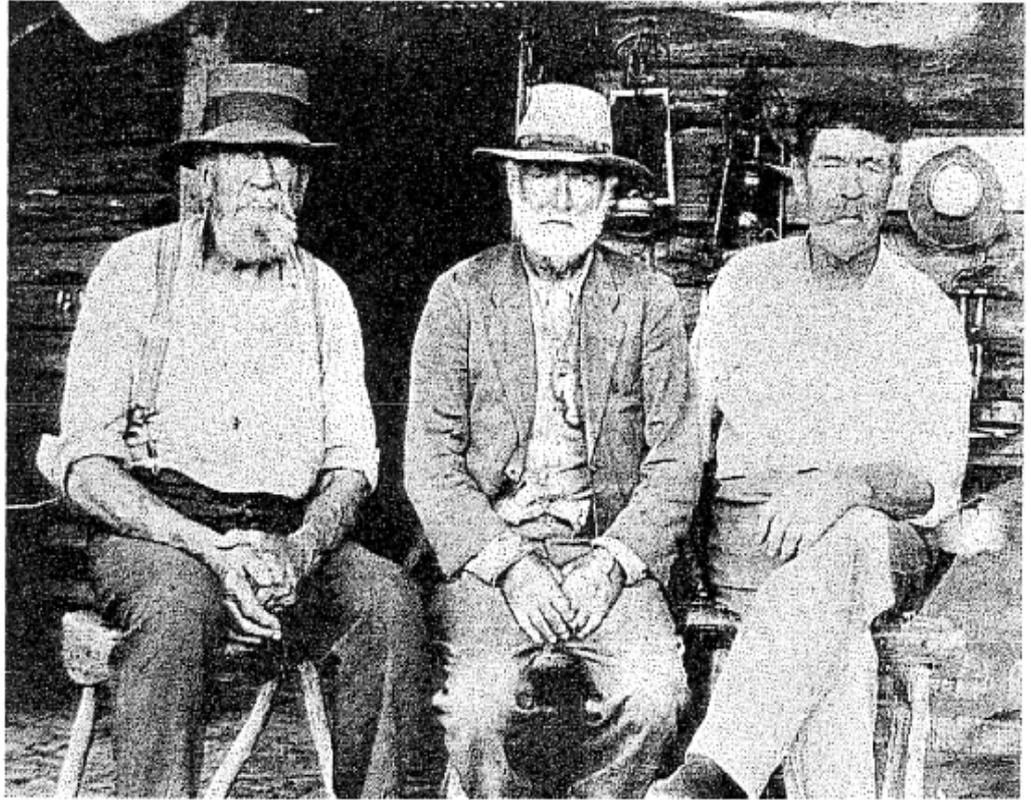


Figure 9: Alec Ross, Frank MacDonald and George Hayes outside the original Neutral Junction homestead, 1934. Photo by M. Terry

From the collection of Mrs A.H. Purvis, courtesy of Graham Ross. Reproduced in J. Petrick. 1996. *The History of Alice Springs Through Landmarks and Street Names*. Self-published, Alice Springs. Reproduced with permission J.R. Purvis

Fanny Ross joined her husband in Central Australia in 1885, when he was manager of Undoolya station. She had her piano transported from South Australia by bullock wagon. It took three months and cost £100 in freight. Her son, Alexander junior was born the following year at Hermannsberg, a three-day journey away. When the baby was six months old the station was sold and the family left for Adelaide. Alec and Fanny returned to Central Australia in 1888, to manage Crown Point station, south of Alice Springs, an eight-day buggy journey from Oodnadatta. Alec left for a muster the next day, leaving Fanny with two

Aboriginal women to help her clean and make comfortable the homestead.⁶³

Anthropologist Baldwin Spencer wrote of visiting Crown Point station in 1894:

We were made welcome by Mrs. Ross... At that time everything was green. The verandah, overgrown with creepers, was cool and restful: we ate fresh vegetables from a garden watered by a well close to the river, and the change from the dust and flies of the camp to the comfort and refinement of the little station home was more than welcome'.⁶⁴

Doris (Bradshaw) Blackwell, who visited the Rosses at Crown Point station as a child in 1899 with her family, on their journey to the Alice Springs where her father had been appointed officer in charge of the Telegraph station, says of Mrs. Ross, 'She was plump, attractive and happy'.⁶⁵ Blackwell also notes:

The history of the Centre was dripping from her veins for she was connected with the earliest pioneers. She had been Miss Fanny Wallis, an aunt of Frank and Albert Wallis who opened the first general store in Alice Springs (Stuart⁶⁶) and her husband was the son of John Ross.⁶⁷

Don Ross also had good memories of his grandmother, typical of a small child's memories of things that impinge directly on his world, as the anecdote below demonstrates. Interestingly, when I asked what he called his grandmother (Gran, Grandma or Nanna) he replied, 'We called her Mrs Ross'. Distance was kept

⁶³ J. Braithwaite. Home for Fanny Ross at Crown Point Station with the notably all male station hands. <http://www.pioneerwomen.com.au/openland.htm>

⁶⁴ B. Spencer. Cited by A. Powell. 1982/1996. p. 92

⁶⁵ D. Blackwell & D. Lockwood. 1965/1972. *Alice on The Line*. Seal Books/Rigby Adelaide, p. 39

⁶⁶ T.A. Wallis purchased a site in Wills Terrace, Stuart (later, Alice Springs), in 1889 and in 1894 his son, F.B. Wallis, had a store built. It was a stone building with an iron roof and a verandah supported by bush posts. It was managed by George Wilkinson. The lease was transferred to G.H. Wilkinson and J.H. Gepp (a silent partner) in 1914, but it continued to trade as F.B. Wallis and Co. until the Wallis Fogarty merger in 1924. B.W. Strong. 1997. *The History of Wallis Fogarty Limited in Alice Springs*. Self-Published, Alice Springs, pp. 20–21

⁶⁷ B.W. Strong. 1997. pp. 39–40

then, and was later maintained, by the white arm of the Ross family, who were reluctant to acknowledge their Aboriginal relatives. It is also possible that Mrs Ross was not made aware that Don was her grandson. Some other white women in Central Australia were deliberately kept in ignorance about such relationships with 'part-Aboriginal' people. Mrs Ross may have assumed Don was just a little half-caste lad George Hayes favoured.⁶⁸

Don Ross: My father's mother was a great old lady. I remember they were camped at Limestone Well (which is what Barrow Creek used to be called) and we called in there, me and Old George Hayes, in the buggy. She gave me some bread with bloody marmalade jam and I didn't like the marmalade, see, so I just went away and scraped it all off with a stick. Chucked it away and just ate the bread, the damper, I remember that.

When Old Grandfather Ross was getting on, and his wife was dead, he gave up [managing stations] and settled down on Neutral Junction. He just fossicked around there. He had the shakes and things. He would burn himself a lot, on the stove. He was buggered you know, old. In the end he got that sick, he went down south.⁶⁹

Doris Blackwell notes that:

An official record of Alex [*sic*] Ross's life, as Inspector of Water Supplies for the South Australian and Federal Governments in the Northern Territory, ends with this entry: 'He suffered injury to his spine through being thrown from a camel, and this accident led to his death.' Alec Ross gave an injured Aboriginal man his own camel and rode a pack-camel, which bucked when its noseline broke, and threw Alec Ross into the air. He only partly recovered and was never able to work again'.⁷⁰

Don was very fond of Alec Ross, who was patient and easy-going.

⁶⁸ White men often kept their extended families (and their wives) ignorant of the existence of 'half-caste' children they had fathered.

⁶⁹ He died in a Home for Incurables in Adelaide. D. Blackwell and D. Lockwood. 1965/1972. pp. 41-43

⁷⁰ D. Blackwell and D. Lockwood. 1965/1972. pp. 41-43

Don Ross: He was a good old fella, a very kind man. I spent a lot of time with him, as a boy. He used to make me whips. He made me I don't know how many whips. I'd flog them to pieces in no time. Just crack whips all day. Bang! bang! bang! all day, around a mob of cattle. I'd be going all the time. The cattle got that way they didn't take any notice of me at all, not a bit. It never hurt them. The old man used to tell me not to crack it all the time. I broke a few on him, cracking them all the time. One of them got caught in a cow's tail one night-time. I actually found it again, after a long time, and he greased it up and made it useful again.

He had a mob of dogs, bred them off cattle dogs from Stirling, and they used to rip him up proper, bite his clothes, all raggedy up to the knees, but he just let them bite. He wouldn't kick them. 'Never kick a dog', he reckoned. I was a bit frightened of them, they bite too hard. But I never saw him hit one.⁷¹

After the pastoral boom of the 1880s came a long-standing bust. Recovery was slow and the Territory cattle stations faced extra problems. There were instances of settlers being attacked and stock being killed and eaten by Aboriginal people. As elsewhere on the Australian continent, relationships between European and Aboriginal peoples in the Northern Territory since 'contact' had been characterised by intermittent hostility and violence, because of European 'settlers' determination to annexe the land they wanted in spite of Indigenous resistance.

One disastrous example of 'frontier conflict' in which Kaytetye people suffered great loss of life is known to history as the Barrow Creek massacre. This conflict was significant in the history of the 'quietening' process by which Kaytetye people were persuaded to accept and/or accommodate European occupation of their land and domination of their lives. In 1874 Kaytetye men attacked the Barrow Creek repeater station and two European men were killed. A punitive expedition was mounted, which resulted in the deaths of upwards of fifty

⁷¹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

Warumungu, Kaytetye, Anmatyerr, Alyawarr and Warlpiri people.⁷² The Europeans felt the killings to be a legitimate retaliation to the ‘unwarranted’ violence of savages. Indigenous people saw it differently. As Mickey Hood Janbuyin put it:

Well, Whiteman no wantem my colour, like, blackfeller. Want to try shootem whole lot, finishem up, all blackfeller. They want to take over this place.⁷³

That the intention was genocide may be open to dispute,⁷⁴ although, in ‘the killing times’ this may have appeared to Aboriginal people to be the truth, and it is certainly true that some Europeans wanted to get rid of all Aboriginal people. Mickey Hood Janbuyin’s final statement is an historical fact beyond dispute. In Central Australia, as had happened elsewhere in Australia, Indigenous people and pastoralists were in direct competition for the land – their interests and ways of caring for country, or utilising its resources were mutually incomprehensible in practical and ethical terms, as well as being incompatible.

Those were hard times, which bred hard men – that is both the legend and the fact. The country was poor for cattle, so stocking rates were low and the leasehold tenures were too insecure to make property improvement worthwhile. Cartage and labour costs were exorbitant (the shrewder settlers turned to the Aboriginal population for relatively free labour), and cattle had to travel the long and

⁷² Accounts and discussions by Kaytetye people and by non-Indigenous historians of the Barrow Creek Massacre include: G. Koch. (ed) 1993. pp. 11–18; D.J. Mulvaney. Barrow Creek, Northern Australia, 1874. In B. Attwood and S.G. Foster. (eds) 2003. pp. 44–51; G. Reid. 1990. pp. 63–65

⁷³ Cited by P. Read and J. Read. (eds) 1991. p.5

⁷⁴ In a discussion of the Barrow Creek Massacre, Dick Kimber points out how difficult it is to arrive at the truth and how much perceptions can change and responses vary over time. R.G. Kimber. No date. p. 6

dangerously dry route from Central Australia to Port Augusta, to reach the southern markets.⁷⁵

In 1887 Simpson Newland, chairman of the Transcontinental Commission, visited the area and went away declaring that the pastoral industry in Central Australia must have 'either men who are prepared to spend years of their life at it, until the few stock they begin with increase, men who will live hard, work hard and die hard, or capital, capital, capital'.⁷⁶ The Central Australian pastoral industry had both, capitalists, a few of whom hung on through the hard times, and men who, once the best land was taken up, leased marginal land and lived hard, spending years of their lives working long hours under arduous conditions, to make a go of it. The often-arid landscape, irregular rainfall, poor soils, nutritionally marginal flora, plus the isolation, poor infrastructure and inaccessibility to local and overseas markets⁷⁷ were the challenges they faced.

But they soon recognised the potential for local Aboriginal clans to provide a permanent, acclimatised and inexpensive labour force for the fledgling industry and came to rely heavily on the skills and labour of the Aboriginal peoples whose land their cattle runs occupied. Land and labour were both to be made productive within the pastoral economy.⁷⁸ Don's laconic account, in which he said that at first there were no Aboriginal people involved on stock work, but after some

⁷⁵A. Powell. 1982/1996. p. 93

⁷⁶A. Powell. 1982/1996. p. 94

⁷⁷ R. Castle, C. Clothier and J. Hagan. Wage Fixing for Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle industry 1911–1965. In P. Bertolak and J. Bailey. (eds) 1997. *Australian Society for the Study of Labour History Conference Proceedings*, Perth, p. 42

⁷⁸ D.B. Rose. 1991. p. 149

'boys' were 'taken' and trained up, then Kaytetye people started to work as stockman, represents years of frontier conflict, and the eventual acquiescence of Indigenous people to the new 'owners' and use of much of their land – pastoralists and pastoral industry.

Don Ross: Early on, they only had whites as stockmen. Then they trained the blackfellas. They got young boys, I think. Got them and kept them. Took the boys and reared them, and trained them as stockmen. No permission, just took them. Like they took the women. Poor buggers.⁷⁹

From the Aboriginal point of view, as far as one can reconstruct it, Tim Rowse maintains that a range of economic adaptations to European settlements were not only possible but necessary, but these did not undermine tradition and identity, nor supplant the tjukurpa (the unalterable charter of the created world).⁸⁰ Aboriginal people retained their associations with home country as long as they were at liberty to show young people the country and explain it in their own language. These conditions, as Rowse points out, obtained for at least a generation after first contact, and in most of Central Australia, remained until the employment policies of pastoralists changed in the 1960s. Because many Aboriginal people reached accommodations with pastoralists, they were able to remain on their own land even if they were no longer free to use it as they had done.⁸¹ Pragmatism eventually prevailed. Enduring terms of interaction were negotiated, Rowse concludes, because a pacified frontier was in everybody's interest.⁸²

⁷⁹ Manuscript of *Good One*, Don Ross.

⁸⁰ T. Rowse. 1986. Aborigines as Historical Actors: Evidence and Inference. *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 87, p. 179

⁸¹ T. Rowse. 1986. p. 179

⁸²T. Rowse. 1998. p. 64

When South Australia handed over the Northern Territory to Commonwealth Government control in 1911, 104,000,000 acres (42,000,000 hectares), approximately one third of the total area of the Northern Territory, was under pastoral leases and permits. Aboriginal labour was sometimes given willingly, sometimes exacted by force: it was profitable because it was cheap and needed in the absence of sufficient numbers of white employees. The Indigenous workers had few options, constrained as they were by their legal status and by their lack of European education. But, while Aboriginal labour was required, Aboriginal people themselves were treated as if they were expendable,⁸³ a double-think that many pastoralists, government officials and white settlers were able to sustain, successfully, sometimes to a degree that almost defied logic, but not the logic of profit-making and the goal of creating a white Australia.

Conditions for Aboriginal people on the stations were frequently abysmal. Food, sanitation and living conditions were often grossly inadequate (and women were often forced by starvation into prostitution with white men) and there were abuses in the payment (and non-payment) of wages. Tony Austin points out that, 'given the utter reliance of the pastoral industry on the far from unreliable Aboriginal men and women, there was a case for considerably improved working and living conditions'.⁸⁴ A widely held belief that Aboriginal people did not understand nor desire nor require money, served to reinforce pastoralists' objections to paying them wages, despite the fact that the pastoral industry relied heavily on their

⁸³ C. D.Rowley. 1970. p. 151

⁸⁴ T. Austin. 1997. p. 123

labour. And it was one of the prevailing frontier myths (still held, by some Territorians, but to which empirical history gives the lie) that Aboriginal people were inferior workers, who would work only intermittently and under close supervision.

This view was legitimised by official reports, such as the 1922 report of the Northern Territory Administrator F.C. Urqhart, in which he stated, 'Although there are now and then exceptions to the rule, the average aboriginal (sic) will not work continuously for any lengthened period, especially at any manual labour of a monotonous nature'.⁸⁵ Despite this prevailing belief, six years later J.W. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines, Queensland, stated in his report that the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory was 'absolutely dependent on the blacks for the labour, domestic and field, necessary to successfully carry on'. Further, he concluded, 'If they were removed, most of the holdings...would have to be abandoned'.⁸⁶ The 1911 Aborigines Ordinance had instituted a permit system of controlling employment, but there were no provisions in the legislation for specific minimum wages for Aboriginal workers.⁸⁷

In 1913 Baldwin Spencer stated his opposition to Aboriginal pastoral workers receiving wages. Their life was excellent, he maintained, and they were perfectly

⁸⁵ F.C. Urqhart. Cited by D.B. Rose. 1991. p. 166

⁸⁶ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS A52/3 Item 572/99429 BLE 1929. J.B. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines, Queensland. 1928. The Aborigines and Half-Castes of Central Australia and North Australia, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers. Also cited by R. Castle, C. Clothier and J. Hagan. In P. Bertola and J. Bailey. 1997, p.43

⁸⁷ C.D. Rowley. 1970. pp. 227, 232

happy with conditions on the cattle stations.⁸⁸ But, as Deborah Bird Rose and others have pointed out, as ‘Aboriginal historical remembrance tells the story, nothing could have been further from the truth’.⁸⁹ Many Aboriginal stock workers have a clear understanding that it was as a result of their labour and the labour of their predecessors over many years that white pastoralists prospered.

Bleakley’s report recommended a very modest system of wages – five shillings to £1 (one pound) per week, plus rations, but no effective provisions were made to ensure that Aboriginal stock workers received the recommended wages. The Northern Territory Pastoral Lessees Association resisted Bleakley’s recommendations (and the North Australian Workers’ Union lobbied for a higher cash wage, not out of solidarity with Aboriginal workers, but because they perceived Aboriginal cheap labour as a threat).⁹⁰ Subsequently, pastoralists did not necessarily abide by either the letter or the spirit of the recommended system. The pastoral lobby was a powerful one, and the Northern Territory pastoralists (mostly) violently disagreed with growing and vociferous criticisms of their treatment of Aboriginal workers from humanitarian and Christian organizations.

Don Ross received no wages, but was given cattle in lieu, from time to time, by his grandfather, George Hayes and other station owners. And upon his

⁸⁸ B. Spencer. 1912. Cited by D.B. Rose. 1991. p. 141

⁸⁹ D.B. Rose. 1991. p. 141. Rose is speaking specifically, in this instance, of Victoria River station workers, but these views have been expressed almost without exception by Aboriginal stockmen from other stations. This is not to deny that there were certain station owners and managers who were more benign, or more careful of their Indigenous employees’ welfare, but the quality and type of treatment of, and conditions for, workers was, to a large degree, fortuitous: decent treatment and reasonable working conditions for Aboriginal workers were neither enshrined in legislation nor insured by positive attitudes to, and treatment of, Indigenous people by European bosses.

⁹⁰ One of the central arguments proposed by B. Brian. 2001.

grandfather's retirement, George Hayes contributed £3000 towards the cost of Don's purchasing Neutral Junction station. Don's attitude to and statements about the lack of wages for himself and other stockmen are not necessarily consistent. In the comments below, Don both reflected sympathy for Aboriginal workers who did not receive wages and reiterated the widely held belief that Aboriginal people did not mind working for no pay:

Don Ross: A man never got paid, only a stick of tobacco a week or something. Plenty of tucker, of course. No, they never got paid at all, Aboriginals. There were some very good men among them, but they didn't get no credit at all, poor buggers. Very unfair.⁹¹

They never got money. They never got paid, poor buggers. I used to give them a bit of money when I had it on me. I [would] get them to buy something.⁹² No, they never got no money, poor boys. It was a bugger you know, but they were happy. Got their tucker and that for nothing.⁹³

Tim Rowse, in his study of rationing and its effects on Indigenous people over the decades in Central Australia, asserts the complexity, for both station owners and Aboriginal workers, of paying, receiving and spending wages in a station situation in which a cash economy could not easily function⁹⁴ and attests to the fact that whilst many pastoralists undoubtedly did cheat their Indigenous employees, some tried to assist their workers to utilise their money to best advantage. This was no easy feat, given the presence of two concurrent cultural systems with

⁹¹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*.

⁹² Presumably, this last statement refers to later years, when Don was the owner of Neutral Junction station, or when he was earning good wages, working for station owners like Stan Brown.

⁹³ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin, 11 October 1997

⁹⁴ T. Rowse. 1998. pp. 130–135

irreconcilable values, in relation to the exchange of goods and services and understandings of mutual obligation.

Don Ross's stories of his childhood, which he remembered as being happy, also reflected the difficulty of conditions on pastoral leases in those early days. Accessing basic services such as sending and receiving mail and obtaining supplies was difficult, time consuming and costly. Narratives such as Don Ross's allow one to appreciate the tenacity required to establish an agricultural enterprise and to secure a livelihood by that enterprise, under such difficult conditions, and also remind us of the mutual occupation of the territory by black and white, both of whom shared the difficulties and established a certain degree of interdependence in their interactions.

An example is Don's stories of the delivery of mail and other items to the stations in the early days. His stories were often focused around memorable characters. One such was Stormy Campbell, a man employed to cart goods to the cattle stations over miles of rough track.

Don Ross: Stormy Campbell was a good man, smart man. He used to cart stuff up and down, from here [Alice Springs] to Newcastle Waters and back. He stopped in at the stations along the way, whoever he had parcels for. He wasn't the mailman. He was private. Fogarty's⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Fogarty's was responsible for stock and station supplies and for transport in Central Australia. In April 1918 J. Fogarty and Co. purchased the business of J.W. Mansfield and Co, in Oodnadatta. Sometime in the next few years Raggatt's store in Stuart (later, Alice Springs) was leased by J. Fogarty and Co. Fogarty's merged with F.B. Wallis and Co. in 1924 to become Wallis Fogarty's. A new store was constructed. One important aspect of the business of Wallis Fogarty was transporting goods and mail. Before motor transport Wallis Fogarty made extensive use of camels, and also sold them. By 1930 they had an extensive fleet of vehicles: in 1925 they had established a fortnightly run to Oodnadatta in the south and Barrow Creek in the north. B. Strong. 1997. *The History of Wallis Fogarty Limited in Alice Springs*. Self-Published, Alice Springs, pp. 1–10, 20, 27; P. Donovan. 1988. *Alice Springs, Its History and the People who Made It*. Alice Springs Town Council, Alice Springs, pp. 107, 139, 275.

used to have him going all the time. Two or three days I suppose it took, to get there (to Barrow Creek). Road was no good, you know. Crooked old road, following the telegraph line. I was a kid when he done that job. It was a rough road.

As a child Don visited Barrow Creek often with his grandfather when Old George Hayes went to collect the mail and other supplies or to drink with his mates. 'He never went anywhere without me', Don said. The mailmen and transporters of goods to isolated settlements were well known to Don and to other station people, as were the Aboriginal workers at Barrow Creek, such as old Moses who was an integral part of the early conveyancing system. Moses was a Kaytetye man, a friend of his grandfather. In view of George Hayes' reputed hatred of Aboriginal people, his relationship with Moses is the more remarkable.

Don Ross: Moses worked at Barrow Creek all his life. From a kid he's been there. He was a great old blackfella. He was a good mate to old George Hayes too, you know. Of course, old George Hayes hated blacks, but he was all right with Moses. He'd go and sit down and talk to him every night, later on, when Moses was working for us. And he was a wonderful tracker, that old man, God, he could track anything. Tell you how old the tracks were, yesterday, this morning or last night, how many bullocks. You can count the tracks, see, when they're spread out. Count their tracks along the ground. I've been with Moses a few times, tracking bullocks. I remember one time he said, 'They been here last night, they been camp here. They gone now, eaten'. He was right too. He could tell by the grass, eaten down, and the poop. He'd go by that too. They [the cattle] usually do that when they get up and go to walk. So we got them. And he sent me along with them and he went round looking for more.⁹⁶

Moses' job was to look after the horses and to have them ready for the mailman on his return trip through Barrow Creek.

Don Ross: Old Moses was there [at Barrow Creek], Kaytetye man, proper Kaytetye. Moses had to get the horses, have them ready for the

⁹⁶ Manuscript of *Good One*, Don Ross

mailman. They used to get everything by mail, and with the Afghans, with camels. The mailman used to get drunk at Barrow Creek. No pub there, then. The owner [of a parcel containing rum] would open it up and give him a drink. They used to get drunk.

There were a few different mailmen, but Sammy Lynch was the longest one there. He used to change horses there. He'd let the horses from Alice Springs go, and get a fresh mob at Barrow Creek and then go up north, to Tennant Creek, and get another lot there. Change horses again, then to Powell Creek, I think, from there. Yes, he used to drive his packhorses up there, and he'd be back in a fortnight. And this old boy, Moses, would have the horses ready, shod and everything. Shoe 'em all, have them ready, then, to go to Alice Springs. It was too much for one man, but Moses was a good man. Used to shoe the horses and have them ready a couple of days before the mailman arrived back.⁹⁷

Jackie Tywekertaye, of Artarre community (Neutral Junction), described the way mail was transported in the early days.

Jackie Tywekertaye: Aboriginal people used to go with the mail a long time ago. The men used to go and pick up the mail. They would put the paper letter in a split stick. A long time ago they would carry it like that. They would split the stick and put the letter inside. It had to be clean while they took it. They couldn't touch it with their hands; they had to watch out it didn't get dirty. It had to be clean in that stick. Then another person would put another letter in the stick and take it to Barrow Creek. They would take the other stick back again. That's how they would do it a long time ago. Aboriginal people would go on foot carrying that letter. And they were people from Artarre. They used to take nothing except a tommyhawk with them, or a knife. They went on foot only.⁹⁸

But even such an apparently benign story as this reveals an atmosphere of violence and intimidation, or the possibility of violence [which] underlay all transactions between black and white, and which Don Ross's life history revealed in numerous asides and throwaway remarks as well as in narratives of more serious occasions

⁹⁷ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁹⁸ Recorded by Myfany Turpin at Artarre (Neutral Junction station) 28 November 1997. Transcribed by Myfany Turpin. Translated by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes

of violence against Indigenous people in Central Australia (and elsewhere), which continued into the twentieth century.

FRONTIER CONFLICT⁹⁹

The last of these major acts of overt violence against the Kaytetye people became known as the Coniston Massacre.¹⁰⁰ It occurred in 1928. Don Ross was thirteen at the time. The tensions between black and white, exacerbated by a severe drought from 1924 to 1928, were brought to breaking point by Fred Brooks' and Nugget Morton's acts of taking Aboriginal women and refusing to return them to their husbands, or at least refusing the reciprocal obligations incurred. Trapper Fred Brooks was killed on 7 August and Nugget Morton was attacked on 28 August. (Morton survived the attack on him.) Constable George Murray mounted punitive expeditions in retaliation, resulting in the deaths of approximately seventy Kaytetye people. In the wake of publicity aroused by the protests of fair-minded people, including missionaries and humanitarian societies, the Governor General appointed a Board of Enquiry on 13 December 1928, to enquire into the killings¹⁰¹ and into whether the shootings in the Brooks and Morton cases were justified and whether any provocation had been given by the settlers to account for 'the

⁹⁹ A term used to describe the intermittent clashes between Europeans and Indigenous people during colonial times, as Europeans displaced the Indigenous owners and occupied their land. Also the title of a book on the subject: B. Attwood and S.G. Foster. (eds) 2003.

¹⁰⁰ Indigenous and non-Indigenous accounts and discussions of the Coniston Massacre include: R.G. Kimber. *Real True History*. (a series of articles on the Coniston massacre) 10 September 2003–18 February 2004. *Alice Springs News*; G. Koch. (ed) 1993. pp. 66–72; C.T. Madigan. 1944. *Central Australia*. Oxford University Press, London, pp.117–126; P. Read and J. Read. (eds) 1991. pp. 33–54; C.D. Rowley. 1970. pp. 288–290; P.Vaarzon-Morel. (ed) 1995. pp. 37–48

¹⁰¹ National Archives of Australia Canberra CARS A431 Item 1950/2768 Part 1 Telegram, Prime Minister Bruce to Queensland Premier William McCormack 27 November 1928. Ibid. Part 2 Board of Enquiry Ordinance

depredations of the Warlpiri. The independence and integrity of the enquiry was compromised from the outset, and there was a public outcry at the composition of the Board. The findings of the Board, made public on 30 January 1929, were (not surprisingly) that in all cases the shootings were justified as self-defence and that settlers or police had given no provocation, and that there was not a 'scintilla of evidence' that the police party was a punitive expedition.¹⁰² The blame fell squarely on the Warlpiri.¹⁰³

Most people now (and some, at the time,) consider it a travesty of justice that the Europeans involved were completely exonerated of any wrongdoing. Most historians also believe (as Indigenous relatives insist) the killings at Coniston to have been more widespread and greater in number than the Board of Enquiry ever established¹⁰⁴ or than missionaries like Annie Lock, who spoke out publicly against Murray and his party, claimed at the time, but the Board tried to discredit the testimony of these 'unattached Missionaries [such as Annie Lock] wandering from place to place, having no previous knowledge of the blacks and their customs and preaching the equality of man'.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² B. Wilson and J. O'Brien. 2003. p. 72.

¹⁰³ See R.G. Kimber. 11 February 2004. *Alice Springs News*. Also B. Wilson and J. O'Brien. 2003. p. 72

¹⁰⁴ B. Wilson and J. O'Brien. 2003. p. 75

¹⁰⁵ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A431 Item 1950/2768 Part 2. Findings of the Board of Enquiry, 18 January 1929. Cited by B. Wilson and J. O'Brien. 2003. 'To infuse an universal terror': A Reappraisal of the Coniston Killings. *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 27, p. 72.

Don was well acquainted with the details of these events: over a number of years he had heard his Kaytetye relatives discussing the devastating events. In conversation with his niece Emily Hayes, Don spoke about the killings.

Don Ross: I remember [it]. Sandy Muldoon [a policeman] told me that the policeman, George Murray, left Barrow Creek and he had old Billy Briscoe and Alec Wilson from Ti-Tree with him and they done most of that shooting. That bloody Alec, he was a bugger. Yes, [they] shot them all. Shot everything. Kids and gins, you know, he shot everything. So the blacks told me, that police boy, he told me. You know, 'akay-anwerne'. He was there. Police tracker – he was there. He was with George Murray and some other boy. Two boys went from Barrow Creek with the policemen [as trackers] but they didn't shoot any. They knew very well it was the wrong mob, see.

They thought they were going out to Lander. Yes, well, they didn't like it, and they didn't do any shooting. This bloody Alec Wilson, they reckon he bloody well shot everything, babies and bloody womans and all.¹⁰⁶ The policeman knew where there was a mob of blackfellas.

The Barrow Creek mob, they were right out [of it]. Only them poor buggers that were over on the Hanson, they got shot. Big mob. I forget how many now. Kids and all and they had nothing to do with it. Some ran away and made it to Barrow. All Kaytetye mob along the Hanson, poor buggers. Kaytetye people didn't know about it [weren't involved]. The police didn't go to Lander at all: that's where the killers were. That old Mick Warlungewerne he told me. He said, 'I was in that. We been kill him now that old man [Fred Brooks]'.¹⁰⁷ That's Mick Warlawerne. Warlungewerne is his name, that's Warlpiri, I don't know what it means. He was a big bugger. He told me all about it. He used to be with old Killicott, as a drover, after. He kept alive, none of them got shot. They shot the wrong ones, poor buggers [who] didn't know anything about it. Kids and lubras and all were killed.

Anyhow, that policeman [George Murray] brought Major [a Warlpiri man] back, because Major had a bloody young woman. A big fat one. Yes, George Murray got Major and put him onto work, give him a job,

¹⁰⁶ R. G. Kimber. 4 February 2004. *Alice Springs News*. R.G. 'Dick' Kimber wrote, 'I think as the only survivor of the patrol who continued living in and about the absolute edge of the scenes of the shooting he [Alec Wilson] bore the brunt of any ill feeling by the survivors on behalf of all of the patrol members for the next fifty years and more until his death'.

¹⁰⁷ R.G. Kimber. 8 October 2004. *Alice Springs News*. R.G. 'Dick' Kimber confirmed that the primary reason for the killing of Fred Brooks was that he would not return Bullfrog's wife (or wives) to him and that he had not fulfilled his promise to pay Bullfrog rations and other items.

so he could have his gin, I suppose. She was Warlpiri. That policeman, he was a bastard. He always had several kweyayes [women]. He was a bugger for women. He had two or three of them. I don't know what they done with them, [the bodies of the Kaytetye people killed] I never asked.

Emily Hayes: They just shot them and leave them – leave them laying there?

Don Ross: Yes, I think so.

Emily Hayes: That was really cruel thing to do.

Don Ross: Yes. Killed the poor buggers [because] threefella went and killed that old man, Fred Brooks, that whitefella. Warlpiri people. They went from Lander.

Emily Hayes: And where was this whitefella, Fred Brooks?

Don Ross: He was at Kerosene Camp, on Pine Hill. [They] couldn't find him.

Emily Hayes: So they travelled across there to that white bloke?

Don Ross: Yes, killed him. They put him in a rabbit burrow, yes.

Emily Hayes: Did anybody find his body?

Don Ross: Yes, they found him. They must have taken the woman then. He must have had the woman there where they killed him. He should have got away from there with her, not bloody stay there. He would have known they would come and kill him. Old Fred Brooks should have gone away.

[Old George Hayes] was on Neutral Junction Station then. He was there. I think he was glad in a way [that the white man's death was avenged], but they were Kaytetye bloody people they killed. Wrong ones. They didn't kill the right ones. Bastards. Nothing [was done about the killing]. Never done a bloody thing about it. [The Kaytetye stockmen] they just kept quiet. They didn't know what was going to happen next. Too scared to talk about it.

Well, they [the government] were going to do something [in reparation] but they didn't, see. They were going to take them [the people who had survived the massacre] and put them somewhere safe. But it didn't happen, no. I remember the talk, yes. But they didn't do it. Not until Warrabri (Alekareng) started up. That's a long time after, though.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Manuscript of *Good One*, Don Ross

The attack on Nugget Morton, following soon after the killing of Fred Brooks, exacerbated the already tense situation and resulted in further retaliation by police and pastoralists on Aboriginal people. Nugget Morton¹⁰⁹ had taken up his pastoral lease, Broadmeadows, (in Anmatyerr country) in the early nineteen twenties, next door to Coniston station which was owned by Randal Stafford. Nugget Morton was unusual among the Lander River pastoralists in that he was quite fluent in the local languages, but he showed his disdain for Aboriginal people by always sitting with his back to them in camp. He was an immensely powerful man, yet also quick and light on his feet when he needed to be.¹¹⁰ He was reputedly ruthless and sadistic, the ‘cruellest’ man Bryan Bowman (later owner of Coniston station) ever knew.¹¹¹

Don Ross: Some bugger, Old Morton, Nugget Morton, who started Anningie station, got bashed about, over a gin. He had Emily, I think, Ampetyane. But they [blackfellas] couldn’t kill him. He was too strong you know. He got to his swag and got his revolver. He had Alec Wilson with him.¹¹² They showed me where he camped, where they fought, from Murray waterhole. Big waterhole there. And they fought. He had his swag away from the fire. He seen them coming, he said. He was telling me himself, Nugget Morton.

‘So, I seen them coming. Oh, I just cut the tucker off for them, hand them the tucker to make them quiet, see’.

They took the tucker all right but after[wards] they hit him with a boomerang. It’s funny they didn’t have a spear, they could have

¹⁰⁹ R.G. Kimber. 12 November 2003. *Alice Springs News*. Nugget Morton reputedly had ridden his bicycle more than a thousand miles to Alice Springs before World War One. He worked in Central Australia as a cattle drover for a number of years before taking up his pastoral lease.

¹¹⁰ R.G. Kimber. 12 November 2003. *Alice Springs News*

¹¹¹ R.G. Kimber. 17 September. 2003. *Alice Springs News*

¹¹²R.G. Kimber. 17 September 2003. *Alice Springs News*. Nugget Morton later took Alec Wilson’s wife and whipped Alec Wilson cruelly when Alec Wilson protested.

speared him, you know. They only had boomerangs. They got into him with a boomerang, put holes in his bloody head and everywhere, but he fought till he got to that swag and his revolver was there and he shot one fella, and the others ran then, ran away from him.

He said. 'I shot one'.

He said he seen them that night coming. He's coming home, see, to Anningie – this is down the Lander. He seen them and he said, 'I better get as far as I can'. And he came to this waterhole and camped. His gin was out after the camels, see, he was on his own. They wanted to kill him over that woman. Yeah, well it [she] was his; he kept her for a long time. He got her from Ti Tree.¹¹³

The burden of Don's story was not just the horror of the violent actions of the punitive posse, but the wrongful attribution to the Kaytetye people of the killing that precipitated the massacre. He wanted the listener to understand the Kaytetye had been unfairly accused and punished. It was 'the Warlpiri bastards' who were responsible, Don angrily asserted, a distinction that was too fine a one, apparently, to have concerned the vengeful Murray and his party. While Don was deeply affected by the number of innocent people killed and the disrespect shown to the women and children, he was also incensed at the irregular and 'unlawful' (by Indigenous interpretations of law) retaliation enacted. Peggy Brock points out that two codes of conduct and systems of behavioural control and punishment existed in every situation where Europeans and Aborigines came into conflict.¹¹⁴ The Coniston massacre was a particularly costly example for the Kaytetye.

The fact that the Kaytetye stockmen kept quiet demonstrates effectively the power relations between white and black: the threat of violence was real and constant.

¹¹³Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

¹¹⁴ P. Brock. 1997. Protecting Colonial Interests: Aborigines and Criminal Justice. *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 53, p.121

‘The blackfella, he was frightened of getting shot’, Don attested. In times of difficulty, relations quickly became more strained and Indigenous people’s position more vulnerable. In this instance, a severe drought in which the cattle drank the waterholes dry and filled in the soaks by trampling and reduced the vegetation on which Indigenous people of the area relied for food, had exacerbated the tensions between black and white.¹¹⁵ In his 1929 report, Bleakley had noted that Land Ordinances in the Northern Territory, in granting pastoral leases, reserved rights of access to, and use of, game and natural water to the tribes, in the terms of the lease – a condition omitted, he wrote, from recent leases in Central Australia. But in drought, water and game supplies became critical, cattle spearing increased, station hands carried guns and the few police protectors could not control the situation.¹¹⁶

There is no doubt that the stresses induced by drought contributed to the tension which preceded the last major attack on Aboriginal people in Central Australia – the Coniston Massacre – but the difficulties the drought brought were also exacerbated by a long history of general disregard by white pastoralists for the property and rights of Indigenous people, and brought to boiling point by a particular incident. In the available recorded and published Aboriginal testimonies of these ‘killing times’ there may be variation in some of the details recorded, but all accounts bear witness to the considerable violence meted out to Aboriginal people on the frontier. On 23 February 1926 Sergeant Stott wrote from Alice

¹¹⁵ P. Read and J. Read. (eds) 1991. p. 34

¹¹⁶ Cited by C.D. Rowley. 1970. p. 267

Springs to J.G.McLaren, Secretary, Home and Territories Department, Melbourne
advising him:

We are experiencing the severest drought ever known throughout the District. Not a vestige of feed for hundreds of miles, surface waters are drying up, well supplies are getting low, the position is getting worse from day to day. Heavy losses among stock have already been sustained.¹¹⁷

Because of the drought exports of cattle from the Territory were lower in 1927 than they had been since the beginning of the century.¹¹⁸ Don Ross recalled a severe drought in the nineteen twenties:

Don Ross: We got some good prices for our cattle.¹¹⁹ Some poor ones, too, during drought times. I remember a drought, one time; they took the cattle out past Elkedra. Nobody had that country then. They must have taken the cattle off there. It was early times, before I started riding. I was only a kid at home. I remember that I was running about then, when they took the cattle to Elkedra. Young George Hayes and his missus and kids and the Old Man went out there. A few workers went out too. There was Choolum and Hector, Riley Kemarre and Chablo Peltharre.

They took the whole bloody herd out there [past Elkedra]. You had to take them cattle while they had a bit of life in them otherwise they got too weak and couldn't travel and they'd die. He done a wise thing taking them out there, plenty of water out there and feed, no cattle then that way. Spring country, water running out of the rocks all the time. None of that country was taken up. None of it. Kennedy and Riley took Elkedra up later, and I think Old Pepperill had Murray Downs. He was there. Too dry, where we were, at Neutral Junction station. No water, no bloody feed either. I don't know how long they were away. They went in the winter and next winter they come back, after a big rain. They were out there till it rained. They took the

¹¹⁷ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A1/15 Item 26/3477 1926 Drought

¹¹⁸ F.G.G. Rose. 1953-1955. The Pastoral Industry in the Northern Territory during the Period of Commonwealth Administration 1911-1953. *Historical Studies*, Vol. 6, p. 160

¹¹⁹ Under a headline in the *Adelaide Chronicle* 3 August 1933 'Best Cattle from Central Australia', it was reported, 'Mr. George Hayes, Neutral Junction Station, Barrow Creek, consigned 26 weighty Shorthorn oxen, which showed too much age, but were in good trade order'.

whole lot of cattle out there. There must have been well over a thousand.

[Back home] we only had old George Hablett and that ‘humberging rain’. That was his great word - humberging.¹²⁰ Anyhow Old George Hayes and Young George Hayes brought the whole herd back and let them go. They were all home again then. Oh God, it was a great rain. We wanted the rain badly but it had done some damage. We were half happy. We saved all the cattle [and] the house was all right. (Well, only the shed was there then, big bough shed. We put the house up after.) It was too boggy, see, and the cattle just took off. That’s when they used to go, east.¹²¹

The inadequacy of reliable sources of water in Central Australia and along the North-South stock route was a problem that had dogged the pastoral industry from its inception. Many of the permanent waterholes which had supplied Aboriginal people adequately for centuries were quickly drunk dry by horses and cattle, and from the time the Overland Telegraph line was constructed and the pastoral industry established the various governments responsible for administering the Northern Territory argued about the extent of their responsibility to provide and maintain permanent water supplies for men and cattle on the stock routes.

In his report to the Department of Interior, 14 October 1942, Administrator C.L.A. Abbott maintained, ‘The shortage of water...is not due to lack of maintenance or inefficiency, but is a natural phenomenon’.¹²² This despite a report to Abbott 12 May 1942, which alleged, ‘Many of the difficulties arise through the maltreatment of the watering facilities by drovers. Troughs are left running over, ground around

¹²⁰ George Hablett had never been known to ill-treat an animal, or to swear, even at a cow, Doris Blackwell noted, and his strongest threat to a restive horse was reputed to be, ‘I’ll swallow yer’! D.Blackwell and D. Lockwood, 1965/1972. p. 63

¹²¹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

¹²² National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A6 Item 59/1 1943/1/6/124 Bores on Stock Routes (N.T.) p. 185.

the troughs is puddled and often very boggy, fences are broken down and often other material damage caused'.¹²³ This report also strongly argued against the leasing of government bores to pastoralists. An example of misuse was given.

At Taylor's Bore the position when a government bore is leased to a landholder is very apparent. The country around the bore shows evidence of over-stocking to a great degree and travelling stock at the present time would have to move several miles from the bore before coming to any feed.¹²⁴

The lessee was George Hayes. The lease was not renewed. Water and its use and supply remained an issue of contention and concern. Pastoralists and government departments argued about the right to use government bores and responsibility for maintenance of these bores as well as of station wells and bores situated on or near the main stock routes, which were utilised by numbers of people.

The change to mechanical pumps to fill the tanks and troughs meant that large mobs of cattle could be watered quite quickly, thus reducing stock losses and maintaining the condition of cattle headed for the Oodnadatta and later the Alice Springs railheads. While the debate over the maintenance of and right to use the wells, bores and waterholes went on, the drovers continued to make their arduous journeys. But the bores and wells were expensive to sink and maintain and critical delays in repairing the bores were frequent.¹²⁵ It was not until the practice of

¹²³ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A6 Item 59/1 1943/1/6/124 Bores on Stock Routes (N.T.) p. 95

¹²⁴ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A6 Item 59/1 1943/1/6/124 Bores on Stock Routes (N.T.) p. 164

¹²⁵ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS F1 Item 46/93 Central Australia 7080 This file contains two letters from Bill Riley at Elkedra Station, complaining about delays in receiving equipment and components needed to repair bores and mills, and wrong components being sent.

trucking the cattle to railheads and markets was instituted in later years, that the risks to both men and cattle were significantly diminished.

As Don drew a vivid picture of a drought in the nineteen thirties, his sorrow at the loss of the cattle was still clearly evident. By this time he was working as a stockman, and therefore would have witnessed the death of stock, first-hand.

Don Ross: The droughts were bad, oh God, '34 to '38 one drought was, four years, no creeks were running at all. Four-year drought. We were pulling water then, with camels for four years. Bloody cattle dying everywhere. Horses too. They lie down and can't get up again; too weak. We lost a few. We shot them and dragged them away with a horse or a camel. Old horses used to get down and couldn't get up again, at the waterholes mainly, got full of water and died. Couldn't get up. One poor old racehorse [Robert] had a big drink of water out of one of the troughs and lay down and couldn't get up. Old Man went and shot him with his revolver. He was a good horse, won many cups.

Hard time all right. We just sat down. Boys would go walkabout somewhere, so we didn't have to feed them. Cattle got poor as bloody dogs, poor as bones. They'd have calves, but the calves would die. No milk for them. Couldn't survive. Only the big bullocks used to keep fat. They get the fattest and so they hold the condition on longer. We'd look for the fattest one to kill.

After four years it rained. Washed the garden away. A lot of vegies went, you know. Big rain. Some of the kids wouldn't have known what struck them when they seen the bloody rain. Floods, that's what we had. We wasn't stuck, though. The homestead was right up on a high place. The roads were too boggy to travel on for a few days. Grass grew thick then and we had fat cattle in no time.¹²⁶

Neutral Junction experienced poor times and good times. One of its affluent times was the result of the high demand for beef during the World War Two (1939–1945). This demand dropped sharply after 1946. The years that followed were lean ones, exacerbated by severe drought, which lasted till 1953. Water, the

¹²⁶ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

old problem for pastoralists in Central Australia, became critically scarce. ‘You could always count on a drought about every fifth or sixth year’, Charlie Schultz, owner of Humbert River Station 1928–1965, wrote.¹²⁷ The cost of sinking bores and wells, the competing demands on them, their maintenance and upkeep, particularly on the stock routes, was a matter of great and ongoing concern, particularly in the marginal lands occupied by smaller operators.

It was during these lean years that Don Ross purchased Neutral Junction Station from his grandfather, George Hayes.

Don Ross: I was the owner of Neutral Junction Station at one time. Right after the war. It was up for sale, see, and I bought it up. Old George Hayes went and sold out and I got it. I was working there and I saved up, paid cash for it. When Old George Hayes sold out to me, he gave me three thousand pounds.¹²⁸

Don had married Lorna Purvis just before the outbreak of World War Two and brought her to Neutral Junction station to live, and in 1947 he bought the station. George Hayes contributed £3,000 toward the purchase price of £3,136/-/-, stock not included.¹²⁹ Stock and Station agents Bennett and Fisher wrote to the Land Titles Office in Darwin 29 June 1948 advising them that George Hayes no longer required Grazing Licence No. 935, as Mr A.D. Ross had purchased the property,

¹²⁷ C. Schultz and D. Lewis. 1995. *Beyond the Big Run: Station Life in Australia's Last Frontier*. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, p. 198

¹²⁸ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

¹²⁹ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1041 Item Pl 158C Pastoral Leases Central Australia 1958–1962, p. 30

and that the application form for the new licence had been forwarded to Mr Ross.¹³⁰

On 1 July 1948 Don applied for a grazing licence for ninety cattle and four horses. The fee payable was £5/10/-.¹³¹ On 9 July 1948 Don was granted Grazing Licence No. 1316 over an area of 90 square miles [230 square kilometres] at an annual rental of one shilling (1/-) per head of 'Great Cattle', plus one pound (£1) Licence fee.¹³² In November 1948, government records cite the Neutral Junction Station herd at 1,800 and improvements were valued at £2,760.¹³³

Don Ross: Old George Hayes [had gone down] south and married down there and came back. He married pretty old, you know. He was sixty-something when he got married. He always had a bloody gin, but he married a white woman. Hunted the poor bloody black women away [then]. His wife's name was Molly.¹³⁴ I didn't like her. She'd try and stand over you and take over everything.¹³⁵ Wasn't very long they stayed, after that. Sold out.¹³⁶ I bought them out. So, he went south with his wife but he didn't last long down there. He was

¹³⁰ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F28 Item GL 1316 Grazing Licences 1912–1978, p. 6

¹³¹ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F28 Item GL 1316 Grazing Licences 1912–1978, p. 5

¹³² Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F28 Item GL 1316 Grazing Licences 1912–1978, pp. 1–3

¹³³ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. Pastoral Leases Central Australia 1958–1962 p. 36

¹³⁴ Whilst resident on Neutral Junction station Molly Hayes applied to adopt a little 'half-caste' girl, Ruby, to whom she had taken a fancy, and raise Ruby as her own child. The archival records do not indicate whether Ruby had been fathered by George Hayes.

¹³⁵ Blanche Hayes, Don's sister, had a more positive view of Mrs. Hayes. Personal communication 2001 Blanche Hayes with M. Turpin

¹³⁶ My understanding, from the account Don gave of the transaction, was that George Hayes' agent sold the property and Don's buyer, Mortimer, an agent for 'Elliot and Fisher' (Bennett and Fisher) paid the purchase price on Don's behalf, for the property, and that the £3000 George Hayes contributed was deducted from the asking price of the station. I asked Don whether the agent named an actual price. He said, 'Yes, £16,000, I think it was'. (I was unable to find sufficient documentation to substantiate this figure.) I asked Don whether it took a long time to pay off that money. He said no, that he already had money saved and that he was getting good prices for his cattle then. Interview with Don Ross 26 June 1998.

seventy-four when he died. I was working at Stirling Station [by] then.

Young George Hayes never had the money, so he couldn't be in it. He was about then, but he didn't want it. He was just a wanderer. Work, come back, work, come back – he been just about everywhere. When he came there [Neutral Junction] he lived in the shed, the saddle room. I gave him a job cutting timber, for posts, contract work. I was building [a boundary fence]. I gave him a truck.

Things kept on much the same as before, when I got the station. But I made a few new buildings.¹³⁷

Drought soon became a concern for the new station owner. In 1949/50 the average rainfall in Central Australia was 3 inches (75 millimetres), compared with the normal 10 inches (250 millimetres). And in 1951/52 the whole of the Territory had abnormally low rainfall, which resulted in extensive stock losses. 1952, the year of the big drought, was 'possibly the worst experienced in recent years by the pastoral industry of the Territory', the Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, noted in his report to Cabinet.¹³⁸ A headline in the *Melbourne Herald* 1 April 1952 declared, 'Drought may cost £2 million', and the Northern Territory Administrator, Mr F.J.S. Wise, noted in his report to the Secretary of the Department of Territories 3 July 1952:

In addition to the drought, the season was characterised by the greatest incidence of fires for many years. Often it was found that good waters

¹³⁷ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

¹³⁸ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F425/0 Item C70 Drought Relief – Northern Territory Pastoral Industry, pp. 2 – 4. These and other files contain applications from pastoralists (including Stan Brown, see National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS A452/1 Item 52/73, and CRS F1 Item 1952/877) for drought relief, describing their financial and other difficulties. Many properties carried heavy mortgages, and others were surviving on monthly advances from agents, the level of debt increasing as the drought persisted and they received reduced prices for their cattle which were often in poor condition and had to be sold as 'stores' rather than as 'fats' – sold as two year olds rather than mature cattle.

were rendered useless by the surrounding feed for many miles having been burnt out.¹³⁹

Acting on the many reports of stock losses and financial hardship being suffered by pastoralists, the Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, recommended in May 1952 that Cabinet allocate £200,000 for drought relief in the Territory, to be used for assistance in sinking bores on stock routes and in dry country where there was still good feed to be had, and in providing relief credit for pastoralists. The associated report detailed a doubling in cattle losses per lease in Central Australia between the 1946–51 and the 1952 averages, and an increase in district losses from 10,649 to 18,566 in the same period.¹⁴⁰

F.G.G. Rose, in an overview of the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory during the period of Commonwealth administration 1911–1953 draws the following conclusions:

The broad Commonwealth policy discernible throughout its administration of the Territory was to encourage pastoral settlement by legislative measures, but except where contractual obligations necessitated, to invest as little capital as possible in developmental work. Objectively, this policy encouraged the financially strong pastoral companies. There is a familiar argument that the Northern Territory is a ‘big man’s country’. This is undoubtedly true to the extent that the man with only limited capital resources cannot contend with the hazards of marketing his cattle which have existed in the past: but this argument has been used too frequently to rationalise the absence of a development policy. A run of two or three bad seasons usually suffices to force the small man out. A company with adequate finance behind it, on the other hand, can survive a series of bad seasons and probably with the next season make sufficient to show a net overall profit. This situation has been accentuated in the

¹³⁹ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F425/0 Item C70 Drought Relief - Northern Territory Pastoral Industry, p. 2

¹⁴⁰ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F425/0 Item C70 Drought Relief – Northern Territory Pastoral Industry, pp. 1–4

past because of the continuing low prices for beef, which even in a good season will give only a small percentage of profit on capital invested. By not providing adequate transport facilities, whether they be water points on stock routes, roads or railways, the government has objectively fostered a situation conducive to large companies.¹⁴¹

That the financial difficulties of some Central Australian pastoralists during the drought were exacerbated by the restrictive financial policies imposed by companies through their agents who dealt directly with the pastoralists (including Bennett and Fisher, who were handling Neutral Junction, station) is borne out in the reports cited above. No finance was made readily available for property improvements, or even sometimes for the purchase of stock, and only restricted finance was given for normal maintenance purposes. Added to this was pressure on clients to dispose of stock early in case drought conditions continued and stock depreciated or died. Government intervention was needed to rescue the smallholder. Eventually, some financial assistance was offered, but it came too late for Don Ross. He had decided to sell the station.

But, the drought was not the only factor which conspired against Don's success. He had lost the hard but experienced leadership of his grandfather, George Hayes, when he purchased the property (Don admitted to missing George Hayes very much), cattle demand was receding, he was having management problems with his workers, he was beset by adverse weather conditions and when he ran into financial trouble he gained a partner who probably had no real interest in the property, and, to the agents with a stake in his property, his continued ownership of the cattle station would not have been of any particular importance.

¹⁴¹ F.G.G. Rose. 1953–1955. p. 168

Don Ross spoke with both sorrow and relief of his decision to sell Neutral Junction. Understandably, he found it uncomfortable to go into the details, and to respond to questions on the matter in a way which might reveal him as lacking ‘what it took’ to be a successful station owner. He was proud, with good reason, of having owned a cattle station, and sensitive about the reasons for its loss. I tactfully withdrew on more than one occasion when I sensed his discomfort was becoming acute, or the direction the conversation was taking threatened to dislodge the central meaning-making myth of himself as the ‘versatile man’. He preferred to talk about his expertise at stock work or his love of horses. But a picture gradually emerged. It was so partial I was obliged to seek information elsewhere, to fill in the gaps. Don’s account of the selling of Neutral Junction was compiled from a number of interviews in which the sale of the station was mentioned or discussed.

Don Ross: I was on my own [to begin with]. I was all right until the bloody agent [Mortimer, who worked for the stock and station agency Bennett & Fisher] put this bludger Ken Milnes¹⁴² in there [as a partner]. I didn’t want to.

‘Oh, he’ll be a great help to you’, they reckoned.

I said, ‘I know the man, he’s just a gambler’.

He was a gambler. He never worked [on a station] in his life. He came to be a partner with me. They put him in, Bennett and Fisher. I didn’t want it at all. I bucked against that. I should have kicked up a big stink about it. I thought that he [Mortimer, the Bennett and Fisher agent] wouldn’t go at it. I was dead against it, but he still put him [Ken Milnes] in. He must have owed them money, so they put him in. He started borrowing money [against the station], see. I had to sign for it.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Referred to in verbal accounts and in written documents as both ‘Milne’ and ‘Milnes’.

¹⁴³ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

In August 1949, Alice Springs butcher, Ken Milnes, purchased a three-fifths share of Neutral Junction station for £13,567/8/6 (stock not included.) An additional 1,800 head of cattle were purchased, increasing the herd to 3,000.¹⁴⁴ The value of the station was then assessed at approximately £22,600.¹⁴⁵ Don was not happy with this partnership, but apparently he had little choice as the station was in debt. (£14,000 was borrowed against the station and the stock mortgaged.)¹⁴⁶ Later, more debt was incurred.

Don Ross: By jeez, I was crooked about it. I knew the man well. That's why I didn't want him. Me there working, poor bugger, and he does nothing. He's a proper gambler, you know. No, the agents must have been his friend. Must have been owing them money, so he got the money out of the station, otherwise I might have been still there. He had no bloody money at all, he was borrowing from the station. He couldn't get it without my signature, that's how I knew.

I wanted him out, but he didn't want to go and he was getting deeper into the station, borrowing money. I had to sign [for the money Ken Milnes was borrowing] three or four times. Well, he had no money. He never asked me at all, the agents [did]. I should've said no, I s'pose. He couldn't ride a bloody horse. I knew he was only a gambler, you know. He was a bad egg, that fellow.¹⁴⁷

Reg Harris, well-known Alice Springs 'identity' and long-term resident of Central Australia, was well aware of agents' practice of insisting that a station owner take on a partner if the station were in debt. That Ken Milnes had purchased a three-fifths share in Neutral Junction station explains how he was able to borrow against

¹⁴⁴ The stock having increased in value from £8 per head to £10 per head. Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C Pastoral Leases Central Australia, 1958–1962 Correspondence Files 'PL', p. 36

¹⁴⁵ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C Pastoral Leases Central Australia, 1958–1962 Correspondence Files 'PL', p. 36

¹⁴⁶ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C Pastoral Leases Central Australia, 1958–1962 Correspondence Files 'PL', p. 36

¹⁴⁷ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

it. And as happens today, the agent could take over the station, or insist on it being sold if the owner defaulted on payment of the mortgage, or if too great a debt had been incurred. Ken Milnes, in Harris' assessment, was 'a bit of a slippery customer' and a great gambler. Milnes was quite well off, he owned a butcher shop in Alice Springs. His initial connection with Neutral Junction station, Harris suggested, was to use it as a source of low priced bullocks, which he would buy and have slaughtered at the abattoirs in Gap Road, Alice Springs, for his shop. Milnes was a town dweller, a butcher, not a stockman, and would have had little or no interest in the day-to-day running of the cattle station into which he had bought.¹⁴⁸

J.R. Purvis (son of R.H. (Bob) Purvis) of Woodgreen station gave a similar account. He said his father told him Ken Milnes gambled and wasted his money and borrowed from everyone he was involved with.

Bob Purvis (Junior): He [Milnes] was a gambler to the extent that he and Pat Davis had a £100 bet that Bradman would make 100 runs at the first test at Lords, [circa 1948] so they flew to England to see that match played. That's the extent of Milnes' gambling. Dad had to sell half this place to Milnes. Those were tough times. I knew what Milnes was. He was a spendthrift and ne'er-do-well. He bought up property, that is how Milnes got into Neutral Junction. Milnes [also] bought a share in this property here (Woodgreen) because Dad was dying and broke.¹⁴⁹

Don Ross was equally condemnatory in his assessment of Milnes.

¹⁴⁸ Personal communication 19 April 2002 R. Harris

¹⁴⁹ Bob Purvis Junior related another story that his father had told him. 'Ken Milnes had grubstaked a fellow named Jim English in the Whippet goldmine in Tennant Creek. English believed he was on to a good vein of gold, but it did not eventuate just then. English said to Milnes, "Well, you'd better take a half-share in this mine and you keep me in tucker". It was only a short while after that when English struck gold, which netted Milnes about £230,000, a fortune. It took Milnes only eighteen months or so to spend most of that money. In two years he was flat broke'. Personal communication with J.R. Purvis 26 March 2005

Don Ross: Bloody useless animal [Ken Milnes] was. Couldn't even get an engine sent up to me. I was having trouble with motors, the pumping motor. I had to pump the two bores thirty-eight miles apart. I used to have to dismantle the bloody thing and take it and pump in another place, for the cattle, see. I was flat out. No rain, so I had to stay home and give the cattle a drink. And what made me real wild was taking this one engine to two places thirty-eight miles apart. Carting this bloody Lister engine. I had to dismantle it and take it and rig it up to another bore, pump there and bring it back again. I had a boy, Big Dan, a big strong bugger, too, to help put it on the truck, cart it from one bore to the other, thirty-eight mile. No fun rigging it up again.

I rang this bugger, Ken Milnes, to get an engine of any sorts and send it up from Alice Springs. He said he'd get an engine and send it up, but he didn't. Too slack. He was no good. He didn't do a bloody thing. I got sick of it. I [have] never had so much worry since. I never worried so much in all my life. I was responsible. And the boys wouldn't work too good. I went crook at them one time. I went mad and threw my leather coat off and wrapped it around his [a stockman's] head. They all cleared out, so I sat down at home. I didn't go out. I couldn't do anything on my own. Anyway, later on they came back. Two came up first, and they were abusing themselves in front of me, saying they shouldna' went. Should've done the right thing. I said, 'You can tell the rest to come back and start work'. I had five altogether [at] that time.

[In the end] I got sick of things. I didn't have the feeling for it anymore. I said, 'I'll get out of here. Too much worry'. And I did. As soon as it rained a little, by Jesus, I was off. I went straight down to Alice and I told the agents, 'I want to sell the place'. I gave the whole thing away. I got sick of it. Too much work. Night and day I was going. I was living in the bloody truck, sleeping in the truck with my rifle under me pillow. That [Ken Milnes was] useless. He couldn't go and get a bloody engine. I got jack of this, that's why I sold. I said, 'Oh, I'll get out of it, that's best, I reckon'. Left everything behind. Only took a few broken-in horses, good horses.

I said, 'I can go without anything, I can live off the land, but he can't', I said. Oh, they [the agents] wouldn't listen to me. I just said, 'Bugger it, I'll give it away. No, I'm never working there while he's bludging and borrowing money from the station'. The agent wanted me to stick it out, because they wanted that bastard in there too, because he owed them money. They wanted me to stick on. He [the agent] said, 'You're a bloody fool, that's all I can say. You're on the pig's back'.

'No', I said, 'when I say I'm going, I'm going. I hate staying here with that man bludging on me, getting money off me when I'm working'. So I got clear of it and I've been happier since, very happy. I didn't want to get out of it at all, but the agent put it over me there. So I put it over them. I just got out.

Ken Milnes sold too. He come and see me and said, 'We'll both sell now'.

I got angry a lot about getting out of that bloody place, I wanted to stay on there. I would have been all right. I knew the place, see, I was reared on it. No, the bloody rotten man bugged it up. I should have stated when I bought the place, not to let any whiteman in. I should of, I should have known better then.¹⁵⁰

A fellow called Hayward had the station after me. His grandmother bought it, for more than I bought it for, twenty thousand pounds, I think, in 1952 or 3.¹⁵¹ Young George Hayes was sad when he heard I'd sold out, poor old thing. He knew Ken Milnes was no good, a bloody gambler. The Kaytetye boys were all sad to see me go. They said, 'We're sorry to see you go. Don't you go away from this country'. That's what they said. But I was glad to get rid of it, you know, get it out of my mind. I was worried. I couldn't sleep. I got sick of it. I never had so much worry, since.

Old Stan Brown said, 'You should have come to me, I would have been in it, I would have bought him out, and be in with you'.

I was ready to go to Queensland, but Old Stan Brown wouldn't let me, he gave me a job on Stirling station.¹⁵²

Don was grateful to Stan Brown for offering him an alternative to all the worries of running Neutral Junction station. As a stockman Don's skills were second to none: this source of pride and identity was restored to him once he went to work for Stan Brown again and surely must have ameliorated the effects of failing to

¹⁵⁰ 'My father says Don was cheated'. Personal communication with J.R. Purvis 26 March 2005

¹⁵¹ Neutral Junction station was purchased in 1951 for Alan Hayward by his stepfather, Stan Brown, and his mother. Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C Pastoral Leases Central Australia 1958-1962 Correspondence Files, p. 29

¹⁵² Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

make a viable operation of Neutral Junction station and being, as he saw it, taken in by his white partner and the agents.

My own assessment of Stan Brown's concern for Don was influenced by my discovery of archival evidence (cited below) which seemed to suggest that Stan Brown had tried to acquire Neutral Junction station for himself during the time of Don's ownership.¹⁵³ I did not make Don aware of my suspicions. On the subject of Stan Brown Don and I agreed to differ. Whilst I had tried to see the man through Don's eyes, my assessment of Stan Brown was closer to Maudie's than to Don's: he was not a man I could easily admire. And when I learned he had been imprisoned for theft of cattle at one stage in his life, it confirmed my opinion of the man. In his later years he applied for a pardon, which, however, he was not granted.¹⁵⁴

THE SALE OF NEUTRAL JUNCTION STATION

Dalgety & Co. wrote to the Lands and Surveys Department on 17 October 1950 on Stan Brown's behalf seeking the approval for the sale of Neutral Junction station, on a 'walk in walk out' basis, with a guaranteed 3,000 head of cattle subject to the payment of £10 per head for each beast mustered over and above 3,000 and an

¹⁵³ I have been unable to gather sufficient evidence to validate or disprove this claim. Whether or not it is true, I felt more sceptical than Don about the friendship and loyalty shown by his old mate Stan Brown.

¹⁵⁴ Personal communication with Professor David Carment.

allowance for £10 per head for each beast mustered under the guaranteed number, settlement on or before 31st April 1951.¹⁵⁵ The reply 9 November 1950 advised:

This purchase would increase Mr Brown's holdings from the 2324 square miles to a total of 3,030 square miles, which is substantially in excess of a maintenance area.

In view of the new amendments to the Crown Lands Ordinance which [would] be brought forward at the next meeting of the Legislative council, this total area would prohibit Mr. Brown unless he were prepared either to surrender or to sell sufficient of his aggregate holding, to reduce it to an acceptable area.¹⁵⁶

Neutral Junction pastoral leases comprised 706 square miles, held jointly by Don Ross and Ken Milnes.¹⁵⁷ Stan Brown replied on 4 December 1950 stating that he wished to buy Neutral Junction with a view to handing it over to his stepson, Alan Hayward, a student at Roseworthy Agricultural college, who would not attain his majority till February 1952.¹⁵⁸ He asserted:

Neutral Junction, in my opinion, has gone back very considerably and I consider I could put it on a sound producing basis as I have done "The Stirling" so that it would be in good working order when Hayward took over.¹⁵⁹

Half the purchase price was to be supplied by his wife, half by himself, and he indicated his willingness to have the property purchased in his wife's name.¹⁶⁰ The return letter pointed out that such a proposal still might be disadvantageous to him

¹⁵⁵ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C Pastoral Leases Central Australia 1958-1962 Correspondence Files, p. 29

¹⁵⁶ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. p. 35

¹⁵⁷ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. p. 31

¹⁵⁸ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. p. 38

¹⁵⁹ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. p. 38

¹⁶⁰ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. p. 37

in the long run, since in new amendments to the Crown Lands Ordinance land held by a wife would be deemed to be held by the husband.¹⁶¹ Dalgety then applied for the property on behalf of Alan Hayward, once it had been ascertained that people under twenty-one could hold a lease.¹⁶² The Northern Territory Administrator on 7 February 1951 consented to the transfer of Pastoral Leases 2380, 158 and 139 from K. Milnes and D.A. Ross to A. Hayward in consideration of the payment of £30,000, subject however to the prior discharge of a mortgage held by Bennett and Fisher Ltd.¹⁶³

There is no doubt that Don Ross, like many other Central Australian pastoralists, was a brilliant horseman and stock worker, strong and skilled in all areas of station work, a prodigious worker despite his bouts of heavy drinking. But hard work does not compensate for marginal land, nor guarantee canny management. Don mostly worked well with his stockmen, he supported his Kaytetye relatives generously, got along well with the white station owners, but perhaps he did not have the shrewd business eye of many of them, nor the hardness, which sometimes accompany a driving ambition for personal gain.

Don operated well in the white world, but he was also Kaytetye by birth and by family association, and his station was situated in Kaytetye country. He most certainly would have had a sense of family obligation that would run counter to a single-minded pursuit of his own gain, 'the association of individual effort and

¹⁶¹ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. p. 30

¹⁶² Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. p. 43

¹⁶³ Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS F1041 Item PL 158C. p. 4

responsibility with private ownership and commercial enterprise',¹⁶⁴ which, Cowlshaw says, is evident in the white man's impatience with traditional Aboriginal people's values.

'How can they expect to attend long ceremonies, go off to funerals, help every bloke that asks for something and give away anything they do manage to get and also run a cattle station and bring themselves up to a better standard?' cattlemen ask.¹⁶⁵

What is logical and rational in the context of one group's norms can appear foolish, irresponsible and disruptive in another, Gillian Cowlshaw asserts.¹⁶⁶ Don Ross was required to straddle these irreconcilable differences. Indistinguishable in many ways from white pastoralists, he also bore the unmistakable signs of belonging to the 'lesser' race, as the prevailing view had it, a view based on theories, Henry Reynolds points out, originating in European concepts of the hierarchy and destiny of races within a biologically determined evolutionary framework, which ascribed a lower place (and ultimate extinction) to Australian Aboriginal people.¹⁶⁷ Whilst attempting to balance the competing claims of the two cultures, Don Ross, like most people, kept his eye very firmly fixed on survival and made his choices and compromises (and justified these, in hindsight) accordingly.

Given the tenor and conditions of the times, he had two choices: either to function as a white man, or to allow himself to come under the 'protection' of the

¹⁶⁴ G. Cowlshaw. 1983. p. 64

¹⁶⁵ G. Cowlshaw. 1983. p. 64

¹⁶⁶ G. Cowlshaw. 1983. pp. 64–66

¹⁶⁷ H. Reynolds. 2005. *Nowhere People*. Viking/Penguin, Camberwell, p. 169

Aboriginals Ordinance. Not surprisingly, he opted for the former – to function as a white man in the white world.¹⁶⁸ It was never a real choice: he would never be admitted fully to white society because of his Kaytetye ancestry, neither could he aspire to full adult participation in Kaytetye culture: that had been denied him by his grandfather’s prohibition when he was a child. Consequently, Don Ross could be seen either as a person who belonged to neither world, or who belonged to both, his existence and the existence of people like himself bearing witness both to the lie of racial purity, and the degeneracy of the ‘half-caste’. Integral to the building of the nation state of Australia was the establishment of a civilised white population, something the Northern Territory aspired to for many decades. Don Ross did not fit this category, but ultimately neither he nor his kind would be able to be excluded or ignored by the nation builders, as history demonstrates.

¹⁶⁸ As has been required of Aboriginal people in other parts of Australia and during other historical eras, and is, to a certain extent, still required, today.

CHAPTER 4

BLACK, WHITE OR BRINDLE¹

History is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others.

Colonised peoples share a language of colonisation, share knowledge about their colonisers.... Colonisers, too, share a language and knowledge of colonisation.²

Don Ross's life history reflects some of the effects of the European ideology of race, and the restrictive policies it spawned, on the lives of Indigenous people in Central Australia in the early decades of the twentieth century. This chapter discusses the history of legislation enacted for the 'protection' of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, from the South Australian Aboriginals Act 1910, which was followed shortly by the Northern Territory 1911 Aboriginals Ordinance, a few years before Don Ross's birth in 1915, to the series of amendments to these Ordinances that continued through Don's childhood and early adulthood. I will argue that the provisions of these Ordinances deeply affected both the course of his life, and that they restricted his choices, enshrining as they did the justifications for the racist attitudes of the times. Nevertheless, Don Ross described this period of his life as happy and relatively free, and represented his choices as relatively autonomous. My argument is that these later

¹ A colloquial saying, meaning to cover all possibilities. Also used as the title of a book. G. Cowlishaw. 1988.

² L. Tuhiwai Smith. 1998. *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books London/University of Otago Press, Dunedin, p. 34 and p. 45

constructions of earlier events allowed him to find coherence and positive meaning in events that could have been viewed in a much more negative light.

Since Australian Indigenous peoples' 'first contact' with Europeans, they have been an object of interest, investigation and theorising. When the British first came to Australia they commenced the process of representing Aboriginal Australians. Historically, Indigenous Australians were depicted as 'ancient, primitive and childlike, the most primitive variety of man still existing.'³ Edward Said has described the 'unimaginable antiquity' of the 'other' as a defining element of the orientalist canon.⁴ Said defines orientalism as a process by which 'authorised' accounts and explanations of Aboriginal life and culture created by dominant institutions for purposes quite outside Aboriginal society, tend to silence the independent and discordant voices of those being represented.⁵ Attwood has called this view of Indigenous people 'Aboriginalism', meaning the construction of false images for political purposes.⁶

Confining the other to the past and yet simultaneously describing them as ahistorical is a common feature of colonial representation, Russell writes.⁷ The perceived primitiveness of Aboriginal culture, depicted as a consequence of their

³ Henry Reynolds. 2005. chapter 4

⁴ E. Said. 1978. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, New York, p. 167. Cited by L. Russell. 2001. *Savage Imaginings*. Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, p. 13

⁵E. Said. 1978. p. 167. Cited by L. Russell. 2001. p. 13. Also cited in G. Cowlishaw. Studying Aborigines: Changing Canons in Anthropology and History. In B. Attwood and J. Arnold. (eds) 1992. Power, Knowledge and Aborigines. Special edition of *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 35, p. 20

⁶ B. Attwood. Introduction. In B. Attwood and J. Arnold. (eds) 1992. p. 1

⁷ L. Russell. 2001. p. 13

deep antiquity, was a key feature of the process of subjectation. Beckett⁸ and others have shown that stereotyping Aborigines as an unchanging people in an unchanging environment was significant in shaping European impressions of Aboriginal Australia, and, that their ‘ideological aggression’⁹ rationalised and justified their annexation of Aboriginal traditional lands. In her exploration of historical and contemporary constructions of Australian aboriginalities Lynette Russell examines particular historical representations of, and values ascribed to, both the stereotype and hybrid forms of Aboriginality.

The ‘hybrid’ was seen necessarily to be a less authentic, more debased form of aboriginality, since it did not/does not fit the European-constructed stereotype of Aboriginal, which was based on purity of bloodlines, silence, deep antiquity and the model of spatial and temporal homogeneity.¹⁰ The pristine stereotype denies the authority and authenticity of any *hybrid* aspect of Aboriginal culture. Homi Bhabha points out, however, that ‘the stereotype is in fact an impossible object’.¹¹ European construction of Aboriginality during colonial times, and its concomitant construction of the ‘half-caste’ as less than a ‘true’ or ‘real’ Aborigine, and less than a ‘civilised’ white man, would have been deeply offended by Bhabha’s assertion.

⁸ J. Beckett. The Past in the Present; the Present in the Past: Constructing a National Aboriginality. In J. Beckett (ed) 1988. *Past and Present*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, p. 205. Cited in L. Russell. 2001.

⁹ A. Memmi. 1967. The Colonized and the Colonizer. Beacon Press, Boston, pp. 52–55. Cited in R. Broome. 2005. Entangled Histories. *Melbourne Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, p. 7

¹⁰ L. Russell. 2001. p. 14

¹¹ H. Bhabha. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, London, p. 208. Cited in L. Russell. 2001. p. 14

Racial extinction of primitive races such as Indigenous Australians was regarded as an inevitable consequence of evolution. The Darwinian-inspired notion of the process of struggle and extinction as inscribed in nature itself so that little could be done to prevent the passing of the Aborigines and other Indigenous peoples was a powerful orthodoxy in colonial times. Racial mixture was therefore undesirable at best and positively dangerous at worst, threatening the strength and purity of the superior races. The parliament of the newly federated Australian states concerned itself closely with the issue of creating and maintaining a white Australia. In fact, it was one of the premises on which the new nation was built.

The Northern Territory was opened up to European settlement relatively late in Australia's colonial history. It was difficult to attract white settlers to the hot, remote north, far from services and 'civilisation' and for many decades Aboriginal people outnumbered Europeans. Settlements and rangelands thus were developed intermittently. Large areas proved to be uneconomic and were abandoned, and then taken up decades later.

The pioneering story of the 'conquering' of the outback by intrepid white settlers became an essential feature of Australian nationalism. Don Ross's stories of early white pioneers, such as John Ross, Alec Ross, Frank Scott, Frank McDonald and George Hayes, which he had from the main actors themselves, or from relatives and contemporaries, reflect the prevailing story of hard men in a hard land taming the wilderness, creating small islands of civilisation in the empty outback, over which roamed small bands of barbaric savages who must be 'pacified', so that the pioneers could get on with the work of opening up and 'settling' the land. From

the vantage point of the twenty first century it may seem at first glance contradictory for a young Aboriginal lad to have rejoiced in the despatching of native people, some of whom surely must have been his relatives, but upon reflection it is not so strange. As small children (and even as adults) we see the world primarily through the eyes of powerful adults in our immediate world – immediate and extended family networks, and communities extending from these family networks. These people constitute our known world; they are our first meaning-makers; their views hold sway over our imagination and understanding; their notions of right action, their moral constructs and what they say and do, the stories they tell, the myths they purvey, prevail in our imaginations, at least until adolescence and adulthood begin to challenge this hegemony.¹²

That this should be so for Don Ross is not surprising. He would have had, from early on, a perception (if not a fully reasoned understanding) of where the power lay. His mother's sphere of influence was circumscribed, as were the lives of his Kaytetye relatives: Don naturally wanted to be where the excitement and action were, with the men, and with the big boss – his grandfather, George Hayes. Their stories excited him, no doubt gave him a feeling of having some currency in the potentially and actually circumscribed world of a small boy of mixed-race in outback Central Australia in the early twentieth century. It was much later in his life that he appreciated the irony of his having viewed as heroes, and relished the

¹² One of the basic tenets of sociology and psychology. Paul Mussen, a Berkeley pioneer in developmental psychology, documented this process in his award winning study *The Psychological Development of the Child*. 1963/1973. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs. He wrote, 'By identifying with his parents [family] a child acquires many of their ways of behaving, thinking and feeling. Moreover, since the parents [family] are representatives of their culture, the child's identification with them provides him with skills, temperamental qualities, attitudes, motives, ideals, values, taboos and morals appropriate for his cultural group'. p. 72. The world of a child of mixed race is thus a conflicted and complex one.

violent stories of, some of the men who had helped to destroy and disinherit Indigenous people.¹³ This paradox exists among colonised peoples the world over.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to explore fully Australia's 'national story', but some areas where it intersects with an/other, conflicted and conflicting history/myth are significant to the telling and understanding of Don Ross's life history.

Life for the European pioneers was undoubtedly hard. The vast 'untamed' outback of Australia did not easily lend itself to the transformation envisaged by the British ideals of agrarianism, ideals which upheld the high status of the cultivator and of free-holding resident smallholders.¹⁴ There were restrictions placed on the sizes of leaseholds, but the leaseholds needed to be of sufficient acreage to make the enterprise viable, given the irregular and relatively meagre rainfall of much of inland Australia, and the infertility of much of the soil. Yet occupying and using the land for rural production was an essential part of the process of European settlement, fuelled by the ideal of 'improvement', the view

¹³ A Cherokee friend, Stan Rushworth, informed me that many of the cowboys in the early Westerns, whom cinema-goers saw fighting the pesky 'redskins', were in fact Indians. These Cherokee cowboys were tall and handsome and good riders, and were more than willing to be hired by film companies. It was one of the few avenues of paid employment open to Indians at the time and one of the ways of getting off the reservation temporarily. (Each colonized people has devised its own way of negotiating the frontiers of colonisation.) Stan Rushworth also said that he and his friends always cheered for the cowboys, at the movies, much as Don Ross had applauded the derring-do of the white pioneers in Central Australia. But there was a double irony operating in the American situation, which I suspect may also have had its Australian equivalent at times: many of the Indian tribes depicted in films were also traditional enemies of the Cherokee, so the Cherokee audience, cheering the supposedly white cowboys in the movies, were also settling old Indian scores. Personal communication with Stan Rushworth, California, 1991. Please note, I have retained the term 'Indian' as Stan Rushworth used it, rather than the more current term, 'Native American'.

¹⁴ A. Powell. cited by T. Austin. 1997.

that nature should be improved through human use and domestication, specifically through agricultural use.¹⁵ It was at this juncture that two conflicting histories and cultural perspectives collided. Two versions of the his/story of the same physical spaces still struggle to coexist, as the present ‘history wars’ attest.¹⁶

That Aboriginal people did not practise agriculture in the European sense was one of the justifications for British occupation and use of the land. That the new settlers did not see, nor accept evidences of Indigenous ownership, because they were not culturally equipped to do so, is one of the tragedies of Indigenous history.

Aboriginal histories of ‘settlement’ profoundly unsettle conventional understandings of Australian history, in particular, the story of pastoral settlement as a heroic and noble taming of a vast, unowned and largely unpopulated land. The occupation by Indigenous people of the ‘empty’ land was intended to become one of history’s cul-de-sacs, as the Indigenes passed inevitably into extinction. Thus, their agency was simply written out of accounts of early settlement, accounts, Reynolds maintains, that were premised on three assumptions:

At the time of settlement Australia was an unchanged wilderness; if Aboriginal people ever owned the land they lost it in 1788; violence was a major feature of colonisation.¹⁷

¹⁵ Nicholas Gill explores this use of land and the conflicting perspectives of what is seen to constitute care and development of land in his thesis. 2000.

¹⁶ As evidenced in numerous public debates and newspaper and journal articles, and typified in such scholarship as K. Windschuttle. 1994; 2002; B. Attwood. 2005. Other articles and contributions to the debate are listed in Bibliography.

¹⁷ H. Reynolds. 1987. *The Law of the Land*. Penguin, Ringwood, p. 188

Aboriginal people's resistance to the occupation of their land, the destruction of their hunting grounds, the despoliation of their wells and waterholes, the interruption to their millennia-long custodianship of the land, and their negative reactions and overt and covert resistance to the violence and ignorance and seeming irrationality of the new white 'bosses', who did not appear to comprehend the responsibilities and reciprocities incurred in entering someone else's territory and claimed with impunity its human and natural resources was often accounted for as the mindless depredations of savages. But as McGrath and others have pointed out the frontier was a place of negotiated occupation as well as resistance. Physical resistance came at a heavy price for Aboriginal people. Kimber estimates that between 1860 and 1895, 650–850 Aboriginal people were killed in punitive expeditions by European people in Central Australia.¹⁸ Those involved in the killing thought they faced a choice between the survival of their enterprise and the survival of the Aborigines.

ABORIGINALS 'UNDER THE ACT'

Towards the end of the nineteenth century rationing began to replace violence as a mode of government.¹⁹ It was acknowledged that Indigenous people had been displaced from their traditional hunting grounds and activities, and therefore from their previous self-sufficiency. White man's coming had disrupted their way of life. As a race they were doomed, but it was the 'white man's burden' to 'smooth the dying pillow' of their passing. Of equal and probably greater concern was to ensure the safety of settlers. The government was keen to see Northern Australia

¹⁸ Cited in T. Rowse. 1998. p. 18

¹⁹ T. Rowse. 1998. p. 7

settled by ‘civilised’ (white) families, and to establish agriculture and industry. Indigenous people could be useful in assisting those endeavours if they could be persuaded to accept the presence of the white settlers and accept ‘protection’ and rations in return for giving up their traditional life and country, or agree to become part of a much needed workforce, particularly in the pastoral industry. The ways in which they were ‘persuaded’, over the next few decades, brought very little credit to white ‘civilisation’, although its proponents never doubted their right to dominate and subdue all obstacles in the way of successful agricultural and other business enterprise in Northern Australia.

The rest of the world was not so complacent. Throughout the ‘frontier’ period of Australian history and beyond voices had been raised in protest at the summary removal and widespread ill-treatment of Aboriginal people and the violation of their human rights. The Government became increasingly sensitive to the human rights lobby, at home and abroad, which kept up its vociferous championing of the Aborigines and equally vociferous criticism of their ill treatment.²⁰ Tony Austin suggests that the Government’s sensitivity to criticism over the four decades leading up to the outbreak of World War Two was far more influential than any sense of abstract justice in securing Aboriginal welfare.²¹

²⁰ These organizations, many of them church-based, had kept up a barrage of criticism and continued their activism over the decades: they included such organizations as The Anti-Slavery Society, The Aborigines Friends, The Aborigines Advancement League, Aborigines Protection League, Aborigines Uplift Society, Association for the Protection of Native Races, Aborigines Progressive Association, Aborigines Citizens’ Committee. The records of many of these organizations are held in the Northern Territory Archives Darwin, for example, CRS A3/16 NT 1914/7500–1915/402

²¹ T. Austin. 1997. p. 28

Europeans remained relatively few in number in the Northern Territory until well into the twentieth century.²² Very few white women lived in the Northern Territory in frontier times. This was a matter of great concern to the Government, as was the concomitant concern about the cohabiting of European men with Aboriginal women, and the births of their mixed-race children, which meant that whilst 'full-blood' Aboriginal populations were being drastically reduced by violence and disease, the inevitable effects of an unequal mental and physical struggle, and an inevitable consequence of evolution, proof that the system was in motion, that there were both winners and losers in the struggle for existence,²³ the 'half-caste' population was increasing.

This horrified colonial Australia. Miscegenation was anathema: racial mixture threatened the strength and purity of the superior (white) races. Mixed-race people were seen as, 'at the very least, unfortunate victims of implacable biological laws and probably dangerous misfits and malcontents. They were threatening not only as individuals but even more so as members of an ill-starred group who were unwelcome wherever they turned'.²⁴

²² Indigenous inhabitants far outnumbered Europeans in the Northern Territory. For example, the 30 June 1933 Commonwealth Census reports of Northern Territory Aboriginal population, estimated by the Aborigines Protection Board, stood at 5561 people (3,127 males and 2,720 females) in employment, camps etc and 13,082 (6952 males and 6130 females) nomads. National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A431/1 Item Aboriginal Northern Territory Population. The 1933 Barrow Creek census figures, conveyed by telegram from Constable Muldoon to the Deputy Supervisor, Census, Darwin on 1 July 1933, included: 'Europeans: 75 males 12 females; half-caste Aboriginals: 17 males 5 females; half-caste Chinese: 1 female; Aboriginals: 99 males, 122 females; Nationality British: 190 males, 140 females; Italian: 1 male, grand total: 331'. National Archives of Australia, Darwin. CRS F504 Item 20 Census Barrow Creek 1933

²³H. Reynolds. 2005. p. 79, p. 77

²⁴H. Reynolds. 2005. p. 81

Over the decades this preoccupation with miscegenation by the Government and the white population was to become obsessive. Another factor, apart from moral considerations, was that sexual relationships between white men and Aboriginal women, and the misunderstanding of, or refusal to acknowledge, the reciprocal responsibilities incurred to the woman's kin, was responsible for a great deal of incidents of violent reprisals against Europeans, especially in 'frontier times'. The Press published a barrage of emotive letters and reports on the subject of the increasing numbers of mixed race people in the Northern Territory. An example is the flurry of articles that appeared in August 1929,²⁵ and Ernestine Hill's sentimentalised article: 'Half-Caste—Australia's Tragedy', published in *The Sydney Sun*, 2 April 1933, which read, in part:

Unrecognised by his father and unwanted by his mother, yet a little human boy to whom the morning life is just as fresh and sweet as to any other, he is the sad, futureless figure of the north—the half-caste. Child of a tragedy far too deep for glib preaching, halfway between the Stone Age and the twentieth century, his limited intellect and the dominant primitive instincts of his mother's race allow him to go thus far and no further. Lost to him are the corroborees, the happy careless wandering of an unclad sylvan people who pick up their food where they find it, and sleep beneath the trees. He thinks—and therefore is accursed.²⁶

In 1884 it had been suggested that the South Australian Parliament regulate black and white relations by law. The plan was shelved because it was thought that a declaration of Aboriginal rights would discourage Europeans from settling in the

²⁵ National Archives of Australia, Canberra CRS A659/6 Item 39/1/996. *The Sydney Sun*, 7 & 13 August 1929, *The Adelaide Mail*, 10 August 1929, *The Adelaide Advertiser*, 7 August 1929, *The Canberra Times*, 8 August 1929, *The Adelaide Chronicle*, 8 August 1929, *Argus*, 7 & 8 August 1929, *Melbourne Herald* 9 August 1929, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 August 1929, *The Melbourne Age*, 7 & 8 August 1929, *The Queenslander*, 15 August 1929

²⁶ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A659/6 Item 39/1/996. *The Sydney Sun*, 2 April 1933.

Territory. But the official ideology of protection, segregation and control was embodied in 1897 in the *Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*.²⁷ This and subsequent ‘special Acts of colonial and State parliaments contained draconian controls over the personal and working lives of all Indigenous Australians...supposedly for their own protection’.²⁸

Formal recognition of the ‘half-caste problem’ featured in the *Northern Territory Aborigines Act 1910* (South Australia), which was replaced, when the Northern Territory came under the Commonwealth Government’s jurisdiction, by the Commonwealth’s first Northern Territory Ordinance governing Aborigines in 1911.²⁹ The emphasis in this act was on rigid protection, with control of individuals defined in racial categories and legislated for as passive recipients of special treatments, much in the manner of prospective inmates of institutions – minors, mentally ill persons, the sick or the aged.³⁰ In the Act, the definition of Aboriginal (section 3) included ‘half-castes’ with Aboriginal spouses or habitual associates and those less than sixteen years. In addition there was a special category of ‘half-caste’ including any offspring of an Aboriginal mother and non-Aboriginal father; this would include a person whose mother had an Aboriginal grandparent. (This is the category to which Don Ross officially belonged.) These

²⁷ National Library of Australia, Canberra. *Aborigines. No. 16 of 1911. An Ordinance Relating to Aborigines*. Notified in *Gazette* 8 January 1912. Also cited in D. Trigger. 1992. *Whitefella Comin’: Aboriginal Responses to Colonialism in Northern Australia*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 30

²⁸ A. Curthoys. Working for the White People. In A. Curthoys and A. McGrath. (eds) 2000, p. 6

²⁹National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A1 Item 1912/2937 (1911–1912) Part (2) Aborigines Ordinance Act 1911

³⁰ C.D. Rowley. 1970. p. 230

people, along with their ‘full-blood’ relatives were to be the special concern of ‘protectors’.

The Chief Protector, Dr Herbert Basedow, represented by the Protector in each Protector’s District, was to be 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’.³¹

W. Baldwin Spencer, Professor of Biology at the University of Melbourne, well-known for his exploratory and anthropological expeditions to Northern Territory in 1894, 1895, 1896-1897 and 1901, was appointed Chief Protector, and Special Commissioner for a twelve-month commission, upon Basedow’s resignation in 1912. Spencer’s brief was to commence implementation of the Ordinance and to investigate and to make policy recommendations on Aboriginal welfare.

Spencer gave much thought to what extent Aboriginal law should continue to operate. He thought it advisable not to interfere with traditional customs. He recommended that 11,000 hectares be set aside as Aboriginal reserves, for the protection and ‘betterment’ of traditional Indigenous people.³² Keeping track of this group was an issue. Basedow had put forward a proposal to the Minister of External affairs in 1911 for ‘permanent individual identification’ of Aboriginal people. He proposed injecting liquid paraffin under the skin ‘in the shape of any conventional mark decided upon’, modelled on the practice of the German criminal investigation departments. It was essential, he insisted, to the success of

³¹*Northern Territory Aboriginals Act 1910 (S.A.)*. Cited by C.D. Rowley. 1970. p. 231

³² W. Baldwin Spencer. 1913. *Preliminary Report on the Aboriginals of the Northern Territory*. Government Printer, Melbourne, p. 24. Other reserves were set aside subsequent to Bleakley’s Report and recommendations in 1929.

his scheme of Aboriginal protection and control, that each Aboriginal person have his own registered mark.³³ This proposal was not adopted, but its recommendation clearly indicates not only the official anxiety that prompted it, and the authorities' intention to control the Indigenous population, but also the attitudes towards Indigenous people and their rights, of those in power.

A significant proportion of Spencer's 1913 report concerned the employment of Indigenous people. He contrasted strongly the 'so-called civilised native in the settlement...for the most part, a useless loafer, [and Spencer's concern here was that the rights of the whites in the settlements be protected and upheld] and the native in the back blocks...[who] under the charge of a humane man, is a cheerful worker and perfectly happy'.³⁴ He acknowledged that Aboriginal workers were indispensable to pastoral stations, and he had a genuine (although unenforced) concern for the welfare of Aboriginal pastoral workers. He asserted that the value of these workers was recognised and they were generally 'well-treated',³⁵ they and their families provided with clothes, food and tobacco and the freedom to 'go bush' when they needed to, as payment for their labour. They were in no need of cash payment, for it was worthless out in the bush.

Spencer intended that the provisions of the *1911 Aboriginals Ordinance* be strongly enforced. The new regulations he drafted strengthened the power of the

³³ National Archives of Australia, Canberra. CRS: A1/15 Item: 11/8705. 6/5/1911 Identification Marks for Aborigines

³⁴ T. Austin. 1997. p. 32

³⁵ In contradiction to much Indigenous testimony, and the reports and protests of humanitarian, religious and other groups.

Chief Protector to take people of full and mixed descent into custody and remove them from the control of the whites, made it easier to remove employment licences, and toughened restrictions on non-Aboriginal entry to reserves and Aboriginal entry to prohibited area. He recommended that officers in charge of police stations, professional officers of the Aboriginal Department and other suitable people such as heads of mission stations be appointed Protectors and he argued for increased powers to be given to Protectors, especially the authority to cancel employment licences where women were used for immoral purposes.³⁶

Spencer acknowledged that the 'half-caste problem' was a difficult one. The population of mixed race children, especially of 'quadroons', was increasing. Only a few of the fathers acknowledged or provided for these offspring. There was little chance that these mixed race children ever would be accepted into white society, he maintained, and even if they were adopted (which was rare) there would be problems, for the girls at least, 'owing to the temperament of the half-caste and to the fact that no white man, if white women are available, will marry a half-caste aboriginal.'³⁷ Although intellectually superior to the full-bloods³⁸ their ancestry and associations told against them, therefore they must be withdrawn from Aboriginal camps and placed on reserves, however cruel it might appear to separate mother and child; it was imperative that the half-castes be strictly separated in institutions designed for their training. Subsequently, establishments were set up for the 'protection' and education of mixed-race children, such as the

³⁶ T. Austin. 1997. p. 34. Also T. Austin. 1989. pp. 73 -84

³⁷ B. Spencer. Northern Territory Aboriginal Department Draft Preliminary Report, 1913, p. 21

³⁸ A view which still has currency in certain quarters almost a century later.

Half-Caste Home in Darwin and the Bungalow in Alice Springs (Stuart), where ‘coloured’, ‘fair’ or ‘half-caste’ children were distinguished from ‘white’ or ‘full-blood’ children. Other children were cared for in missions.³⁹

It was into this political and social milieu that Don Ross was born, in 1915. But, he was unaware, at least in his early childhood, that his existence and the existence of growing numbers of children like himself who were the products of ‘miscegenation’ were of such grave concern to the white settlers and the Government. Initially, at least, Don was protected from much of the furore surrounding Aboriginal ‘protection’ and the ‘half-caste problem’. He lived out bush, in a location which was an arduous travelling distance from the officials in Darwin and Melbourne, and which was also some distance from the towns and settlements it was felt had such ill effects on Aboriginal people. The closest centre to Neutral Junction station was the small settlement at Barrow Creek, with its Telegraph station, police station, ration depot and camp for Kaytetye people, and, after 1924, a hotel (which subsequently provided Don Ross with drinking companions and wider contact with the ‘outside world’). He rarely left the station, occasionally going to Stuart (Alice Springs) with his grandfather, George Hayes, or to Barrow Creek, Wycliffe or Wauchope for the mail, supplies or to attend the races and picnic days.

³⁹ Long-standing conflict ensued between the pastoralists and missions, particularly in Central Australia where pastoralists accused the Hermannsburg mission of harbouring cattle killers, and missionaries such as Annie Lock (who spoke out against the brutal actions of Constable Murray’s party in the commission of enquiry following the Coniston massacre) of ‘spoiling’ Aboriginal people by giving them ideas above their station. A certain amount of scorn still is exhibited towards ‘do-gooders from the south’ by some Northern Territorians who believe only they understand the true nature of Aboriginal people, and what is best for them. The converse, of course, may be argued, that outsiders often know little of the history and particular conditions of the Northern Territory and act precipitously and ill-advisedly in their attempts to defend Indigenous rights.

His world was largely bounded by Kaytetye country; he was the son of a Kaytetye woman; he lived surrounded by Indigenous relatives and playmates. But, in significant ways that world was mediated and controlled by white men. He was also the son of a white man and the grandson of a white station owner. Both his white grandfathers and his paternal great grandfather had been pioneers on the Northern Territory frontier. Don lived in the station house and not in the Kaytetye camp on the other side of the creek. 'I was inside with the boss. The old boss, even when I was a little boy,' Don said. 'I ate at the table with them [the white people] and they [the Kaytetye boys and men] they didn't; they sat outside. I got better treatment, better food. I was treated better than them, poor beggars'.⁴⁰

Don Ross: The workers didn't really mix with the whites. All their tucker on one plate, they used to get. Tea and all, in the billy. All the blackfellas there, Mum used to feed them: all their tucker was cooked outside.⁴¹

Don knew his grandfather wanted/expected him to be a white man, as children *are* aware of their parents and elders' wishes, even without these wishes necessarily being stated explicitly. Don also was aware of the attitude his grandfather and other white men held toward Indigenous people. He was forced, from an early age, to negotiate the incompatibilities of his world, which contained both Kaytetye and European families and cultures.

Don Ross: I mixed with the [Kaytetye] workers. We worked together, spoke Language [Kaytetye]. But I was careful. Old George Hayes used to growl at me for saying that, once or twice. "Don't you talk blackfella, talk English." But it made no difference; when he wasn't around, I was still singing it out.⁴²

⁴⁰ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 23 October 1997

⁴¹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁴² Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 23 October 1997

Don Ross, although respected by Kaytetye people for his skills and achievements, was never initiated into Kaytetye law. Don Ross and I had one brief (and obviously awkward and possibly somewhat culturally inappropriate) conversation about this aspect of his life.

Terry Whitebeach: Were you taught [Kaytetye law] in your family?

Don Ross: No. Very little.

Terry Whitebeach: Did you talk about it with the Kaytetye boys?

Don Ross: Yes. They taught me a fair bit.

Terry Whitebeach: Old men?

Don Ross: The old men, yes.

Terry Whitebeach: Did you go through initiation?

Don Ross: No, they were afraid the Old Man would shoot them.

Terry Whitebeach: Really? And would he have?

Don Ross: Well, he was dead against it.

Terry Whitebeach: How do you feel about that?

Don Ross: Well, it turned out all right, anyway. But they would have done...you know. They thought a lot of me. They did.⁴³

As his grandfather's favourite Don obviously was anxious to retain his grandfather's favour and to avoid incurring the same scorn and poor opinion his grandfather had of Indigenous people. Without detracting from Don Ross's own natural proclivities and talents, which were prodigious, as Don himself admitted and many other people attested, it is interesting to speculate on the degree to

⁴³ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 20 March 1998

which the desire to please and emulate his grandfather and to keep in favour (or conversely, to avoid the disfavour meted out to other Kaytetye people) may have been significant in Don Ross's accruing numerous key practical skills at a comparatively early age, and also in his not openly defying his grandfather by allowing the Kaytetye elders to 'grow him up' to take his full adult role in Kaytetye culture and society. It is difficult to try and imagine the feelings of Don's Kaytetye family as they saw him growing up without the deeper aspects of the culture: perhaps they thought he was safer and better off as a white man, given the times. And at least he was living on his own country, with access to his Kaytetye family. They certainly were not adequately equipped to meet the implied or real threat of guns and the punishments meted out European law. To a different degree that dilemma exists still, for many Aboriginal people and communities – as they weigh up the costs and gains of adhering to more traditional ways, or of taking on European values and lifestyles.

In one interview I requested that Don explore the implications of some of the information he had given me regarding his early life and the attitudes of white people towards Aboriginal people. He found this process arduous, and I always felt moral qualms about instigating such sessions, but it was necessary, we agreed, in order to help people who were not aware of Northern Territory history to understand Don's life and narrative. In dialogues such as these, perhaps more than anywhere else, the absence of the non-verbal component of the interchange limits the reader's apprehension of the full details and scope of what the occasion offered and communicated. The relative poverty of the written record becomes very evident.

Terry Whitebeach: What did you think when you were growing up, being brought up by whites, but you also had an Aboriginal family too. Did you think about that?

Don Ross: I did think about it, but I was frightened. I couldn't do much. It was no good. I'd have liked to have the boys, the kids, you know, with me. Playmates. A lot of them were related, you know. And I was feeling a bit crooked about that. I should have had them.

Terry Whitebeach: Living in the station with you?

Don Ross: Yes. They used to live in the camp with their parents.

Terry Whitebeach: And did you ever talk about that with your mother?

Don Ross: Yes, I did. She thought it was no good. But she couldn't do nothing.

Terry Whitebeach: Did you ever talk about it with George Hayes?

Don Ross: Oh, he wouldn't have them. She knew he wouldn't come up with that. He'd have the workers all right, and the bloody kweyayes (women) but no outsiders.

Terry Whitebeach: Even if they were family?

Don Ross: No

Terry Whitebeach: So why were you different?

Don Ross: He tried to make a white man out of me, see.

Terry Whitebeach: And down in the camp there were other children who had a white father and an Aboriginal mother, or just the ones with an Aboriginal mother and father?

Don Ross: Yes, well, they were a bit of a mixture.

Terry Whitebeach: So it depended on whether the station people took a shine to you? Or was it because you were his grandchild?

Don Ross: Yes. That's why, I suppose.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 April 1998. Don's own eldest son, Alec, was later taken away. The reader will note that in this interview I trespassed against one of the most basic canons of oral history interviewing: asking a leading question – and thus putting words into the interviewee's mouth. (And here I asked not one, but two questions concurrently.)

When Don and I discussed the taking of ‘half-caste’ children he said that it didn’t happen much when he was a child.⁴⁵ At no time did Don himself feel the impingement of the Aboriginals’ Ordinance recommendations for the separation of mixed-race children from their tribal relatives.

Terry Whitebeach: So in the early days it didn’t happen? You weren’t in any danger of it?

Don Ross: No. Me and a lot of others grew up without that worry. Safe.

Terry Whitebeach: You didn’t have that fear, as a child, that someone would come and take you?

Don Ross: No. No. I didn’t.⁴⁶

In the annual report of the Northern Territory for 1915, which was received in Melbourne on 10 September 1915 (six months after Don Ross’s birth) by the Minister for External Affairs, the Northern Territory Administrator, J.A. Gilruth, commented:

[on the] disappointing [progress] in the vital direction of settling people of European origin permanently in the Territory of the Northern Territory... I found no evidence that any number of white people are desirous of making the necessary effort to settle permanently and of course our race cannot be pitchforked in and forced to remain willy-nilly. The consensus of private opinion seems to me to be against the possibility of development by whites, though public opinion is in favour of no other development’.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Which I understood to indicate either that he was not aware of it, or that none of his peers had been taken, during Don’s early childhood, or, possibly, both.

⁴⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 April 1998

⁴⁷ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A3/7 NT 1918/532, Northern Territory of Australia, Report for the Year 1915.p. 17

The Northern Territory was still only lightly ‘settled’ and intermittently the home of the European settler. White women were still conspicuous by their absence, and were to remain so for decades yet. George Birchmore wrote on the back of a photo he took at the first race meeting at Barrow Creek in 1926: ‘all the white women between Alice Springs and Katherine at that time’. The photo shows seven women, only.⁴⁸ It was obvious that miscegenation was destined to remain a feature of Northern Territory life, if for no other reason than the scarcity of white women available to the settlers as wives and partners.

The 1915 report covered such matters as education, mining and geology, agriculture, including the pastoral industry, health, public works, and also included a report on the Aboriginal Department by H.E. Carey, Chief Protector of Aboriginals, who found ‘little fault... with the humanity of...European employers of natives in the townships’.⁴⁹ The employers, Carey said, had recognised ‘that the Aboriginal is a human being, to be treated as such’. The treatment of Aboriginal workers on the larger stations ‘had always been fairly satisfactory’, Carey maintained, ‘at the same time, if it is true that most employers are beginning to recognise their responsibilities to the native, there is also the necessity for teaching the native his share of the bargain in working for the white employer’.⁵⁰ Again we see the tension between the rights and responsibilities of black and white: both are addressed but from within the assured hegemony of white

⁴⁸ J. Robinson. 1999. *Bushman of the Red Heart: Ben Nicker: 1908–1941*. Central Queensland University Press, Rockhampton, p. 9

⁴⁹ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A3/7 NT 1918/532. Northern Territory of Australia, Report for the Year 1915. Report on Aboriginal Department, p. 26

⁵⁰ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A3/7 NT 1918/532. Northern Territory of Australia, Report for the Year 1915. Report on Aboriginal Department, p. 26

government policy, the desire to develop the colony and the strong belief in the rights of the superior race to create a nation of free white citizens.

Aboriginal people were excluded from citizenship, and its rights and responsibilities, and it would not be until 1967 when a Constitutional Referendum overwhelmingly approved an amendment to the Constitution,⁵¹ that Aboriginal people were counted in the national census, and that all states except Queensland abandoned laws and policies that discriminated against Aboriginal people. The words 'other than the aboriginal race in any State' were then struck out of Section 51 xxxvi, so that it read:

The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:

the people of any race for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws

Section 127 stated:

In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a state or other parts of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives shall not be counted.

This was struck out in its entirety. It was the culmination of a long slow process of the concession of mutual rights and obligations of citizenship to groups other than Europeans in Australia. Other landmarks included the 1949 legislation which gave Aboriginal people the right to enrol and vote at federal elections provided they were entitled to enrol for State elections, as was the case in New South

⁵¹ This referendum saw the highest YES vote ever recorded in a Federal referendum, with 90.77% voting for the change. National Archives of Australia Fact Sheet 150.

Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania, or had served in the defence forces. In 1962 voluntary enrolment on the electoral roll and voting at federal elections was extended to all Australian Aboriginals.⁵² They were not obliged to enrol, but once enrolled, voting was mandatory. In 1978 the Northern Territory was granted self-government and 7 June 1980 saw the first election conducted for the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. 1984 saw the introduction of compulsory voting for Australian Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.

As Julie T. Wells has pointed out, citizenship in ‘settler’ times, ‘was constructed as a complex reciprocal relationship between individual and state and it represented a way of controlling national hegemony in the task of nation building’.⁵³ ‘Racism was the fundamental reason for the exclusion of Aborigines’, Wells states.⁵⁴ A white Australia was the ideal, and Aboriginal people, whilst fulfilling the task of menial workers in the new nation, were not accounted suited to citizenship. How they were to fit into this new nation, once it became clear that they were not conveniently going to vanish, was the subject of much heated discussion and ongoing deliberation.

J.T. Beckett, Chief Inspector of the Aboriginal Department, was outspoken in his Report on Aboriginals, 19 June 1915, stating clearly his concern for Aboriginal people. This brought him into conflict with Spencer, who trod more delicately when faced with vested interests in the Northern Territory. Beckett’s opposition

⁵² The last state to provide Indigenous enfranchisement was Queensland, in 1965. National Archives of Australia Fact Sheet 150.

⁵³ J.T. Wells. 1995. p. 12

⁵⁴ J.T. Wells. 1995. p. 12

to the police as Protectors – he saw a conflict of interest, which both potentially and actually existed – and his assertion that, removed from Aboriginal influences, half-caste children were capable of equal educational attainment to whites, were both opposed to popular opinion. Beckett recommended stronger measures to protect Aboriginal people as ‘in present circumstances the natives are not by any means efficiently protected or controlled.’ He admitted that a major difficulty in dispensing justice was ‘the fact that aboriginal evidence seldom gets credence when opposed to statement made on oath [although] an aboriginal rarely gives false testimony in a court of law.’⁵⁵

Beckett’s report addressed the problem of half-castes at length, drawing attention to the inequities between the lot and treatment of males and females, and contradicting the popular assessment of half-castes as the innately morally degenerate, lesser kin of their ‘purer’, but now sadly perishing, primitive relatives and forebears. His report stated:

Wherever there has been a settlement of white or alien coloured people, half-caste children born of aboriginal mothers, are in evidence...Amongst them are many bright-faced, intelligent boys and girls, who, if given a chance to obtain an elementary education, would be able later in life to look after themselves and compete successfully for employment in the labour market. In their youth these children live in camps, and assimilate the habits, customs and superstitions of the full-blooded aboriginal, and when later in life they are impelled by a natural desire to assert the ‘white side’ and live and work with the whites, they find it practically impossible to escape from the thralldom of the tribe, the members of which never give them peace so long as they can keep in communication with them. The fact that the descent is traced through the maternal side, and that every half-caste regards his mother’s husband as his father (the actual father being frequently unknown, and always tribally ignored), assists in cementing the half-caste to his tribe. These things make it difficult to give the half-caste

⁵⁵ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A3/7 NT 1918/532. Northern Territory of Australia, Report for the Year 1915. J.T Beckett. Report on Aboriginal Department, p. 44

a fair start on the road to a civilised life, unless he or she be removed in infancy, before even environment begins to affect the child's character.

The lot of the half-caste man is necessarily a lot easier than that of his sister. The boy is usually snapped up at an early age by some white man, who often enough teaches him a good deal of variable value. Generally, amongst other knowledge, he learns something useful, principally stock work, and is thus able to knock out a living, though this is often a hard and ill-requited one. He may have had a dozen masters before he is fifteen years of age, filling in time between jobs by returning to his tribe, who always give him a sympathetic welcome. Thus, unless he should have the luck to be taken in by some one who may take an interest in him, he remains to all intents and purposes a blackfellow.

The half-caste girl who remains with the tribe anywhere in the vicinity of a civilised settlement has one inevitable destiny, and that the most degraded.

It is freely stated that all half-castes are morally worthless; that the taint is in them and that this must inevitably manifest itself. This, in my opinion, is cruelly false, and in nearly every case uttered without thought. That the half-caste girl without proper protection is more likely to become degraded than a white girl goes without saying, for she runs the risk, when the time and opportunity are favourable of actually being sold by her tribal relatives for prostitution, or taken away by force by some unscrupulous man who keeps her just as long as he cares to do so. Where half-caste girls have been given a fair chance and kindly treated, they do not go wrong: in fact they exhibit a plain repulsion to follow any such sort of life. In cases where half-caste girls are living in open immorality, the history if looked into proves the impossibility of the girl taking any other course.⁵⁶

In 1918 the Commonwealth Government revisited the provisions of the 1911, and the new *Aboriginals Ordinance* was drawn up. Besides evincing an administrative preoccupation with miscegenation (the definition of 'half-caste' was extended to include 'quadroons'), an obvious concern within the prevailing cultural ethos and stated nationalist intention of securing a 'white Australia', its provisions required pastoralists wishing to employ Aboriginal people to take out a permit, but the

⁵⁶ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A3/7 NT 1918/532. Northern Territory of Australia, Report for the Year 1915. J.T Beckett. Report on Aboriginal Department, p. 44-46

Chief Protector of Aborigines was given no guidance as to the conditions he should expect to see established, nor was a minimum wage laid down.⁵⁷ (In fact it was seventeen years after the *1911 Aborigines Ordinance* before the next major investigation of Aboriginal living and working conditions took place.) The Ordinance made provision for obtaining material support for half-caste children from their white fathers if it could be proven the man had the ability to pay, and ‘provided that no person shall be taken to be the father of the child unless the evidence of the mother is corroborated in some material particular’.⁵⁸ It states clearly that the unions which resulted in such offspring were unlawful.

- (1) Any person (except an aboriginal or a half-caste not living with his wife) who
 - (a) habitually consorts with a female aboriginal or half-caste; or
 - (b) keeps a female aboriginal or half-caste as his mistress; or
 - (c) unlawfully has carnal knowledge of a female aboriginal or half-casteshall be guilty of an offence.⁵⁹

As the child of such a union, Don Ross was in a vulnerable position. Although his reminiscences of his early childhood obviously demonstrate very little overt consciousness of the politics of the times, his very personal memories are framed by the particular conditions and tenor of the times into which he was born. Don Ross remembers his early life as a safe happy time spent both under the protection of George Hayes, the white boss, and in close association with his Kaytetye relatives: this despite his grandfather’s disapproval of anything Aboriginal. It was a relatively free life, by his own admission, full of adventure and interest out in the

⁵⁷ P. Read. 1979. p. 7

⁵⁸ *Northern Territory of Australia, No. 9 of 1918. An Ordinance Relating to Aborigines*, Section 44. National Library of Australia, Canberra, pp. 12–13.

⁵⁹ *Northern Territory of Australia, No. 9 of 1918. An Ordinance Relating to Aborigines*. Section 52, p. 15

bush, and in lots of ways it was indistinguishable from the memoirs and reminiscences of white station children and families in the Northern Territory.

But there are also aspects of his stories of early childhood that bear resemblance to testimonies like those, for example, of those Holocaust survivors who were too young to remember details of particular times of political and social abuses (such as the rise of Nazism and Hitler's 'final solution' of the 'Jewish problem') that potentially and actually constituted great danger and upheaval for themselves and their families. Their memories of their early childhoods demonstrate their lack of understanding, as young children, of the nature and magnitude of political events and changes surrounding them: the recorded memories feature instead intimate associations with family and localised physical surroundings, (and, from some survivors, unformulated feelings of disquiet or danger). However, the events that were destroying their families so deeply affected these children that their stories bear the weight of these catastrophic happenings, whether they are explicitly articulated or recalled, or not. The silences, or the brief, qualifying remarks, the throwaway lines, alert the listener/reader, who *does* have access to a fuller version of the events of those times, to the existence of a wider, more dangerous set of circumstances and contingencies than are overtly present in the narrative. Don's childhood memories have a certain poignancy, when they are set against the documentary evidence of the tenuousness of the safety in which he stoutly averred he passed his childhood.

Don remembered his mother, his home, his playmates, his surroundings; the garden, particularly, for its productivity, for the fact that it was one of his mother's domains, and because it was the site of childhood mischief:

Don Ross: We had a great garden there. Oh God, wonderful. Grew anything, turnips, carrots, oh, anything you can name. We had everything, plenty of grapes growing there, miles of them. Watermelons, rock melons, miles of it. Us kids used to go and pinch 'em sometimes. The old man woke up to it one day. Us stupid kids would pull the carrots out and pull the top off, the leaf part, and put it back there, and it went dry, you see. Shouldn't have left it there. He called us up. 'Did you do this?' he asked me. I said, 'No, I never pinched anything'. But I did. I pinched turnips, I think, and carrots. Of course I bloody pinched them. He knew that'd be a lie. But he wouldn't hit me. He said, 'You kids better look out for yourselves now. Next time you're pinching, I'm going to belt the bloody shit right out of you'.

Me and Old Hector Kemarre used to go down and pinch the watermelons every night. There were hundreds there. We used to go down the creek with them. Take our pocket knives and eat them in the dark. We used to have a big blow out. The bloody things used to go bad, we had to eat them or they'd have gone bad. Mum knew, but she wouldn't say nothing. Every bloody night we used to get a couple of the smallest ones, me and Old Hector.⁶⁰

But even these apparently artless memories give insights into the uneven power relations of the time. George Hayes accused Slippery, a Kaytetye boy, of stealing from the garden, and threw a piece of wood at him and injured him. The difference between George Hayes' response to his grandson's mischief and to the traditional Kaytetye boy's supposed misdemeanour is significant. Don, who was often guilty of purloining vegetables and fruit from the garden, was never hit: Slippery, who, on Don's admission, was innocent of stealing the watermelons, was summarily punished, with no redress possible. But then he was black – and therefore not to

⁶⁰ Manuscript of *Good One*, Don Ross

be trusted. He must be kept in line, must learn the consequences of touching, or even of being accused of touching, anything that belonged to the whitefella boss.

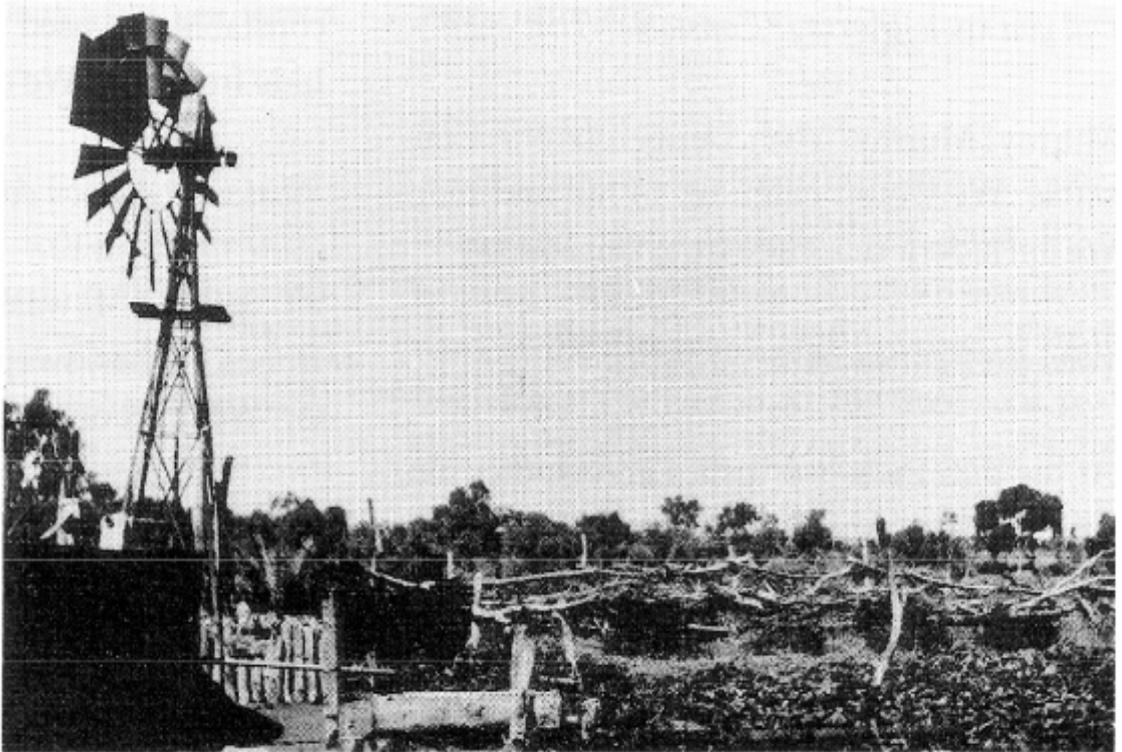


Figure 10: George Hayes' Garden on Neutral Junction station 1927
GEN 572/17 ASTS 1594 Mortlock Library of South Australia

Don's memories of his mother were of a woman who was nurturing and practical, but powerless when it came to negotiating with Europeans.⁶¹ Hettie was familiar with the ways of white people: she had worked in the kitchen at Barrow Creek before Don was born, which was where she met Alec Ross, Don's father. She was adept at keeping a garden and cooking European-style meals, as well as hunting for traditional bush foods.

⁶¹ According to Blanche Hayes, George Hayes often hunted Hettie's Aboriginal husband away. And it seemed Hettie only visited the Kaytetye camp when George Hayes was away from Neutral Junction station. Personal communications with Myfany Turpin 1998–2002.

Don Ross: Mum looked after the garden, and did the cooking. She was a hard worker. She was a lovely mother. She used to make me happy. She was a good cook, too. She cooked everything, bread and meat and vegies, and beautiful rissoles, with thyme and gravy. They were the best rissoles I ever tasted. Gawd, I could eat them. I used to eat them till I was sick. In the morning I used to go out for the horses, early in the morning, and I used to tell her to make rissoles. She'd make them, too, wrap them up in paper and I'd take them out when I went.

There was plenty of bush tucker too. It [Neutral Junction] was a new place, see, real wild yet, so there was plenty of bush tucker. Goannas, plenty of witchetty grubs, bush fruits, lots of kangaroos. [My mother] used to go out a lot and get bush tucker. She was a great hunter. Oh, we got a lot of bush tucker when we were out, you know. Ride along, get hungry, and you'd eat whatever you could find. Alangkwe (bush banana), conkerberry, ahekeye (bush plums), another black berry, ankweleye. And meat – kangaroo – but we had plenty of beef, bullock, we didn't have to kill any bush meat. But a blackfella, he likes that kangaroo now and again. Geez, they'll eat it. Cook it.⁶²

Again the differentiation, which was legally and administratively enforced, and enshrined in the consciousness of the time, made itself felt, as Don distinguished between himself and the other station people, and their habit of eating beef, and the 'blackfella [who] likes that kangaroo now and again'. That same distinction is seen when Don, recalling his playmates, said, 'I had a lot of boys to play with, you know. Only Aboriginals, that's all I had to play with'.⁶³ Nevertheless, the friendships were genuine, and Don took great pleasure in recalling childhood games, games which modelled the adult pursuits of their familiar environment.

Don Ross: Hector put this whip around and a lizard grabbed it, see. Hung onto it. Well, he tried to crack it off. Nothing. Tried to gallop with it and dragged it over sticks and everything and it never let go. Still hung to that bloody thing. By Jesus, it was terrible. It was a frilled neck lizard. It was holding onto the tail of the whip. It was interesting to know how the bloody thing hung on. When he cracked

⁶² Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁶³ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

it [the whip] he swung it [the lizard] around, couldn't get rid of it. By Jesus, he [the lizard] stuck to that whip.

We played football, too. Make 'em out of socks, fill 'em with bloody rags; fill the sock, cut it off and sew it. We used to make balls and they were good ones too. We used to play football, me and the other kids.

We used to play this racecourse game, with sticks and matchboxes, too. We'd make a round mark in the dirt, for a racecourse, sometimes a big one, if there was a mob of us. We used sticks for horses, and we marked off the track in sections. Anyhow, you'd spin the box, and if it came down straight, that was a six, and on the side a little bit, that was three, and if it came down flat, on the match side, that was one. You'd count the numbers, what came up on your box, to make your horse go round the track. We used to name the horses by the ones we used to ride. Old Hector was about the best, I think, at this game. [We were all] playmates. A lot of them were related, you know. I was good mates with them, played with them, on horseback and worked with them.⁶⁴

But Don's greatest desire as a child was to be with the workers in the stock camps.

Don Ross: When I was eight years old I was in the stock camp. Real little fella. That was my fault, though. He [George Hayes] would have left me a bit longer, only they had gone out one day and I ran after them on foot, after the packhorses, oh, about a mile away or more. George Hayes took me back home and said, 'I'll pick you up next time. You wait'. I waited till next time and they brought a horse for me. A creamy mare, nice quiet mare, called Canary. She had one growing up, a filly, broken in, too. I was riding her for a while.

That was it. I never left that camp anymore. I was in the workers' camp forever. I felt all right. I was happy, that's one thing. My God, yes. The other boys were a bit jealous. They reckoned I was mighty. Next day we went mustering. We brought the cattle in, took them to Bean Tree yard. We yarded them there. Next day mustering, we went along, then we went home. Took them home and branded them. I was a big stockman then, by God, I was.⁶⁵

The young boy's desire to be with the men, the status incurred by being in the workers' camp, both were understandably heady incentives, but the young boy's

⁶⁴ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁶⁵ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

triumph at having achieved his aim also prefigured the almost inescapable destiny of a half-caste boy on a cattle station, life as a stockman. George Hayes, whilst fond of the lad, obviously intended he should join the workforce as quickly as possible, and had no intention of wasting time on getting Don an education. But the grandson was rescued from the life of illiteracy to which George Hayes condemned his only son, Young George Hayes. An educated 'old timer' took it upon himself to teach Don to read and write and calculate.

Don Ross: I never went to school. There was an old fella come there, Bill Abbott, an Englishman, he was a well-educated man, he taught me. Just give me a start, and I learned myself to read and write. He knocked about up here for years. He was down at Charlotte Waters, I think, for years, in a place there, operating telegraph machines. He was a gardener on Neutral. He had a good garden. He seen when I been writing, copying, you know. I could write my name real nice and I taught myself that. He had some slates and things and he started teaching me. That's how I started, copying his writing. Oh, I went like nothing. Oh Jesus, I learned in no time. I was going like buggery once I had a start. Every night there was a school: he used to call me. He'd show me. He had proper things written out. He taught me and my brother a fair bit. He cleared out not long after that. He shifted to Stirling station. [That was] when Kidman⁶⁶ owned it.

Bill Abbott taught me how to add up money, and everything with figures. Sums, you know, everything. I used to do that no matter whether I was in the stock camp or not. I used to take them things and do them by the firelight. He used to say, 'You better look out that somebody don't chisel you. They pinch things off you. Look out for thieves. You gotta be able to look after your money, count them'. I was very thankful to that old fella. He went to the trouble of giving me that lesson.

My mother couldn't read and write. Not Young George Hayes either. He could write his name, that's all he could do. Old George Hayes could read, all the white people could. He never give any of his kids schooling. I didn't like him for that, you know. He wasn't going to have me with that schooling, just work. He reckoned schooling was no good, bloody old mongrel. He never taught me much, you know, only work. I don't know what his bloody idea was, but he worked me plenty.

⁶⁶ Huckitta, Stirling, Bond Springs, Hamilton Downs, Austral Downs, Victoria River Downs and Newcastle Waters were all part of Kidman's Northern Territory holdings at various times. P. Forrest. (Sir) Sidney Kidman. In D. Carment, R. Maynard, A. Powell. (eds) 1990. p. 167

Young George Hayes, he sent his kids to school. They went to Quorn, a school for Aboriginals, this side of Adelaide. Yes, Freddy, Frank, Ada, Emily, and who else – that’s all, I think – went to school. He thought it was better. He liked to see them read and write.⁶⁷

Old George Hayes was probably the most powerful and dominant figure in Don Ross’s early life, and his influence the reason Don chose to cast in his lot with the whitefellas and thus forgo the full participation in Kaytetye ceremonial and cultural life. Don Ross did, however, maintain his Kaytetye ties and friendships, and he managed to rationalise the cultural loss. ‘It turned out alright’, he said, as he counted the gains of having retained the affection and the companionship of his Kaytetye relatives as well as having acquired agency in the white world. But whilst acknowledging that Don’s grandfather’s approval and patronage constituted somewhat of a two edged sword, in those times George Hayes would have considered it unthinkable to have allowed or encouraged Don to revert to his Kaytetye origins. Don was an example of what the half-caste could aspire to, if encouraged to shake off his origins and learn to live in a ‘civilised’ fashion. It is very difficult to give an objective picture of a close family member, but Don provided insights into his grandfather’s life and character, from the perspective of a favoured grandson.

Don Ross: Old George Hayes was a hard man, but I got on all right with him, yes. He reckoned I was a great kid. I kept pretty straight. There was plenty to do. I was a bit scared of [Old George Hayes], but he never ever hit me. Well, I don’t know, I should have been hit sometimes, but I never got a flogging from him.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁶⁸ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

Tommy Thompson, a Kaytetye senior man, a generation younger than Don Ross, has different memories of those times.

Tommy Thompson: Don Ross was only a young fella when that cheeky whitefella [George Hayes] was there. He [Don Ross] was also scared and had to work, that whitefella might hit him too, Don Ross. He had to keep up with that old man, his grandfather, too. He had to move or he would get a hiding too. That whitefella might hit half-castes too. They were scared'.⁶⁹

But Don staunchly maintained his grandfather had never hit him, although his grandfather yelled at him – one of the nicknames given to George Hayes by Kaytetye people, because he shouted so much, was ‘horns and bulls’⁷⁰ – he favoured Don above the other children.

Don Ross: He [George Hayes] used to call me ‘imp’ when he was wild. ‘You bloody little hemp [imp]’. He said that a lot of times when I was growing up, when I was doing something with the horses, something like that, not careful enough. And, ‘Look sharp!’ That was another great word. ‘Look sharp!’ And he’d look sharp too. He never said, ‘Hurry up!’ just, ‘You better look sharp!’

He never went without me anywhere. Always took me. Only me, not Dick or Lorna or Blanche. He used to take me in the buggy, go into Barrow Creek to get the mail. Stop in there all day. I used to get lollies. He’d have the rug ready and he’d put it down there in the buggy, spread it out under the seat and I’d lay down. He’d take off and I’d be sleeping.⁷¹

As the son of a white station owner and a ‘half-caste’ Kaytetye woman, Don, according to the laws and cultural perspectives of the time, was assigned the category of ‘half-caste’, which theoretically imposed on him the restrictions

⁶⁹ Interview of Tommy Thompson by Myfany Turpin 10 November 1997 at Artarre (Neutral Junction Station)

⁷⁰ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 11 October 1997

⁷¹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

attendant on this racially circumscribed position in the societal hierarchy. However, he was brought up to move in a European world, and he seemed to have been accepted (superficially, at least,) by most of the white people he came into contact with, and to have sustained quite cordial relationships with them, despite being listed in official documents, such as the Neutral Junction employment return of 1945, as 'half-caste'.⁷²

That Don was able to navigate his way successfully most of the time in the white world may have been due, at least initially, to his 'fairness' as well as to the relationship he had with his grandfather, George Hayes (which probably also would have been predicated to a large extent on his fairness). Don's special place in the affections of his grandfather, may have been because he was male and the eldest grandchild, a clever, good-looking boy whose features (which included the strong build and thick curly hair of George Hayes) bore visible evidence of the white side of his ancestry. Also, Don's athletic ability, lively intelligence and easy and early acquisition of a range of skills would have endeared him to his grandfather, showing Don to be a 'chip off the old block' (George Hayes was a man of considerable strength and skill) and attesting to the dominance of his European ancestry (the blacker the skin the less intelligent, was a cultural cliché of those times) and ensuring his position, from an early age, as a valued addition to the workforce. Don thus would have been a source of pride, not shame, to the old man and the least likely of Hettie's children perhaps to cause him social

⁷²National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS 7114 Item E740 1943/1945 Reports of Aboriginal Workers by George Hayes to Native Affairs, p. 87

embarrassment and difficulties in the racially demarcated world of the Northern Territory.

Don grew up to be a flexible man, with an easy-going nature and very little outward anger. He made friends easily, and got on well with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of both genders. This would have ensured a social mobility perhaps denied a less personable man. I asked Don who he thought were better friends to him. His answer was, 'Blackfellas, I think. There were some good blackfellas amongst them, easy-going, friendly, do anything for you. [Whitefellas] were all right too. I had plenty of them [as friends] when I was a young fella. Some people are more special. They stay in your mind, they do'.⁷³

The fact that Don Ross became a skilled worker, and held his own as a station owner's son and as a skilled cattleman as well as being very good natured, would have ameliorated the disadvantage (from a European point of view) of his Aboriginal ancestry. Don recounts that he did not have a certificate of exemption, as was granted to 'half-castes' who lived in a 'civilised' manner and separated themselves from their more traditional Indigenous relatives. Instead, he carried a letter from a Member of Parliament, Macalister Blain, to navigate situations of potential conflict, for example, when his right to be in a hotel bar was challenged⁷⁴. That he needed to employ such a strategy reveals the tentativeness both of his acceptance and his ability to 'pass' in some situations.

⁷³ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 14 April 1998

⁷⁴ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 27 March 1998

Don, under the tutelage of his grandfather and other white pastoralists, had developed a taste for alcohol as a young man, which was to become a problem for him in later life, when he used it to assuage loneliness and physical pain caused by long hours of hard physical labour. Alcohol was also a social lubricant, although as the account below reveals, it could also function as an irritant in social situations. No doubt as a young man, it gave him status, to drink with the older white station owners, though he revealed to me that initially he disliked intensely the taste of alcohol. But to be able to purchase and consume alcohol indicated that you were not subject to the restriction imposed by the Aboriginal Ordinances, that you had the same freedom in that regard as white men, and thus ascendancy over traditional Aboriginal people, who were subject to the Ordinances and forbidden to drink. And it probably helped to ameliorate the effects of insults offered him as a 'coloured' man, as the account below seems to suggest.

Don Ross: Young George Hayes never drank at all, but Old George Hayes he could drink a lot. 'Stick on the 'erbs', [he used to say]. All the bloody hard stuff he used to drink. Them old fellas they get on the bloody brandy or bloody rum and they would drink for days. Kennedy and Riley, from Elkedra, they used to come in to Neutral and they would get on the bloody grog. God, they'd be drinking there for bloody two or three days a week, for two or three weeks. And I'd go into Barrow Creek and get it for them. He [Old George Hayes] used to get a taste and away he'd go. He'd drink and he'd want a reviver. I'd go back and get some more for him, keep him going.

When I used to come into town [Alice Springs] I used to have a lot of drink till I had nothing left. Drink there all day. Made up for lost time. I was drinking a lot of bloody rum. I was strong and could hold it. But I never got that sick. I had plenty to eat. My mother didn't want me to drink at all. I said, 'I like a little bit of drink'. I was a bugger for rum. That's what I used to drink. Rum. Rum. Rum, never beer.

The policeman at Barrow Creek tried to stop me once. I wrote to Blain, Macalister Blain,⁷⁵ that was him, Member of Parliament, he was a great mate of mine. Write to him and he give me the okay. Showed this policeman what Blain wrote. He just said I ought to be allowed to drink a little drop. I didn't have one of them permits to drink. A lot of them had that, but I didn't. I just had this letter from Blain, that's all I had; I was right then.

The old Barrow Creek pub, I've spent some money there, by gee. I told a bloke there one night, on the bus to Darwin, 'I've bought this bloody pub, six times'. I could be [wealthy], but I spent the money there.

When I was on the road I used to carry a little bit of rum. Make you warm. Keep you warm. I'd drink anything in the end, you know. I got worse, but I never had a row with nobody when I was drinking. I was a good poor bastard. Quiet bugger. Take a lot to get me wild. I've had them call me all sorts of bloody names in the pubs, even here in Alice, yes. They'd finish up calling you 'black bastard' or something, but I didn't mind that. I didn't mind; they could call me anything, swear at me and all. Good tempered, sometimes, I guess. Never get angry. They used to call me anything. I don't know why: they hated them [Aboriginal people], I think. Some still do.

One bloke got hold of me in the Stuart Arms here. 'You come and have a drink, you black bastard', he says. He'd been on the grog. He was bloody aggro.

I said, 'It's too late, pub's closed'. Well it was. I said, 'You can't get a drink now'.

He wouldn't take no notice of that. He wanted me to go and have a drink with him. He did call me a black bastard. Bloke give him to me to take him home, down at the other pub, Underdowns. 'You're going that way, take him with you'.

He was too drunk, all right. He was stupid.

I said, 'I can't have that. You were the white bastard that made me'. I got hold of him and he tried to struggle with me and knock me down, but I put a hold on him – flying mare – picked him up and I threw him out under the lamp post there. I threw him to bloody hell. He fell down there, and he never got up. He stayed down there. I waited a

⁷⁵ Adair Macalister Blain (1894–1983) entered the House of Representatives as an independent member, in 1934. He was interested in the pastoral, mining and industrial development of the Northern Territory. M. Maynard. Adair Macalister Blain. In D. Carment, R. Maynard and A. Powell. (eds) 1990. pp. 20–21

while; I cleared out then and went home, left him there under the lamp post.⁷⁶

Don recounted that his grandfather had asked him whether he wanted to be a whitefella or a blackfella.⁷⁷ He told his grandfather, 'whitefella'. I asked Don the reason for his answer. He replied, 'Because being a blackfella's a bugger of a life'.⁷⁸ The boy also would have been aware that his was the only answer his grandfather was prepared to countenance.

Don Ross's position within Kaytetye society was equally potentially contested, but apparently as equably managed, at least, according to Don. He was not discriminated against for his fair skin. In fact, the Kaytetye understood clearly the advantages in the white world of being a 'yellafella'. And Don's fairness also gave him considerable advantage, as an adult, in procuring the attentions of the Kaytetye women, who supposedly favoured fair men, both for their good looks⁷⁹ and status and for the goods to which these men gave them access.

Although precluded from ceremonial aspects of the culture, Don Ross retained his bush skills, his relationships with family, country and some aspects of Kaytetye culture. He also maintained his language skills, to the extent that in his senior years he was a consultant for the Kaytetye Dictionary project. He was reticent,

⁷⁶ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*.

⁷⁷ One of those impossible questions children are asked, like "Whose little girl/boy are you?" where there is only one 'correct' answer possible – 'Yours'. Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 10 April 1998

⁷⁸ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 10 April 1988

⁷⁹ Their Kaytetye nickname for Don, 'antheyperre' translates as 'lovely one'. Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 30 October 1997

however, about speaking ‘Language’ when non-Kaytetye speakers were present.⁸⁰ He was reputedly one of the few Kaytetye people who could still speak the ‘old Kaytetye’, the purer form of the language, as it existed before English and other Indigenous languages altered Kaytetye language greatly. Don Ross valued his language: ‘It’s a good thing, you know, your own language’, he said.⁸¹

From a non-Indigenous perspective he enjoyed a position of greater power than his Kaytetye relatives: he lived with the whitefellas and he was in charge of the Aboriginal stockmen from the workers’ camps, but in regard to Kaytetye law and culture he was in a position of impoverishment and disadvantage, in comparison with his traditional Kaytetye relatives. It was a situation that would have demanded considerable personal skill to navigate. The evidence is that Don Ross possessed these skills in sufficient measure, at least to operate within the parameters of his familiar environment of station and stock work. He was a versatile man. That he was not well served, living as a ‘half-caste’ person in a nation governed by a belief in a nation-state united by British cultural identity, is evidenced in his particular blindnesses and moral lapses. It was a very difficult world he inhabited, but Don, like many other Indigenous people, managed to construe the life he had lived as meaningful and coherent and self-directed, in spite of the circumstances that had actually and potentially impinged on his choices, narrowed his options and constricted his freedom.

⁸⁰ He rarely spoke Kaytetye in my presence.

⁸¹ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach, Myfany Turpin and Graham Ross 7 February 1988

In 1928, by the time Don Ross was fourteen and virtually in charge of the stock camp, doing a an adult's work, the Queensland Protector of Aborigines, J.W. Bleakley, was appointed by the Government to report on the status and conditions of Northern Territory Aborigines. Considerable unfavourable comment about the conditions of Aborigines was embarrassing the Government, and Bleakley was called upon to submit a report and recommendations for the future treatment and welfare of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. Bleakley's 1929 Report⁸² demonstrates the ongoing preoccupation of those times with 'the evils of miscegenation'. It stated:

Perhaps the most difficult problem of all to deal with is that of the half-castes and how to check the breeding of them and how best to deal with those now with us.... As long as conditions such as exist now in the Territory continue, so this problem will face us. In a country where climatic and other conditions discourage the presence of white women, the evils of miscegenation will be evident.⁸³

His report bore witness to the poor conditions in which Aboriginal people lived and worked on some pastoral leases (and other places) and investigated the provisions currently in place for the 'protection' of Aborigines and half-castes. He couched the recommendations of his report carefully. Improvement to the health, education, employment and living conditions of their Aboriginal workers would be in the pastoralists best interests, he suggested, as it would yield a more efficient work force for an industry to whom these workers were indispensable. He recommended modest wage scales, and provisions for the old and infirm. He found it remarkable that the pastoralists, although 'recognising their absolute

⁸² National Archives of Australia, Darwin. CRS A52/3 Item 472/99429. Bleakley Report. Also Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS A 431/1 Item 50/597

⁸³ National Archives of Australia, Darwin. CRS A52/3 Item 472/99429. Bleakley Report, p. 27

dependence on Aborigines, made no attempt to elevate or educate them, although this should enhance their value as machinery'.⁸⁴ The tension between protection and control was a feature of his report, as it had been of Spencer's.

Dr Cecil Evelyn Cook, who was Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory between 1927 and 1939, attacked Bleakley's report, vehemently opposing Bleakley's recommendation that people of mixed descent, who separated themselves from their traditional relatives and lived in a 'civilised way' should be exempt from the provisions of the Aborigines Ordinance. His views had their origins in Social Darwinism, which had much currency in scientific and popular circles of the time, and in eugenics, with its insistence that the 'dysgenic imbalance' in society was the result of the greater incidence of physical, mental and moral degeneracy inherited by members of the lower class, and that 'degenerates' therefore needed to be prevented from breeding. Miscegenation, it was argued, 'commonly spell[ed] disharmony – disharmony of physical, mental and temperamental qualities... A hybridised people are a badly put together people and a dissatisfied, restless, ineffective people'.⁸⁵ The nationalist concern for racial well-being, translated into Australia's White Australia Policy, was perhaps the most vital driving force in Cook's policy making, Austin writes.⁸⁶ His consistent advocacy of the policy of 'breeding out the colour' by inducing 'half-caste' women to marry European men is the best-known element of his welfare policies. It represents an ultimate eugenics

⁸⁴ Bleakley Report, p. 6. Cited in P. Read. Northern Territory. In A. McGrath. (ed) 1995. p. 277

⁸⁵ Davenport 1917: 56. Also Stoddard 1925: 120. Cited by T. Austin. 1990. pp. 106–107

⁸⁶ T. Austin. 1990. p. 113

solution.⁸⁷ The period of his appointment saw the tightening of provisions of the Aboriginals Ordinances and attempts to increase control over the lives of ‘half-castes’.

This was the time of Don’s young manhood, which would soon herald the beginning of his sexual activity, and it perhaps represented the period he was in greatest danger of incurring the penalties outlined in the Ordinances. In 1933 the sections of the ordinance dealing with sexual contact were strengthened and prostitution made an offence. Further changes in 1936 included greatly increased penalties for whites, even though Cook had arrived at the realisation that ‘legal prohibitions of intercourse are ineffective, no matter how large the penalties’.⁸⁸

But again, it was not just the Government Ordinances Don Ross had to worry about: he was subject to the provisions of, and was required to negotiate, two laws; the Kaytetye law of ‘right skin’ alliances, which required his taking as a wife or sexual partner only women from particular moieties, who were designated ‘straight skin’ for him, and the provisions of European law, as enforced by the police and Chief Protector, which forbade him to form sexual relationships with ‘full-blood’ women, and also made it next to impossible for him to take a white woman as a wife.

Don Ross by his own admission was a man with a healthy sexual appetite, and he enjoyed considerable success with women. He was flattered by women’s

⁸⁷ T. Austin. 1990. p. 113

⁸⁸ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A452 Item 52/451, Cook to Abbott, 2 September 1938. Cited in T. Austin. 1997. p. 271

admiration and desire for him, and found it hard to deny himself sexual congress with available women. It must be noted, not in his defence, but perhaps by way of explanation, that in this matter he followed the example not only of his grandfather, but of policemen, Telegraph workers and other white pastoralists and rural workers, many of whom made sexual contracts or alliances with Aboriginal women, some of which they honoured and some of which were brief and superficial and very much to the detriment of the woman and her tribal husband. Don Ross pointed out that the women gained something from their relationships with 'fair' men like him, or with white men, as well, and that their husbands did not oppose the union as long as their wives were returned to them. His accounts suggested the self-determination and agency that McGrath and others have argued existed, to certain degrees, of Aboriginal women on the 'frontier'. It is also possible that he may have subscribed, in some degree, to the prevailing belief that Aboriginal women were naturally promiscuous, a belief that must have assuaged the guilt of many white men and allowed them to rationalise their 'men behaving badly' activities. And his sexual adventures gave him a certain status among a certain type of men.

But, Don Ross also genuinely liked women and enjoyed their company, and, whilst he was hardly monogamous, he generally treated his partners well: he was an intelligent and engaging human being, non-violent and good humoured. He usually provided materially, if not always consistently, for his partners and his children, to the best of his ability, at least by the standards of the times, and he

acknowledged all of his children,⁸⁹ unlike many half-caste or white men of those times.⁹⁰ Don understood the jealousy that his behaviour caused traditional Indigenous men, and knew they were powerless to act on it. He exonerated himself for most alliances, by arguing that it was the women who chased after him. The narrative of his brief relationship with a Kaytetye woman, Mary, whom he insisted on returning to her employment at the Barrow Creek Post Office, turns on this very point.⁹¹

Don Ross: Mary was a full-blooded Kaytetye woman. She was a good sort, that one. Her father was old Spring Range Jack, an Alyawarr man. I come down the crossing with a mob of bullocks, and it rained up there at the crossing, at Barrow Creek. The creek was running and I camped there with them bullocks, because there's green grass. I camped there for a few days and she knew. She went up there, sneaked up. Of course I accepted her, put her in my bloody swag.

[Then I] said, 'You go back to work now'. I took her up a little bit and let her go. She just went up the hill, she didn't go back to work at all [at the Barrow Creek Post Office]. She went up the hill and as soon as it got dark she come down again. She came down to me again, three or four times. One day I was going up the hill and I seen her coming down the hill, daytime, before dark. I waited for her. I drove up there, made her come down and go in the bloody motorcar. I took her up to the Post Office. 'Here's your woman', I said to Mrs Rattle. She didn't say anything. She was savage; thought I had her all the time, but I only had her at night-time. She hid herself and waited till dark so she could go back again, see. I was doing up the truck there, at the Post Office now. I had this old Mapleleaf. I pulled her down and was doing her up, and I used to go with Hector, to see them bulls had a drink and that. I'd camp there and she'd be there, this

⁸⁹ Even, according to Kaytetye people, some who were not his biological children, but who were the children of women he had partnered. Personal communication with Myfany Turpin, 2000

⁹⁰ Don Ross and I had a number of conversations in which we discussed what constituted proper care and respect for women. He acknowledged that Lorna, his first wife, had had a hard life after he left her. With the exception of Lorna, Don retained the love and respect of his partners and his children. Interestingly, his guilt was greatest where breaking Kaytetye law was concerned.

⁹¹ Which I challenged, and for which relationship (and others) Don good-humouredly admitted he bore an equal responsibility.

bloody Mary. Just sneak up to me at night. God, I must have been in hot water then.⁹²

Don would have been aware of just how much ‘hot water’ he would have been in if Mrs Rattle had been riled enough to insist on legal action being taken against the young stockman. He was at great pains to insist he returned the Mary to her work: severe penalties could be incurred for inducing Aboriginal people to leave their place of work. This account also gives an insight into the delicate balances and hierarchies of social relationships of the isolated and interdependent communities in Central Australia of those days.

Another alliance with a tribal Kaytetye woman, Aileen, was not so fortunate in its outcome. It is my (admittedly optimistic and perhaps unduly romantic) opinion, that had circumstances been different, Don Ross may have made a good marriage with Aileen. Aileen was straight skin choice for Don, therefore acceptable to his Kaytetye relatives, and Don and Aileen were obviously very fond of one another, although their terror at the legal implications of their union led them to take desperate measures to conceal it from official notice. They had several children,⁹³ none of whom survived. Don spoke with great sorrow of the deaths of their children. Don Ross gave an account of the events which led one of these deaths (in this case by omission rather than commission.)⁹⁴

Don Ross; I’ve had twenty-four children. One died, with bloody pneumonia. Oh, a pretty little kid too. Very pretty one. Poor little darling, she was a lovely little kid. She looked like Dawn [another of

⁹² Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁹³ Possibly four, though this number is unconfirmed.

⁹⁴ Those readers familiar with some of the grimmer aspects of Northern Territory history, and the contingencies forced upon desperate people, may read the silences, here.

his daughters]. Sad, all right. Why I didn't get her to the hospital quick was because the police would be on me, you see, having her from a black woman. That's what we was afraid of. We tried to keep that quiet, till she got older, you see. We was bugged, proper, frightened from the police, you see. We wasn't allowed to have gins. If they caught you with one, you're gone. I don't know what the fine was. In gaol, anyway. Bastard of a thing. She [Aileen, the child's mother] was scared, all right. We'd both go in gaol, see. Yes.⁹⁵

And so they were separated by circumstances beyond their control. Don said little about this, although it obviously caused him great pain to recall that relationship (and possibly to reflect, silently, on just how circumscribed his life had been, in those years). Many decades later Don and Aileen got together again, in Don's retirement, the law forbidding such liaisons having been repealed. They spent a decade or so together again in their senior years, living south of Darwin. Aileen's end was a sad one. When Don returned to Alice Springs in very poor health, to be cared for by his family, Aileen returned to Atarre, the Kaytetye community on Neutral Junction Station.

Don Ross: Aileen got drowned some years ago [circa 1990] at Barrow Creek. Well, Neutral Junction. She tried to get across to the station, I think, to get some tucker.⁹⁶ And the water was too strong for her, I s'pose. She reckoned, 'I been across this bugger before'. But she was weaker then.⁹⁷

It was perhaps inevitable that the law would catch up with Don Ross. And it did. His first son, born in the early 1930s to traditional Kaytetye woman Ouida (usually spelled 'Weedah' on patrol officer's returns), whom they named Alec

⁹⁵ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁹⁶ To this day, no bridge has been built across the creek.

⁹⁷ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

(Alexander), after the Ross family tradition of naming their eldest sons Alexander, was taken into custody along with other mixed race children and removed to Croker Island, while Don was away taking cattle to the Adelaide market. Don was appalled, but there was little he could do. He made the best of things by comforting himself with the thought that Alec at least would be give an education. It would be many years before Alec saw his parents again, and by that time his mother's grief had consumed her, so that she no longer recognised her son.

Don Ross: They took Alec. His mother was Weedah (Ouida) Ngamane. Straight one for me. They wouldn't have taken him only I was in Adelaide at the time, you see, no one there to defend him. He was well cared for, I provided for him. I was working. I didn't know till I got to Barrow Creek. But the police was nice about it. That policeman Kennett was there and he told me.

He said, 'You know your son's gone?'

I said, 'No'.

'Well, they rounded up all the half-caste kids and took your son too'.

He was gone. By God, I nearly fell through the bloody floor. He was a kid about five or six then. Weedah, she cried when she seen me. She just grabbed me and howled, poor bugger. Her little kid. We was so happy. But I was away. They shouldn't have taken him, you know, 'cos I provided for him. He went away and I never seen him till he was a man with three kids. But he got schooling, anyway.

Weedah had another child after Alec. That was Colin. She was a sick woman, after. She died a sick woman.⁹⁸

In an interview in Tennant Creek, Alec Ross, who was working at that time at the Aboriginal Children's hostel, reflected on his separation from his family and culture at an early age.

⁹⁸ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

Alec Ross: I remember very little about my early life. I knew we had goats. That's probably at Neutral Junction, not Barrow Creek. I really can't remember much from there. All I know is we had goats. But that may have been at the Bungalow, you know, the old Telegraph Station. I can remember two people there [at the Bungalow], that was Bobby Randall and Alec Kruger.

I cannot remember anything about being taken. The mission said I was probably three and a half when they took me, because when I got to the mission [Croker Island] I think I was four then, or maybe a bit older, I'm not sure, but all I remember is being at the Telegraph Station for my first Christmas. The old Bungalow. They divided a lot of us up and took us to a place in Darwin, Kahlin Compound, and from there they split us up and we all went our different ways. So, I can't remember the real story there, but I can remember going to Sydney and coming back again, to Croker [Island].

The Japs actually flew over us every day while they were bombing Darwin. And the only thing that got us out of trouble, I think, is that the missionaries got us to build a big cross, about three feet wide and about three feet high, with stones, and we had to paint it with white clay, get clay from the creek bed and paint it white and they knew it was only a mission station and nothing else. They bombed Milingimbi, but it had a lot of army and air force personnel there.

The mission boat took us [with some of the staff]. Margaret Somerville, the missionary, God bless her, she must be about ninety now, she came to us when she was about twenty and she stayed for years.⁹⁹ Anyway, she and a few others took us across to Barkly Point, across to the mainland, and we walked from then on to Pine Creek.

We lost a little boy, who was a relation of ours, little Charlie Hayes. He was from Barrow Creek. [A few years ago] I went to find his grave and it's still at Oenpelli¹⁰⁰ and all it's got on it is, 'Charlie Hayes, Croker Islander, three and a half'. It's still there. They [his family] are still trying to get the body back. I went back on that track with an old Victorian sergeant. I worked at the Jabiru police station for a while and he and I went back along that track in a truck just to

⁹⁹ Margaret Somerville (1912–) was a Methodist missionary who went to the Croker Island mission station for 'half-caste' children in 1941. After Pearl Harbor was bombed in December 1941, the civilian evacuation of Darwin was ordered. Darwin was bombed on 19 February 1942 and most of the white women and children were evacuated from Croker Island in March. Margaret Somerville and others stayed with the Aboriginal children and helped in their evacuation by walking with them to Pine Creek, then by army transport and train to Otford, NSW. She returned to Croker Island in 1946, caring for children there till her retirement in 1966. She was awarded an M.B.E. for her services to isolated children. Eve Gibson. Margaret Somerville. In D. Carment and B. James. (eds) 1992. *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*. Vol. 2. Northern Territory University Press, Casuarina. pp. 197–199

¹⁰⁰ Gunbalanya, in Arnhem Land

see how we'd managed it before. You just cannot believe the things we went through there, because there was no track then. There were two Aboriginal guides and about four or five missionaries and the rest were all kids from fourteen down to about one or two. It was really hard.

We went through Malangie and to Sandy Creek. We camped at Sandy Creek. That's a spot outside Oenpelli Mission. They said there were forty or fifty cros there. We used to swim there every day from sun up to sun down, never saw one, so maybe they weren't there at the time. But I think there was a grown-up to sort of take care of us, because a lot of things could have happened. We crossed both those rivers, the South Alligator and East Alligator rivers, on their rafts and boats. When we got to Pine Creek the army was there. They actually took us the rest of the way. The army convoy took us to Alice. We went to Alice and then took a train from Alice. We used to line up with them for a feed. They took care of us. Then we got a train to Adelaide, and from Adelaide to Melbourne, from Melbourne to Sydney, on the train.

They put us in a little place called Otford. It's on the coast about an hour in the train from Sydney [approximately fifty kilometres south of Sydney]. We had to go into Sydney if we wanted anything done, the hospital or anything. It was nice there [Otford]. It was really good there. I had to get up before school – I was eight years old then – and milk two cows before I went to school. And I try and tell the children here [at the hostel in Tennant Creek] that and they must think I was mad. And I say, 'Well, I had to do it'.¹⁰¹

After little or no contact with his family for many years, Alec finally was reunited with them, after meeting his younger brother Graham for the first time, in Sydney, when he (Alec) was in his twenties.

Alec Ross. He [Graham] actually sent me a letter. He knew where I was. He asked Dad. He said, 'Who's this Ross, boxing in Sydney?'

And he [Don Ross] said, 'That's your brother. He was taken away when he was young'.

So Graham came down.

I think Dad wrote to me twice. I was only little at the time. This was before I boxed. I was down in Otford. He wrote to me then. He just

¹⁰¹ Edited interview with Alec Ross by Terry Whitebeach 14–15 March 1999

said, 'I'm your father', and that. Sent me a picture of himself and two other people and a little kiddie in his arms. I don't know who they were. To me, my mother was one of the missionaries, you know. She was always there when I wanted her, Margaret Somerville. It's in the book, *They Crossed a Continent*.¹⁰² Margaret Somerville wrote that.

I got used to everybody else being my brothers and sisters. There was probably ninety of us and we sort of grew up like a family, so today, those women, all grandmothers, they're all my sisters, just like Hetti Perkins in Alice, she was like a mother to everybody, well, that's the way it is with us. Like Mrs Schmidt, who lives here, Nancy Cameron, she married a German guy, well, she and I were in Sydney together, when we left the mission. She was nursing and I was boxing and I used to call her, to give me comfort, you know. 'Come down and see us', [I would say]. She hated boxing but she used to come down to see us, just like back in the old times, just to give me support. It was good, because we talked about Croker and days gone by.

I sorta grew up in Sydney and just thought, 'Oh well, family somewhere', you know, but I didn't bother, you know. I thought, 'They'll find me if they want me'. The thing is, I thought they wouldn't know me anyway. I grew up differently. But then Graham wrote me this little note and left it under my door and said, 'I'm your brother', you know, then I had to meet him at seven o'clock, so it was pretty good. It was good to know you had so many relatives. At least you had a family. I wouldn't have known, except for Graham.

Then Noel [Alec's younger brother, Lorna's and Don's eldest son] came down when my first son was born.¹⁰³ That was the other brother, but Graham had already told him about us, so he came down. That was good. He came down to see me and we looked after his baby while he went to the movies, he and his wife.¹⁰⁴

Mum died a couple of years after I got here [back to Central Australia]. I met her, but she didn't know me. She went a bit nutty, I think, poor old lady. Terrible for her, because, you know, every time I saw her she was always saying, 'I'm gonna look for my son, Alec'. She didn't know me. She had this little drum, all packed with clothes and toys, you know, that she'd picked up. I'd talk to her and tell her,

¹⁰² M. Somerville. *They Crossed a Continent*. 1991. Coleman's Printing, Darwin

¹⁰³ Alec named his first son Godfrey Donald, after his father Don. He was unaware of the Ross family tradition of naming the eldest son Alexander. He named his next two sons David and Graham, after his brothers, and Alec's nephew named his son Alec, to reinstate the family tradition. Interview with Alec Ross by Terry Whitebeach 13 March 1998

¹⁰⁴ Alec also acknowledged the role of his brother David, in helping him return to Central Australia. He said, 'If it hadn't been for David...he sent me the money to come to Alice Springs. Each time I'd call him and he'd send me the money'. Interview with Alec Ross by Terry Whitebeach 13 March 1998

‘You know, your son’s a big boy now, a big man’. She couldn’t understand. It sort of wrecked her life, I think. It was tough in those days. [My father] wasn’t supposed to mix [with Aboriginal people] – he wasn’t allowed to do that, because his father was a Scotsman. In those days it was very tough.¹⁰⁵

Alec, although saddened by the separation, and at some level denied a secure place among his siblings, because of that long separation and different upbringing, bore his father no ill will. When I asked Alec how he would describe his father, he replied, ‘Well, I reckon he’s just a true old bush gentleman’.¹⁰⁶ However, the cultural losses were deep, Alec admitted.

Alec Ross: I can’t speak Kaytetye anymore. I spoke it when I went to the Telegraph Station but I soon forgot it when I went to Sydney. I knew a lot of words when I was at the Telegraph Station. I remember talking to a few of the kids. My mother’s family say, ‘You should be like us’, and I say, ‘No, you have another way, and that’s it’.¹⁰⁷

Graham Ross’s account of meeting up with his brother differed in some of its details from Alec’s, but each acknowledged fully the role the other played in the reunion and gave the other most of the credit. The precipitating factor in their reunion may well have been their mutual involvement in the sport of boxing, which took Graham to Sydney. According to Dick Kimber, Graham Ross had been a very able boxer in his youth. Many Aboriginal people were taught boxing as a sport in the 1960s by Bob Darken, former champion and well-known Northern Territory policeman, who was stationed initially at Hart’s Range, but also served in Darwin and Alice Springs. He ran a number of sports programs for

¹⁰⁵ Edited interview, Alec Ross by Terry Whitebeach 14–15 March 1999

¹⁰⁶ J.R. Purvis agreed with Alec’s assessment of his father. He said, ‘Donald Ross was a very fine person’. Personal communication with J.R. Purvis 26 March 2005

¹⁰⁷ Edited interview of Alec Ross by Terry Whitebeach 14–15 March 1999

Aboriginal people.¹⁰⁸ The elder Ross boys had their father's athletic ability.

Noel Ross was also a good boxer, Dick Kimber recalled.¹⁰⁹

Graham Ross: My brother Alec is part of the Stolen Generation. They might still have that feeling that they're not wanted, even though they're grown up and in their sixties. I just know that I wouldn't have liked it, because I was just taken away from Neutral Junction and put in the Catholic convent, where I grew up, but we weren't taken away and kept away, we were just sent to school for an education. We were allowed home to Mum and Dad. I think if I hadn't have gone looking for Alec I don't think he would ever have come back. Because I flew his wife and their children back. They came back and they stayed here. They never went back.

Dad never told us there was another brother. Never ever told us. I didn't know. It might have upset him too much. I just happened to turn up in Sydney one day and Alec seen a photo of me in a boxing magazine and he hunted around and asked questions and he found where I was. And then we met up and found we were brothers, you know.¹¹⁰

In 1997 Don Ross and his niece Emily Hayes (daughter of Young George Hayes) discussed with Kaytetye linguist, Myfany Turpin, the removal of Aboriginal children from their families.¹¹¹ Almost every family had lost children, it seemed. Don was less philosophical about the losses on this occasion than he appeared to be, in the later interview, cited above, perhaps because the earlier discussion was among family members.

Emily Hayes: Policeman was mustering half-caste kids. Put them all in the big truck.

Don Ross: His name was Coop, he was a mongrel bastard of a policeman. He was stationed at Alice Springs. Sergeant Coop. He was a mean bloody animal. Proper bloody policeman, you know, but

¹⁰⁸ Personal communication with Mrs R. Darken 19 March 2005

¹⁰⁹ Personal communication with Dick Kimber 1999. Noel was the eldest son of Don and Lorna.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 6 February 1999

¹¹¹ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes 31 October 1997

the government was doing it all. He said, 'I couldn't do nothing'. There was a mob [of kids taken] from Alice, I forget [who] now. I wasn't there to see them go anyway. Ruby Willis was one [to be taken], from Barrow Creek, my Alec, and young Hayes.

Emily Hayes: Two Hayes, wasn't it? Your nephews.

Don Ross: Yes, well, the boy was belonging to Old George Hayes, Old Man.

Emily Hayes: That one was old Auntie Lena's son, ay? Well, that was her son. And we had another one, your sister's – Lorna's son – poor little Teddy Borlais. Young Charlie, who fell out of the tree, was Mary's son [Sandy's sister]. I think Lena's son was the youngest. That's what I found out when I went up to Barrow Creek.

Don Ross: They had a lot of kids. They took them all the way up, you know, they picked them up. There was a hell of a mob. Big mob of kids.

Emily Hayes: What's that place the other side of Ti-Tree there, out at Central Mount Stuart there? They had a camp there and they left all the kids there. Just like they were tendering a muster or something, picking up all the half-caste kids and leaving them there at Central Mount Stuart. They had all the kids there. They had a camp there.

Don Ross: That was their depot.

Emily Hayes: Yeah, they went out from there to get all these kids from all these communities, you know, like from Ti-Tree, Aileron, Anningie. Any kids from Neutral went?

Don Ross: Yes, I think.

Emily Hayes: Any Wilsons?

Don Ross: No, I don't think. Only young Long, Jackie Long. Yes, he's got his footballers now, five footballers playing one game. Their father was taken away, Jackie Long. He's in Darwin. He was taken away. He never came back. He was taken from Anningie I think, or Mount Esther. Well, the father used to work there.

Emily Hayes: Yes that's what one of the womans was telling me. They would get all the kids and put them in at Central Mount Stuart. When they were ready they would chuck them all in the truck. And as they were going past Stirling and Barrow Creek they would pick up a bit more and they picked up our kids from there.

Don Ross: Yes, the bastards, left the mothers crying. Most of the kids were only small you know. Alec was only about six. No, less than that.

Emily Hayes: Remember me and Dad and Mum went to pick up Sonny from Tennant Creek Hospital and that was in 1942 and that's when Katherine got bombed and we were at Tennant Creek. Alec Ross mob were already gone. They were gone before the war. Because all the kids from Croker Island were marching through the scrub in Darwin somewhere. Aunty Jessie White mob were all there, they were travelling with Alec Ross mob. It's only what people told me, in 1942 when we had to pick up Sonny and Ronnie from Tennant Creek hospital.

Don Ross: They wouldn't take Emily because she was well looked after by mother, father and grandfather. That's why my kid shouldn't have been taken away, because I provided for him. But they took him because I wasn't there. I don't know what they used to think when they saw half-caste kids. [Police] used to frighten the mothers. Might take them away and get them into trouble.

Emily Hayes: That old lady at Pine Hill [Nana Minnie] she hid all hers away. When they used to see white people coming she used to hide them in a blanket. She'd put them in the swag or hide them out bush.

Don Ross: Yeah, that Peggy was one, ay. The last one, yeah.

Emily Hayes: Peggy and Uncle Alec Pepperell and poor aunt Lorna. Dowra they call her. She kept all her kids and she used to run away with them, hiding somewhere. She worked at Pine Hill. She had a lot of half-caste kids but none of them were taken away. What happened to uncle Alec Pepperell?

Don Ross: He got killed in Mount Isa. Somebody killed him there.

Emily Hayes: But when he was small, did he go to Bungalow?

Don Ross: No. He didn't.

Emily Hayes: But Frank went there, ay?

Don Ross: Yes. He went to school. Bungalow.¹¹²

I enquired whether George Hayes had done anything to try and stop Alec being taken away. He hadn't, Don replied, then suggested that probably George Hayes

¹¹² Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin and Emily Ross 25 October 1997

would have been glad to see those children go. Children like Alec Ross did not fit the plan to breed out the colour: they demonstrated the dangers of potential reversal to native roots. It is a sorrowful fact, however, that whilst genetically closer to his Indigenous roots, darker and more ‘Aboriginal looking’ than his half-siblings, Alec Ross, by virtue of his separation and non-Indigenous upbringing is less culturally connected to his Indigenous world than his fairer siblings – the children of two ‘quadroons’, Lorna and Don Ross. Thus Alec’s (and indeed the whole Ross family’s) losses are another example of the results of these difficult times.

The National Archives in Darwin contains a file of correspondence related to the fate of a ‘half-caste’ child on Neutral Junction in 1940: these letters clearly indicate the attitudes of the times. In the first letter in the series, dated 31 January 1940, George Hayes requested the permission of V.G. Carrington, the District Officer in Alice Springs, to keep ‘a little Half caste girl here [Neutral Junction station], about 6 years old’, rather than allowing her to be taken to the Bungalow. ‘I’ve had her ever since she was an infant,’ he writes, ‘having taken her out of the Blacks Camp and reared her.... I would like to keep her, and my wife says she would look after her.’¹¹³

Carrington, after contacting the Department of Native Affairs in Darwin and receiving their recommendations, replied to George Hayes on 7 February 1940:

The instructions in regard to the placing of Halfcaste children in the Institution are issued by the Director of Native Affairs and the

¹¹³ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1 Item 1942/41 Correspondence

purposes are firstly to ensure that they receive suitable education and secondly to ensure that they are segregated from Aboriginals.

If you are prepared to guarantee these items, I suggest that you communicate with the Director of Native Affairs, Darwin, to ascertain whether he will permit the child to remain on your station and be reared by you.¹¹⁴

Accordingly, Molly Hayes wrote to The Director of Native Affairs, explaining:

Since I've married Mr. Hayes and come to live at the Station it is my wish to keep [the child] if I am allowed. I would take all responsibility of [*sic*] her, unless she became unmanageable, when I would immediately send her to the Bungalow. I could have her educated by correspondence, and would not let her go near the Black Camp. We are very fond of the little thing at present and she is always with us.¹¹⁵

The child would have been about thirteen when George and Molly Hayes left Neutral Junction, and would have been left behind, to an unknown fate.¹¹⁶ One can only speculate on the human cost to the child of their short-lived and somewhat capricious patronage of her. They separated her from her family and culture and raised her to white ways and expectations, then left her with no real way of realising them. Perhaps they made good their promise to educate the child by correspondence, but it seems unlikely, given George Hayes' unwillingness to have his own grandchildren and children educated. There is no indication in the files why this particular child took Molly Hayes' fancy: perhaps she was the child of one of George Hayes' liaisons; perhaps she was an exceptionally attractive infant. Molly Hayes was beyond child-bearing age when she married George Hayes, and would have considered it her right (and very advantageous to the

¹¹⁴ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1 Item 1942/41 Correspondence

¹¹⁵ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1 Item 1942/41 Correspondence

¹¹⁶ I discovered this document after Don Ross's death, so was not able to get him to confirm the identity or fate of the child.

chosen child) to select a child to keep with her, then to deliver her into the custody of the Department of Native Affairs Institution if the child's nature and behaviour no longer pleased her. I see very little practical difference or difference of philosophical approach between the taking up and later discarding (my value-laden term) of this child and the obtaining and disposal of slaves in the United States of America. Each system denied the autonomy and agency of the individual, and treated them as objects rather than autonomous individuals. And in each case the behaviour of the subjected people's 'owners' was condoned by and enshrined in the law of the land.

The laws were harsh and discriminatory towards Indigenous (and other non-white) people in the Northern Territory and social strictures often just as harsh. In the face of the progressively strengthening provisions of the Aboriginals Ordinances, and the prevailing view of Aboriginal people as irremediably child-like and insufficiently intelligent to adapt to the dominant culture,¹¹⁷ it is perhaps Don Ross's great fortune that, whilst protected by his connections with the white world through his grandfather, George Hayes, he was also able to spend a great amount of relatively untroubled time with his Indigenous relatives, out in the stock camps, doing what he loved best, mustering horses and cattle.

At Woodgreen station Don met Lorna Purvis, a 'half-caste' Arrernte woman, whom he was to marry in 1938. But at the time of his projected marriage to Lorna Don also had another girlfriend, a white woman, Ruby Ridgelaw, who arrived in Alice Springs on his wedding day, presumably to try to persuade Don to marry

¹¹⁷ T. Austin. 1990. p. 105

her, not Lorna. Don spoke on more than one occasion of Lorna as a ‘disagreeable’ woman, in spite of other qualities he praised her for – her hard work and her good mothering skills – and I imagine much of the acrimony in their marriage might be traced to the possibility of Lorna’s being passed over for a white woman, who would have raised Don’s status, and to the fact that Lorna’s wedding day was postponed, when Ruby Ridgelaw appeared. Don disappeared at that juncture, leaving the two women to sort it out between them.

Graham Ross, who loved and admired his mother, remembers Lorna as quite an angry woman (as do other people): I put it to Don Ross that Lorna had had just cause for her anger: after a hard childhood in the Bungalow, she then married a philandering husband, and, as a Western Arrernte woman, she lived among Kaytetye people, for whom she had no particular liking or ties: she bore eleven children¹¹⁸ and worked extremely hard on Neutral Junction and at the Barrow Creek hotel, as a cook, from time to time. Lorna had worked particularly hard, Graham maintained, to try to save Neutral Junction station. By the time her youngest daughter, Fiona, was born, Lorna was worn out and ill. She died shortly afterwards, and Don’s mother, Hettie, cared for the children, in Alice Springs, while Don was out working on the stations. Don agreed that my assessment was a reasonable one. ‘She was a good woman,’ he agreed, and when I asked whether he’d like a photo of Lorna in his life history, he replied, ‘I’ll have her picture any time’.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ I remarked to Don that he couldn’t have found Lorna too disagreeable, if he had eleven children with her, and he was vastly amused and flattered by my comment. He also thought it only right I should take the women’s part. He then reflected on Lorna’s good qualities.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 27 May 1998

However, in the account he gave of the wedding ceremony that was postponed upon Ruby Ridgelaw's arrival on the scene, Don demonstrates little overt considerations for the feelings of the women, except where these feelings related to his aborted desires. In that way, he was certainly a man of his times. But, to judge him less harshly, it must be remembered that Don Ross was always ill at ease and relatively unskilled when speaking about emotional matters, as pointed out earlier in this thesis. He infinitely preferred discussing cattle and horses, cars or machinery. And a description of an aborted wedding day is not an easy tale to tell, considering the humiliations, real and potential, in the situation described, particularly in regard to the racial issues. I think he realised that the story did not reflect well on him.¹²⁰ He tried to present himself in the best possible light.

It must also be remembered that Don was aware that what was written down would be the picture of himself that would be presented to the world, and although he could be artlessly self-critical (or self-congratulatory) at times, one of his sources of pride and relative self-satisfaction was his success (self-admitted) with women and the pleasure he had given his partners. Don Ross was like any other person: he had his blind spots. It is significant also to remember the context in which this story was told. Don and I were discussing restrictions on Aboriginal people's lives, and his unhappy marriage, at the time.

Don Ross: I could have married a white woman, Ruby Ridgelaw, but I married Lorna [Purvis] instead. I was going with Ruby [as well]. I had the two of them, up there [near Barrow Creek].

¹²⁰ And I did not feel it was within my brief to point out Don's real or imagined faults. That my comments were as direct as stated above was a mark of the cordiality of our friendship and the easy-going nature of Don Ross, I feel.

Lorna said, 'Meet me at Fogarty's in the morning [in order to get married]'

I had to meet her there. And *two* of them came to meet me. They *both* came down. Mrs Spencer was down in Alice then too, a woman married to a whitefella. She was the boss's wife. Worked in the pub at Barrow Creek.

She said, 'Now which one of them are you going to marry?'

I couldn't say much. Gawd, I was buggered. Didn't know which way to go. Two women, see. They [Ruby and Lorna] said a few words [to each other], not much. I didn't know what they were saying. Well, we didn't get married that day.

Mrs Spencer said, 'Which one are you going to marry now?'

And I said, 'I'll marry my own colour, I think. A woman of my own colour'

That was important. The other one was a white girl. But she was good, you know. But I reckoned if we had a row she'd be calling me all the black Bs and everything. That's all that mattered. [Colour] was a big thing. I talked to me mother about it. She said the same. But I was whipping the cat afterwards. She [Ruby] came down afterwards. She must have thought I'd change my mind, you see. But I didn't, poor beggar. I was broke up about her. And [then] Ruby was gone, poor little dear. I did make the wrong choice. I married Lorna, a bush woman. She come from the west side, Western Arrernte, out Glen Helen way. She was in the Bungalow. She was put there to go to school. I had met Lorna out on Woodgreen station. She was working out there with her uncle, Sandover Alligator [Bob Purvis]. We [Lorna and I] parted after a while.¹²¹

So, the story Don told, to show he was just as good as white people, had the same freedoms, and that a white woman found him acceptable enough to want to marry him, demonstrates the exact opposite state of affairs: the easy camaraderie he enjoyed with white men most likely would have been fractured, had Don, as a half-caste, possessed the temerity to claim one of the few unmarried white woman

¹²¹ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 10 April 1998

in Central Australia as a bride. I think Don knew that, and accepted the contingency of marrying Lorna, in an enterprise doomed to failure.

These affairs of the heart, though significant for revealing the contingencies of the times, were of secondary importance to men like Don Ross: his more enduring passion was stock work. In the 1930s, new legislation introduced a minimum wage for Aboriginal workers, gave the Chief Protector right of entry to pastoral leases and made the managers of those leases responsible for the food, clothing and health of Aboriginal workers and their dependents. It was nearly impossible to ensure that this legislation was enforced. Don, as noted earlier, never received any wages.

The 1930 apprenticeship scheme for half-caste youth proposed by Cook was opposed by the Pastoral Lessees' Association. The Great Depression had exacerbated the employment situation for white people and the argument was that the training and employment of black workers would endanger the employment of whites. (Don Ross recalled numbers of unemployed white men passing through Central Australia looking for work during that time.) Cook argued that some kind of employment scheme was critical to the future of Australia's north. Station owners were required to register their employees, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and, under the *Aboriginals Ordinance 1918-1933*, were required to submit half yearly returns, giving details of their Indigenous employees. Patrol officers compiled reports on the employment of Aboriginals 'under the act' on stations and in mines.

In 1933 the employment licensing sections of the *1918 Aboriginals Ordinance* were amended to enable the Chief Protector to specify standards of remuneration. ‘Country’ licensees were now obliged to pay Indigenous people (including ‘half-castes’) no less than five shillings per week. There were exemptions, (such as for payment in kind: George Hayes thus could be considered to have obeyed the letter if not the spirit of the law, by allowing Don Ross to build up his own herd) which maximised the discretion of the pastoralist. The employer was considered accountable, not to the Chief Protector, but to his delegate, the local policeman, whose understanding of pastoralists’ capacity to pay was assured.¹²² But the distances involved were immense and an inadequate number of staff was employed to oversee the implementation of the legislation. And, whilst holding the entrenched belief that the wellbeing of the Northern Territory depended on the pastoral industry, Canberra politicians frequently misunderstood the realities of life in the Territory,¹²³ Read observed. Some of those realities included pastoralists’ and police collusion to outwit the dictates of Canberra and make their own decisions about their responsibilities toward their Aboriginal workers.¹²⁴

The writings of anthropologists such as Elkin were beginning to have an influence on European thinking about Aboriginal people, and it was also becoming obvious that they were not dying out, as had been predicted. The population of white people remained low, whilst the ‘half-caste’ population was increasing. Both ‘half-castes’ and ‘full-bloods’ were an integral part of the Northern Territory

¹²² T. Rowse. 1998. p. 57

¹²³ P. Read. 1979. p. 8

¹²⁴ Evidence of the cavalier attitudes that were to express themselves in the late 20th century Northern Territory bumper sticker – ‘I’m a Territorian, proud, independent and determined’?

workforce, particularly of the pastoral industry. The low or even non-existent wages they were paid made them even more attractive as workers, although pastoralists complained loudly and long about having to accommodate and distribute rations to the sick and infirm Indigenous people and their dependents on whose land their cattle runs had been established. George Hayes was no different. He chased Indigenous people away when the wells and bores were low, or when there was no work for them, or droughts were bad, and he hunted them down when their labour was required.¹²⁵ He exaggerated the extent of the help he extended to Aboriginal people, and underplayed the assistance they provided him on Neutral Junction. The return submitted by George Hayes in June 1945 shows only five Aboriginal men and one woman in his employ; Ben, Jackie, Jack, Dodger, Rattler and Lorna. Don Ross and Lorna are listed as ‘half-caste’ workers. The return, as required, also gives details of their health, accommodation, clothing and food rations as well as conditions of employment.¹²⁶ A note from the patrol officer was added:

I have inspected the books of these people and find that natives are well cared for, but owing to the proximity of military roads and camps the natives come and go at will and very few are permanent. I questioned all the natives of the place and all told me they are well satisfied with their work and food.¹²⁷

Don Ross’s ‘amorous adventures’ might be viewed as an antidote for, or perhaps an extension of, the gruellingly long hours of hard and often dangerous labour,

¹²⁵ As demonstrated by Daisy Kemarre’s interview, an extract from which is cited in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

¹²⁶ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS 7114 Item E740 1943/1945 Reports of Aboriginal Workers by George Hayes to Native Affairs, p. 87

¹²⁷ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS 7114 Item E740 1943/1945 Reports of Aboriginal Workers by George Hayes to Native Affairs, p. 87

that pastoral work entailed: he was a very physical man, he subscribed to the prevailing myths of the macho male, live hard, play hard, and his status was high with both black and white women. Don had numerous relationships with Indigenous women, and also recalled at least two white women (other than Ruby Ridgeway) where there had been potential for romantic involvement. The first occasion was at the race meeting at Barrow Creek, where a Miss Zigenbine rode Don's horse in a race. 'Her bloke got jealous of me, too', Don recalled. 'She was married to him. He wouldn't talk to me. Anyway, I kept away from her. I didn't go near her'.¹²⁸ In that situation, surrounded by white men, there would have been no possibility of Don acting on the mutual attraction. The second potential entanglement was with Stan Brown's wife.

Don Ross: Well, I could have had [Stan Brown's] wife. She wanted me, too, his missus. I wouldn't, on account of him, he's my friend. I told him that.

'Don't worry about me, Stan, I'm a friend of yours'. I was too.

She wanted me. I wouldn't be interested. And he told this old partner of his on Annitowa, Old Yank Lyon, he told him, see. He [Yank] came and told me. He was another friend of mine. He come and tell me that he [Stan Brown] told him if he caught us he'd shoot the two of us. Shoot us, me and his wife. He said that to Yank. Of course, Old Yank come and told me straight away.

He said, 'You be careful'.

I said, 'I don't need to be careful, I wouldn't touch his wife, he's a friend'.

'Well, that's what he said, if ever he caught you, but he said you weren't game enough, you wasn't game. She wanted you all right'.

I said, 'Yeah, I know that, but I'll never go near her, never touch her'.

He said 'He'll shoot you both'.

¹²⁸ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

Bastard, he would too.¹²⁹

When Don told me this story, I shuddered at the disastrous outcome that may have occurred. But, upon reflection, both his proud boast and his claim that it was out of consideration for his friend that he did not take up Stan Brown's wife's offer appear to me as face-saving reconstructions of a morally dubious and potentially lethal dilemma in which he found himself embroiled. For although by that time (the 1950s) the negative bent of legislation, scholarly discourse and public opinion towards both Aboriginal and 'half-caste' people, had ameliorated somewhat, things hadn't changed *that* much, and 'the versatile man' would have known better than to have invoked the moral outrage and retributive fury of a white man cuckolded by a member of the 'inferior' races, no matter how personable a mate, how good a stockman, how much agency in the white world Don Ross felt he had. To survive, Don Ross must have understood where the line was drawn, as I think he did, whether he articulated it overtly or not, and determined never to step over that line, and not to test the rough justice which almost certainly would have been meted out to him in the Northern Territory of those times.

But, despite the stringency of 1930s legislation and policies related to the control of Indigenous people, things were about to change. The immediate agent of change was not so much a legislative one, although the thinking of the times was beginning to change and the conscientious, long-term efforts of religious and social justice organizations was beginning to have an effect on seemingly implacable racist policies and actions. In 1939 the Native Affairs Branch was set

¹²⁹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

up in the Northern Territory, and in 1941 Child Endowment was paid to Indigenous parents, albeit not to nomadic or dependent Aboriginal people. It was, however, the Second World War that brought swift and irrevocable changes to social and material conditions in the Northern Territory, changes which were to have long term effects on the status and expectations of Indigenous Territorians, and which helped to fuel the efforts of 'half-caste' Indigenous people in their quest for social justice and more equitable living and employment conditions for themselves, their families and descendants.

CHAPTER 5

CITIZENSHIP: ‘A BRIDGE OVER THE WIDE DIVIDE’?¹

When someone dictates your identity...it is a dangerous thing. It creates a big deep gap in your belly and the further removed you become from that place of identity, whether it be literal or symbolic connection in the form of recognition at community level, the larger and more painful the gap becomes.²

Assimilation both wooed and compelled, invited and manipulated, offered to forgive Aborigines their heritage while exonerating the colonists' dispossessing and genocidal actions.³

Changes in the legislation governing Aboriginal people's lives in the Northern Territory and changes in the thinking about race and Indigenous people's place in Australian society made the conditions and constraints under which Don Ross lived his eighty four years of life vary from era to era. The stringent laws against miscegenation in the 1930s were to ameliorate as a new vision of Indigenous people's gradual accession to citizenship began to be mooted as a concept, and reflected in ensuing policy changes. Nevertheless, racist ideology and practices had an entrenched place in Northern Territory society and popular opinion may have taken decades longer to change if not for the social upheaval consequent upon the outbreak of war in 1939. This chapter documents some of the changes World War Two effected for Aboriginal people. It traces the progress of government assimilation policies and legislation and the welfare model of

¹ H. Reynolds. 2005. p. 209

² F. Doyle. 2005. *Whispers of a Wik Woman*. Queensland University Press, St. Lucia, p. 71

³ T. Rowse. 1998. p. 107

governing Indigenous people's lives, and demonstrates the way in which Don Ross's life history reflects these changes. The final legislative impediment to the full recognition of Indigenous people as Australian citizens was removed by the 1967 Referendum, which ensured that Indigenous people, from that time, would be included in the national census.

When citizenship was extended to all Aboriginal people in the 1960s, the advantages Don Ross had enjoyed by virtue of his mixed race heritage were technically extended to all Indigenous people in the Northern Territory and elsewhere. But popular opinion was slow to change in the Northern Territory, as it was in Queensland, and Western Australia, in particular, and legal rights did not necessarily ensure social acceptance. The nuances of race, and the advantages and disadvantages of one's racialised position in society, as imposed by European thinking, and internalised by such men as Don Ross, were reflected in the actualities of Indigenous people's status, social mobility and social position, and the rights and freedoms they experienced. These were largely still governed by the thinking of earlier eras, in the outback.

So, despite achieving full citizenship, Indigenous people's identity remained a vexed issue. The final section of this chapter considers the question of Indigenous identity, and draws on the views of some contemporary scholars as well as on interview material from Don Ross's life history, to address this question.

Racial prejudice had intensified during the 1920s and 1930s as the community's commitment to White Australia became more entrenched.⁴ This was despite the resistance to racial ideas in many Western countries in the 1930s in response to the rise of Nazi Germany. It had been assumed that 'full blood' Aborigines would die out. In August 1932 Professor A. P. Elkin, the foremost 'authority' on Aborigines of those times, presented a paper at a joint meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, in Sydney, in which he stated 'The Australian aboriginal race is going down to biological history as another instance of a type which was so adjusted to, and specialised for, one environment, that it could not adapt itself to another'.⁵ This 'fact', he maintained, coupled with the Aborigines' 'comparatively small size of brain' spelled doom for the race.⁶

The 1937 National Conference on Aboriginal Affairs 'assumed that people of mixed descent would be shepherded across a bridge over the wide divide between Aboriginal and white Australia. They would be taken on that journey as children and would be strongly discouraged from ever going back from whence they came'.⁷ The Conference documents stated:

That this Conference believes that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not the full blood, lies in their ultimate

⁴H. Reynolds. 2005. p. 209

⁵ A.P. Elkin. 1932. *Church Standard*, May and June, pp. 37-38. Also cited in J. P.M. Long. 1992. p. 13

⁶ J. P.M. Long. 1992. p. 13

⁷ H. Reynolds. 2005. p. 209

absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed towards that end.⁸

Elkin set out a number of stages through which he considered Aboriginal people would progress before they became assimilated. These he enumerated as clash, pauperism, intelligent parasitism, protection, and the final achievement, assimilation.⁹

In 1937 John McEwen became Minister for the Interior in the Lyons government. He joined with Elkin in scapegoating Cecil Cook for the conditions of the northern Australian Aborigines. The *McEwen Memorandum*¹⁰ promised a ‘new deal’ for Aborigines. Hitherto, McEwen said, policy had consisted of ‘merely dealing with the physical needs of the natives as the needs became apparent’.¹¹ What was needed was ‘some final objective’ on which to base long range policy. The objective was to raise the status of Aborigines ‘so as to entitle them by right and by qualifications to the ordinary rights of citizenship and enable them to share with us the opportunities that are available to them in their own native land’.¹² In reality, as Tony Austin argues convincingly, the means of attaining the objective ‘many generations’ down the track, differed surprisingly little from the policies Cook had espoused for years, with the major exceptions that any notion of

⁸ Commonwealth of Australia. 1937. *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Authorities*. Canberra, Government Printer, p. 3

⁹ A. P. Elkin. 1961 *The Australian Aborigines*. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, pp. 321–338

¹⁰ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A452 Item 1952/541 Australian Commonwealth Government Policy with Respect to Aborigines, issued by the Honourable John McEwen, Minister for the Interior

¹¹ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A452 Item 1952/541

¹² National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A452 Item 1952/541. This did not include, of course, returning land stolen from Indigenous people, nor allowing the perpetuation of their own law and cultural practices.

biological absorption was removed, and the concession was made that native Australians could aspire to full citizenship one day.¹³ Austin and Parry agree that most matters of substance had been proposed before and effectively ignored in Canberra.¹⁴ Some of the pejorative labels were modified, but little changed for ‘half-castes’, and there was no recognition of the need to assist people suffering the social and economic effects of institutionalised racism.¹⁵ On Kaytetye country, for example, Patrol Officer Strehlow reported in 1938 that the government ration depot at Barrow Creek was inadequate, the surface water was gone and there was insufficient grass and fodder, the government having given their land to white settlers. His strongly worded recommendation was that ‘the Government which has parcelled out every useful portion of the natives’ tribal territories to a handfull (sic) of white settlers should make itself responsible for the continued existence of these dispossessed inland tribes’.¹⁶

The 1939 Amendments to the *Aboriginals Ordinance*, which apparently was to herald a change in policy from protection to assimilation, contained no element of self-determination for Aboriginal people beyond the choice to live as white Australians. How this was to be achieved, in reality, beyond mere statements of policy and in the face of entrenched racism, was not clear. In *Nowhere People*, Reynolds documents the ‘rejection, ostracism and hostility that placed immovable

¹³ T. Austin. 1997. p. 304

¹⁴ T. Austin & S. Parry. (eds) 1998. p.21

¹⁵ T. Austin. 1997. p. 304

¹⁶ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F 126 Item 13. Patrol Officer T.G.H. Strehlow to Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Darwin, 13 December 1938. Strehlow’s records are valuable because they demonstrate understanding of Kaytetye (and other Central Australian Indigenous groups’) cultural matters. He was also one of the few people to have suggested any reciprocity in assimilating Aborigines into European culture.

objects in the way of aspiring mixed descent people'.¹⁷ Parry and Austin note that although the assimilation of Aboriginal people into the dominant white culture had been agreed to as a Commonwealth policy in 1939 it was a decade before an administrative structure to support its implementation was put in place.¹⁸ The account Don Ross gave of his decision not to marry the white woman he loved, but to 'stick with his own colour' demonstrates his understanding of, and accession to, the cultural attitudes of the day – his appreciation of the forces arrayed against such a union.

Whilst not underestimating the part played by the ongoing efforts of a number of groups and organizations working to improve the status and lives of Aboriginal people, it may also be argued that it was, in fact, World War Two, rather than, or at least as well as, the policies, legislation and activists' efforts, that helped to effect radical change for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory in the 1940s.¹⁹ Following the entry of Japan into the war in 1941, and the subsequent bombing of Darwin in early 1942, northern Australia became the front line for home defence. The frequent bombing of Darwin forced the evacuation of the Administration, and the Northern Territory Force became the de facto administration of the Territory for the duration.²⁰ There was a lot of movement both of troops and civilians between Alice Springs and Darwin during the war years. The Stuart Highway, until then little more than a dirt track, was hastily

¹⁷ H. Reynolds. 2005. p. 203

¹⁸ T. Austin and S. Parry. (eds) 1998. p. 22

¹⁹ Julie T. Wells. 1995. pp. 37–63

²⁰ R.A. Hall. Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War. In D. Ball (ed) 1991. *Aborigines in Defence of Australia*. Australian National University Press/Macmillan Pergamon, Botany Bay, pp. 32–63

upgraded, as Top End civilians were evacuated south, and troops moved north.

Don Ross recalled that time.

Don Ross: That road was put through at the same time. Bitumen. Soldiers were building it. The Yanks had a lot to do with that. It was only narrow, then. They widened it since. It's a great road now, a beautiful road, but too fast. She's one of the best roads going now. They cut a lot of bends out of it. Big hill up there, near Renner Springs, I think it is, they call it Weaver's Cut. Weaver cut it there when he was a boss on the road. Big hill, cut right to the ground. My god, you see this big hill and then they just chopped it right down. Warumungu country. Cutting a bloody hill down!²¹

The army set up a number of depots along the route. One such was at New Barrow, twenty-five miles north of Barrow Creek, on the Taylor Creek.

Don Ross: The soldiers at New Barrow were from all over the world, I think. A few Yanks were there. Yes, might be five hundred, all going north, every night, travelling in trucks and utes. Only the officers used to be in the utes, and the rest of them in trucks. Trucks were loaded and they camped there for the night. Next morning they're gone again up to Darwin. Going to the head of the fights I suppose, poor beggars. Never see a lot of them no more. They got killed.²²

Neutral Junction station won the contract to supply beef to the New Barrow depot, and Don, as chief stockman, was responsible for fulfilling the contract.

Don Ross: They needed to buy meat from somewhere. Old George Hayes was boss of Neutral but I was running the turnout. I kept the bullocks up to [the army], big bullocks. All I had to do was gather the beasts there [to New Barrow], they had their own butcher blokes, Bluey Langford and Doc Bligh, to butcher the beef. Killed three or four every night, sometimes five. They used to get five if there was a big troop going through. I put up the yard and I built the bloody gallows and everything. Cemented the floor for them. I done all that.

I had Emily's father, Young George Hayes, to muster the bullocks. He'd shepherd them, tail them, feed them and water them. I'd yard

²¹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*.

²² Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

them and [the army butchers] would come and kill whatever they wanted. The butchers never killed the white bullocks, they just let them go.²³

Big army going through, you know, big mob had to be fed. I think about five hundred, in those cars. They used to put in a night there at New Barrow. The next place [depot] was Elliot. They had the camp at Barrow Creek first, at old Burns Well but the water was no good, so they moved to New Barrow [in 1941]. My god, we had good meat there. Beautiful beef. 1942, they ate us out in twelve months, so we gave the contract to Stirling Station. Stan Brown was in the money, then. He never looked back no more. [Later] he had a little block down the bottom end of the Hanson. He owned the whole lot then, the whole ninety miles.

[When the army] ate [Stirling] out I started off with them again. I had some bullocks there, so I kept them going again. I was there [mustering] all the time, just come in for a night or two. And instead of starting on the outside bullocks, I started getting them there, close handy, so I had to go out further and further each time. Should have started on the outside first. Anyhow I kept them going with beef. I was killing till when the war was finished, 1945, then they all cleared from there and that place was closed down, New Barrow.²⁴

The war times were full and busy times for stockmen like Don Ross. Their services were in demand, and their skills eagerly sought. They were contracted to muster cattle and drove them to the various army depots. In 1986 Kaytetye stockman Tracker Mick recounted for the Central Australian Media Association [C.A.A.M.A.] Kaytetye Program a fairly typical example of the droving expeditions which he, Don Ross and others undertook before and during the war. In the excerpt below, an account of droving cattle through Kaytetye country, Tracker Mick demonstrates the detailed and intimate relationship with country of its traditional owners.²⁵

²³ A superstition existed that white bullocks brought good luck, so people were reluctant to kill them.

²⁴ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

²⁵ Kaytetye text is followed immediately by English translations. Tracker Mick told most of the story, getting confirmation on things from Don as he talked. At the time of this muster, Alf Morris

Tracker Mick: Kweretheye aynantherre alpereyneyayne apmere Arrelthartnenge-warle aynanthe watchem-ayleyayne. Nhartepe aynanthe alpereyneyayne wele-warlelke arntwe etnyenyerre. Nhartepe aynanthe anteyerr-apertame alpenherre dinner-penhe apmere nantewarle? Apmere Arratherrketyenge kwerarle now. Mpelarte altemarle aynanthe pweleke arrtyey-alpenhe altemarle. Arrtyeyayne, Arratherrketyenge kwerarle nthelarte altemarle alpawele. Arrtyeyayne

After [coming from Singleton station] we took the cattle to New Barrow and watched them there. We took them to the well to give them water. After lunch we took them south to Arratherrketyenge, a waterhole on the Nine Mile Creek. We minded the cattle west out there, where those big open spaces are at Arratherrketyenge. We minded them there.

Nharte rlwampe erlkwe-yene, atnkwarengele ahalaytnewene you know, akwerralye wenharte lwematnenkepe, rlwenewepe. Artnpenhengerne ayenge erlwepe ayenge nhartepe pwenge-rtame. Dish-larleng atye arntwampenye arntwelke wenhe nante repe erlwarre wenhe washem-ayleyayne. Erlkwe atyenge angkenhe "Hey arntwe-rtame nhartepe mpele" Arrkantepe ayenge anyaperte thapele-thapele alpereyneyayne. Rlwenep ayney-alpenhe. Blanket-pe atye rollemup-aylenyerre.

In the early hours of the morning that old white man²⁶ used to call out. When the morning star was just coming up. I ran there with my eyes still closed. I bumped into the dish of water where the old man used to wash his face. The old man said to me 'That's a dish of water!'. Well I was laughing so much I couldn't walk straight. I went back and ate my breakfast. Then I rolled my swag.

was the manager at Murray Downs. Interview recorded by Emily Hayes (Tracker Mick's cousin) in 1986 at Alekerange, at the home of Sally Ross (since deceased), Don Ross's daughter. Tape transcribed in 2000 by linguist Myfany Turpin and translated into English in 2002 by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes. Corrections by Jacob Peltharr and Cookie Pwerle at Stirling Station, in February 2002. The narrative is similar in its construction to Don Ross's account of mustering and droving, in chapter 1 of this thesis. There are many more references to sites and locations, however, as the listeners and speakers shared a common knowledge of country, a knowledge that I did not possess. This is reflected in the relative paucity of references to country in the accounts Don gave me. He rarely indicated the Indigenous names for sites, as he knew I was unfamiliar with the country. It is interesting to note Tracker Mick's assertion that it was Don Ross who inducted him into the practice of 'camping' with women.

Tracker Mick: We went to Stirling and gave them [the cattle] water there. The women would fill the tanks with water, and the men, the stockmen would all leave. That's where we had dinner. They might bring back a woman at night time. Yeah, we camped at Arlperreyte, north of Aileron. That old man, your [Emily Hayes] uncle, taught me about that (bringing women to camp).

²⁶ Either Jack Bohning or Alf Morris: both are mentioned in the account.

Nantewe atye arntarrtyenhe. Nhartepe aynantherre apenherre apmere Awele-warle. Awele-leke dinner-pe ayneyayne. Awele-theyepe aynanthe apenherre mpelarte. (which way ?) Awele-theyepe aynanthe alpenhe nant-arengge? Pernenantheleke, apmere Pernenantheleke aynewantheyenge Kaytetye-arengge apmere. Pernenanthele nthelearte aynanthe watchem-ayleyayne pweleke artyeyayne. Nthetheyartepe ngwetyanpepe aynanthe pweleke alpereynenyerre Yerntelengkwe-warle arntwarle wel-arle wetharlarte. Atnetherrpewarle wetharle. Government wel-warle. Anthwengeynenyerre nthelearte pwelekepe-ee. Nhartepe aynanthe alpenhe arrerewanenye antekerpenhe. Arrtyey-alpenhe pweleke.

I looked after the cattle. Then we went to Awele, where the Taylor Creek meets the Neutral Creek. Yeah we ate dinner at Awele. From Awele whose country did we go to? Yeah, Pernenanthe (near Limestone Bore) then, our country, Kaytetye country Pernenanthe. We minded the cattle at Pernenanthe. In the morning we took the cattle to Yerntelengkwe (where the highway crosses the Taylor creek). To the well there, at that place called Atnetherrpe (Burns Well) where there is a government well. We gave the cattle water there. Then we kept going, a long way south, minding the cattle.²⁷

The war widened the world of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. Many developed cordial relationships with the soldiers:

Don Ross: I used to go down there and stay with [the soldiers] when I came in with a mob of bullocks and they would save us some beer. And we'd have a bit of a party, you see. I liked my drink then, too. I got drunk with them a few times. They used to put all their beer away till I come in with a mob of cattle, then we'd have a night out, or a couple of nights. They were good blokes, you know. We used to have great yarns. There were some good blokes. The local fellas, well, I was good mates with them, see. They used to play two up. They'd get me for three or four because I'd throw heads, for sure, every night. They used to win a lot of money on me. I never had a bet on myself. Never bet but I won some money for them. If I wasn't there they would go and get me, to throw a few pennies. We used to have parties with grog they'd save up, and picture nights.²⁸

With much of the available white labour enlisted in the services the competition for labour was intense in the sparsely populated regions of northern Australia and

²⁷ Section of transcribed and translated interview with Tracker Mick 1986

²⁸ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

there was an increased demand for Aboriginal labour on military bases in the Northern Territory as operations increased. The Army Labour Unit was set up. It offered employment to many Aboriginal men, an alternative to stock work, often with better wages and conditions, and much more equitable treatment. (The army had first priority in regard to Aborigines who were not already employed. Second in priority were pastoralists and essential services within the civil administration.)²⁹

Work performed by Aboriginal people included sanitation, firewood cutting, butchery, cement work, labour on Army farms, driving, garbage disposal, salvage, loading and unloading at rail-heads and general labour.³⁰ Kaytetye senior man, Peter Horsetailer, described working at army depots, including New Barrow during World War Two, and meeting African-American troops for the first time.

Peter Horsetailer: Big Army camp, where they been living around there [Banka Banka]. That's where I saw a lot of them American mob been come there. I seen 'im big mob.

Francis Good: Any black men from America?

Peter Horsetailer: Yeah, I seen 'im a lot of Negro been come too; I seen 'im all. More bigger than us fellas, anyway.

Francis Good: You hadn't seen them before?

Peter Horsetailer: Yeah, I never seen 'im before, but I seen 'im when I been working long Army. I saw longa Banka na. I seen 'im.

Francis Good: And do they have any trouble there?

²⁹ R.M. Berndt and C.H. Berndt. 1987. *End of an Era: Aboriginal Labour in the Northern Territory*. Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, p. 163

³⁰National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS 1978/215 Item 21 Native Personnel (1943–1944). Also cited by D. Ball. 1991. p. 55. National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1 Item 50/486 Central Australia 7080

Peter Horsetailer: Well, we didn't have any trouble there. But I shift – come back to work longa New Barrow then. And I was been New Barrow when that Army been finish now, when been finish. And I been started – here again I been come along Barrow Creek again.

Francis Good: When you were at New Barrow, what did you do there?

Peter Horsetailer: Oh, well, we been just clearing a bit of camp for them, cutting some wood, cleaning some rubbish, you know, and digging for toilet, same sort jobs we had. And we march, we can march, line 'em up for tucker, for meal, you know. And go, have a meal on the table – mix up, you know, black and white, live there, all that. That's way we been doing.

Francis Good: And lots of trucks coming through?

Peter Horsetailer: Yeah, lots of ... been travelling; got a lot of people, lot of mens. Travelling from south, travelling from north, to go back, and some been coming from south. Oh, lots of people been travelling round long this in – that's long this; they been putting 'im, not too long bitumen been that, but they been travelling long dirt road first. Then they been putting that bitumen then, all the way along.

Francis Good: And that old man, Sandy Ross, was telling me that they got some Aboriginal people, no clothes people, and brought them in.

Peter Horsetailer: Yeah, through Coniston way. Yeah, he went round there; he working. He work for them Army. He been Sergeant then. He had a three stripe. And he went round and collect in some people to bring them in for work. And after that, when he been get them people, we been working there, long New Barrow then. And I think he been come bilong station work for Old George Hayes. And I takem on that job then, after old Sandy been working there. I remember that one.³¹

In reply to a number of letters from pastoralists either requesting Aboriginal workers be sent to their stations, complaining about the Army's having first priority to their labour, or asserting that former station workers were showing

³¹ Interview recorded by Francis Good at Barrow Creek 22 April 1990. Peter Horsetailer was Don Ross's uncle. 'He was a kid when I was a man', Don said. 'He worked on Neutral Junction for a while with me. I brought a mob of bullocks down to Alice Springs, sold them to Deep Well. He was with me then, and Sam and Old Hector. Oh, they were good boys, I had'. He added, 'He was Mum's half-brother, a good, quiet man. And his father was old Paddy. Paddy's Soak was named after him'. Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 30 October 1997

disinclination to work on the stations,³² Patrol Officer Gordon Sweeney stated, in his report 11 January 1944:

In the case of one ex-stock boy employed at Barrow Creek Staging Camp he refused to return to the station stating that his employer had not provided him with clothes and blankets and he was satisfied with Army working conditions. Where the Stations offer wages and working conditions commensurate with the work they have no difficulty in holding their stock boys.³³

By 1943 the military had surpassed the pastoral industry as the largest employer of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. Cash wages were paid directly to the Aboriginal employees, and goods could be purchased from government-subsidised canteens. The fact that Aboriginal people could spend their wages, however small, at their own discretion gave them a sense of independence and responsibility, Catherine and Ronald Berndt maintain.³⁴ Conditions often differed markedly from those on stations³⁵ and Aboriginal people were increasingly conscious of this. As Tim Japangardi recalled:

Tim Japangardi: Treated pretty well, army time, no cheeky [that is, nobody harmed Aboriginal people], nobody get cheeky. You know, they got provost police, and soldier policeman, somebody get cheeky. You know, they never treat 'em wrong. Some people never, never treat an Aboriginal wrong way. That's really kind. Never. And they good fun always.³⁶

³² National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1 Item 42/461 Pt. 1 CA 7080 ATSIC Central Office, pp. 2, 11, 19, 26. Official Government Policy statement issued by V.J. White Deputy Director of Native Affairs 1 March 1943 states that, 'The Army has no prerogative in the matter of the disposition of Native labour'. Ibid., p. 9

³³ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1 Item 42/461 Pt. 1 CA 7080 ATSIC Central Office, p. 17

³⁴ R.M. Berndt and C.H. Berndt. 1987. p. 164

³⁵ R.M. Berndt and C.H. Berndt. 1987. pp. 155–177

³⁶ P. Read and J. Read. (eds) 1991. p. 133

The war may be taken as indicating the end of the process of destruction of Aboriginal society, C.D. Rowley, claimed.³⁷ ‘Questions of economic opportunity and justice were being raised. The problem had ceased to be one of survival and had become one of equality’.³⁸ This point was emphasised in a letter by E.W.P. Chinnery, Adviser in Native Matters to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, 4 January 1944 in which he stated:

It is of course, well-known to you that there is now an increased, if belated, appreciation of the capacity of the aboriginal, and at the same time a wide-spread demand for this labour, particularly in specialised occupations like those connected with the cattle industry and other developments, where the services of the aboriginal have been widely used in the past, but in many instances, inadequately appreciated.

The aboriginal himself has long been conscious of these factors and it will be obvious to you that his sense of relative values is developing rapidly through contact with the friendly soldiers with whom he has been working, men who openly express their admiration of the part the aboriginal is playing in the war effort.³⁹

Charlie Schultz said, ‘The Second World War really helped open up the Territory. For a start, some of the roads were improved, and after the war ended there were cheap motor vehicles and machinery available’.⁴⁰ Don Ross’s mechanical bent and his love of motorcars, second only to his love of cattle and horses, were fed by a whole new range of vehicles which began to appear in Central Australia, to service the defence forces.⁴¹ So, despite the scarcity of various commodities, in

³⁷ C.D. Rowley. 1970. p. 337

³⁸ C.D. Rowley. 1970. p. 337–338

³⁹ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS F1 Item 42/461 Pt. 1 CA 7080 ATSI Central Office, p. 23

⁴⁰ C. Schultz and D. Lewis. 1995. p. 158

⁴¹ It was also during the war time that Kurt Johannsen, with his mechanical talent, invented a wood-burning device to produce gas to power engines, as a substitute for conventional fuel. J. Madlock. In D. Carment & B. James. (eds) 1992. pp. 100–102. Don Ross included in his life

some ways the war years were a time of plenty, evacuees and Australian and American troops swelling the population of Central Australia, and the number of vehicles dramatically increasing, as did the demand for food and other consumer goods. In addition, the American troops in particular were a rich source of tobacco, fuel, alcohol and other Army supply commodities coveted by local civilians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

Don Ross: [When] I was delivering them cattle there I had plenty of tucker, you know. Didn't have to go home to get any. They give me all the tucker there, tobacco and everything. I used to get a pound of tobacco a fortnight, for nothing. I used to smoke a pipe before that, but I couldn't get pipe tobacco [during the war] so I started on cigarettes because I could get them for nothing. Used to come in tins, Log Cabin. The favourite tobacco I used to smoke was Havelock or Clipper. A big plug, that one, a long one.⁴²

Don Ross: We could get plenty of petrol. War times we was helping ourselves. They had them [fuel dumps] all over the bloody scrub and everywhere, hundreds of drums. They had them out bush, everywhere, bloody mobs of them. One time a fellow came along and caught me at these drums. I was filling my drum, only a tin, about twelve gallon, I suppose. He never said nothing, just drove past me.

Oh yeah, a lot of people was pinching it. They pinched a car there one night and loaded it up with petrol and took it. Out near the Jump Up there, the other side of Barrow Creek. Nine-Mile Jump Up. I seen it there loaded with petrol. They just left it there and came back in the truck or something. Next night I went back there but it was gone. There was the miners there at Barrow Creek, perhaps they took it. Didn't seem to matter much, they [the army] had tons of it there. There was petrol everywhere. Well, I used to fill my bloody car up there. I had a bloody tin and I'd go over. It was all out in the open. All you had to do was open the drum. In later years I could chuck the bloody drum on. I used to chuck the drums on.⁴³

history an amusing account of his encounter with Kurt Johannsen and his ingeniously modified car. Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*.

⁴² Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁴³ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

All the army settlements were abandoned by early 1946.⁴⁴ Very little but the foundations of buildings and rusted remnants of metal food containers are evident today at New Barrow. Graham Ross reports that Don claimed many of the vehicles and much of the equipment were buried in pits on site at the end of the war. But the sealed highways between Mount Isa, Alice Springs and Darwin remained, as did the long distance telephone systems, improved water and power supplies along the highways and in the towns. The Northern Territory cattle industry was left perhaps the strongest it had been in the seventy-odd years of its existence.⁴⁵

Kaytetye people looked upon the 'army times' as fortunate times for them,⁴⁶ as other Indigenous groups in the Northern Territory had, also. In most instances, as stated above, Indigenous people received more equitable treatment, better wages and greater opportunities from the armed forces than they hitherto had received from local employers. They gained more access to European goods and enjoyed greater agency, for example, in deploying their labour and their wages. Having their labour in such demand gave Indigenous people bargaining power. In a report to the Director of Native Affairs, 27 February 1943, Patrol Officer Sweeney stated 'Native labour is becoming scarce, and the station owners must treat their native employees well to hold them'.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ R. M. Berndt and C.H. Berndt. 1987. p. 175

⁴⁵ A. Powell. 1982/1996. p. 185, p. 191

⁴⁶ Personal communication to Myfany Turpin by residents of Tara, Neutral Junction Station. 1998.

⁴⁷ National Archives of Australia Darwin, CRS F1 Item 43/65 Sweeney to Director 27 February 1943. Also cited in T. Rowse. 1998. p. 100

Contact with troops from elsewhere in Australia and from overseas (America, chiefly) began to breach the accepted racist attitudes and codes of conduct that had existed for decades in the Northern Territory. Tim Rowse notes that Central Australia began to attract short stay visitors from ‘down South’, including soldiers and tourists, who had not necessarily been socialised into the locals’ colonial attitudes.⁴⁸ Aboriginal people’s more fully appreciating the worth of their labour, plus the more humane and egalitarian interactions they experienced with ‘foreigners’ and ‘outsiders’ during the war, made them less satisfied with the often harsh treatment they were used to receiving at the hands of many white Territorians. The Army Inspector of Native Personnel, in his 1945 report, noted the wide variety of work undertaken by Aboriginal service personnel and concluded with the observation that civilian authorities had now to ‘seriously consider’ bringing Aboriginal living standards to the level of the Whites.⁴⁹

For men such as Don Ross the war years, full of fellowship and good times, would have reinforced their sense of agency and legitimacy in a wider social sphere. But, although Don Ross related with relish stories of good times with the soldiers, I detected more than a hint of patronising (racist) attitudes towards him, for example, in the men making him a kind of lucky mascot for their two-up games. It is difficult to accurately assess attitudes and nuances of the past from within one’s own very different moral and social milieu, but on a number of occasions I had doubts about the sincerity of the good fellowship that was being extended to Don and which he received so happily, and wondered whether it may largely have

⁴⁸ T. Rowse. 1998. p. 103

⁴⁹ Inspector of Native Personnel, Administration of Native Affairs Section: Care and Guidance of Native Race by Army, H.Q. Northern Territory Force, 23 April 1945. Also cited in P. Read. In A. McGrath. (ed) 1995. p. 283

been the result of the contingency of unusual conditions prevailing during the war. But, I am looking with the eyes of a twenty first century woman back into a world of men and war and racism of more than sixty years ago, a world that I have not had to negotiate in the way in which Don was required to: our two constructions and interpretations of events therefore suffer from equal but very different biases and limitations. But they inform one another in the dialogue of history-making. At a recent conference, Indigenous academic Anita Heiss noted, as have other Indigenous academics such as Jackie Huggins, that the anger she feels and expresses at the ill-treatment her ancestors have endured, treatment she herself had not experienced personally, is an anger older family and community members who had been on the receiving end of this ill treatment apparently did not feel, nor express readily.⁵⁰ Huggins writes, ‘The people of my mother’s generation display a profound lack of bitterness about their lot, something which I find both frustrating and amazing.’⁵¹ This was certainly the case with Don Ross. His son Graham expressed much greater anger, on his father’s behalf.

On the world stage the bases of scientific racism had failed to stand up to rigorous scientific scrutiny, and the events of World War Two forced the hand of the colonial powers into agreeing to declarations against racist, imperialist and discriminatory practices.⁵² The newly formed United Nations declared that the war had been made possible by the denial of democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect for men, and by the propagation in their place, through

⁵⁰ Children’s Book Council of Australia Conference, Sydney, 4–6 May 2006

⁵¹ J. Huggins, R. Huggins and J.M. Jacobs. 1995. p. 170

⁵² J. T. Wells. 1995. p. 64

ignorance and prejudice, the doctrine of the inequality of men and race.⁵³ In 1948 it adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its equal application regardless of race, colour, religion or 'primitiveness'. The old system of colonialism and the concomitant 'protection' of its colonised Indigenes, which effectively denied them most of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, was beginning to be strongly challenged.

After the war, questions were posed in Australia by and about Indigenous servicemen who returned home, after defending their country's rights and freedoms, or supporting the war effort in a number of ways, to discover that few of these rights and freedoms were extended to them, once the threat of overseas invasion had been overcome. Much had changed but much had stayed the same.

It was during this time that Don Ross purchased Neutral Junction Station. George Hayes retired to South Australia with his wife Molly in 1947, thus avoiding the subsequent issues of workers' rights, award wages, welfare payments and all the other bureaucratic requirements of the Native Affairs board, that would have been unpalatable to a pioneer who belonged to earlier, less-regulated era. His age, a long-term back injury, and a recently acquired wife who was city born and bred, would have been strong factors influencing his decision to retire 'down south'. And, being a fairly astute man of business, he would have assessed the conditions of the day and made his decision to relinquish the station accordingly. The wartime beef boom was at an end and Central Australia was in the beginning of what would prove to be a serious and prolonged period of drought.

⁵³ UNESCO Conference 16 November 1945. Cited by P.G. Lauren. 1988. *Power and Prejudice. The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination*. Westview Press, Boulder, p. 136. Also cited by J. T. Wells. 1995.

George Hayes most likely would have considered that his grandson had youth and strength on his side, and that he himself was too old. In giving Don £3,000 pounds towards the purchase of the station, he may have been demonstrating some sort of moral responsibility to the young kinsman to whom he had paid no wages since Don had first gone out to the stock camps at eight years of age. Again, I view George Hayes' actions in a less charitable light than Don: George Hayes was never a particularly benevolent employer; he extracted as much as he could out of his workers, including Don Ross, and then retired with the profits, leaving Don to battle on alone, in circumstances far more complex than he himself had encountered. The times were changing, slowly and inexorably: Don Ross gained a marginal property that had experienced a fortuitous boom during the war years, but which was now sliding into more arduous, less productive times. He also inherited the bureaucratic duties of station owners: administering rations to their Indigenous dependents and keeping records of these dependents as well as of the Indigenous employees, in accordance with Native Affairs Department policy. There is no doubt that he, like most station owners, found these duties onerous, particularly during busy mustering seasons. Don Ross maintained that Stan Brown simply refused to comply with Native Affairs requirements.

Don Ross: Old Stan Brown at Stirling, he was giving them [Indigenous people on the station] his own rations. Every week he'd give them to the camp mob. He said, 'I've got to do this, to keep the workers here. Otherwise I won't have no workers, they will all clear out, go to Barrow Creek. You gotta feed them'. So he used to feed them himself. All the Native Affairs fellas that came there, he'd hunt them off the place. He was a savage old bugger, Stan Brown. He said, 'You can't tell me nothing about blackfellas, you bastard, you get. You go and live with them'. That was to Harry Kitching [Native Affairs]. He tried to tell Stan Brown about blacks. You couldn't tell

Stan Brown anything about blackfellas. He knew. Harry Kitching never come near him, anyway, after that.⁵⁴

Whilst it may not be the case that Stan Brown *never* had to comply with official requirements, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that policies and regulations were not always maintained with the punctiliousness that was requested, in Central Australia, and that some pastoralists, police and officials concurred at times in less than formal applications of these policies. From Don Ross's accounts and from other evidence of Stan Brown's nature and activities, I am well able to believe he would not necessarily have felt bound by the law to admit official overseeing of his station with regard to workers and their dependents. The 'old boys networks' sometimes proved more powerful than, and interpreted more liberally, the laws made in far distant Canberra.

As station owners, Don and Lorna were answerable to the Department of Native Affairs for the Kaytetye people who lived or worked on their station. They were responsible for distributing rations and clothing supplied by the Department, and for overseeing the general health of the Aboriginal people in the camps. The Northern Territory Archives holds a letter from Lorna Ross dated 7 July 1949, containing a request 'to get our medicine chest filled'.⁵⁵ Neutral Junction had been declared a ration station for 'aged and infirm natives'. The responsibilities weighed heavily. Lorna bore the brunt of these responsibilities while Don was often away out in the stock camps, mustering. And I doubt that they felt the freedom to order off their property the Native Affairs officials, in the cavalier

⁵⁴ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁵⁵ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 26

manner of Stan Brown. Besides, the people on Neutral Junction were kin: and Don Ross was also known as a 'soft-touch'. Having had no special training, a lot of the first aid and basic remedies they administered were the same rough and ready ones Don had received as a boy. Don recalled with amusement his practice of giving the stockmen Epsom salts before they went out mustering.

Don Ross: One spoon of Epsom salts in a four-gallon bucket. Heat it, take it before droving. You don't get sick, it cleans you out. That old Spring Range Jack, he can't shit, he reckons.

'Oh,' I said. 'I'll fix you. I can fix you'. I got a jar with some warm water and a packet (we used to buy them in packets, little packets in a box, you know) Epsom salts. I emptied the bloody box in there, the bloody packet and I said, 'You drinkem quickfella'. He drank it quick. I said, 'Right, you'll be all right tonight, when you come back'. He took the goats. I asked him how he was.

'Oh, nothing now, nothing. Shit can't stop'.

I fixed him. He never came back for any more.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*. Apart from injuries, health seemed to have been good, out on the station. Kaytetye people would have had their own bush remedies of course. It is interesting to note that it was during the war, when numbers of people were travelling through the Northern Territory, that Don contracted contagious illnesses – chickenpox and mumps – for which he was hospitalized. Graham Ross recalled:

Dad told me a few times that he could remember when a lot of people all round Barrow Creek and different areas, the Kaytetye, Alyawarr and Ammatyer were keeling over and dying from a sickness that was brought in by the Europeans - whether it was chicken pox or measles, I can't remember. All those old people just keeling over and dying. They didn't know what it was. The little kids were dying, the old age people were dying, only the strong managed to survive.

Interview with Terry Whitebeach 2 February 1999. Much of Suzanne Parry's research has been on the health of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, see, for example, S. Parry. 1992. *Disease, Medicine and Settlement*. PhD thesis, University of Queensland, St Lucia; 1998. *The Impact of Christian Missions on Aboriginal Health*. In T. Austin & S. Parry. (eds) 1998. pp. 253–274; 2005. *Health: A Matter of Control*. In J.T. Wells, M. Dewar and S. Parry. (eds) 2005. pp. 57–70. See also T. Rowse. 1998. for discussion of Aboriginal health issues. Dick Kimber also posits the position that disease could be considered the tool of an unwitting genocide. R. G. Kimber. 1997. *Genocide or Not? The Situation in Central Australia, 1860–1895*. In C.M. Tatz. (ed) *Genocidal Perspectives*. Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies, Macquarie University, Sydney, p. 47

Government records of the late nineteen forties and early fifties document the responsibilities Don and Lorna held towards the Kaytetye people living on Neutral Junction. A receipt signed by Don Ross dated 6 June 1949, itemises stores delivered to Neutral Junction. These included:

1x100 lb [45 kilogram] chest tea
1x1 cwt [50 kilogram] case soap
8x70 lb [32 kilogram] bags sugar
23x150 [60 kilogram] lb bags flour
6x56 lb [25 kilogram] cases rice
11 men's coats and trousers
28 blankets
17 women's coats and dresses (skirts and jackets)⁵⁷

A return for 27 May 1950 shows the weekly rations issued: it names the twenty three recipients and against each name lists the goods each was issued: '10lbs [4.5 kilograms] flour, 3ozs [85 grams] tea, 1 stick tobacco, 2 ozs [56 grams] baking powder. No rice, jam, milk or soap were issued that week'.⁵⁸ On 14 September 1949, Mr W. McCoy, Acting District Superintendent commented: 'All rationing is done by Mrs Ross who has to date made a fairly good job of supervising this aspect'.⁵⁹

Don Ross: Lorna used to give the rations out, to the camp ones [the Kaytetye people who lived in the camps and did not work as stockmen]. The ration was sent from here [Alice Springs] – Native Affairs, you know – and we used to give it out every Friday, to the camp mob. The workers got paid wages. That started after the war, I think.

Well, there was plenty of flour, sugar and tea, treacle, jam, plenty of rice and tinned meat – bully beef. By God, it's good tucker, make curry out of it. Bags of rice, they used to send up. I never charged

⁵⁷ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 19

⁵⁸ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 69

⁵⁹ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 25

them anything for doing that, you know. I used to pick it up from Barrow Creek, from the store there, take it out, load it on the truck and take it home. And I used to do the books. They never paid me for feeding them, Native Affairs, or whoever they were. But my wife, I told her about it. 'You better see Mr. McCoy'. Bill McCoy was the boss. 'See if they pay for all this bloody stuff. Feeding takes up a lot of time, you know'.⁶⁰

A less than flattering report of the conditions at Neutral Junction was given in 1949 to the Director of Native Affairs. The patrol officer's report noted:

At the time of our visit he [Don Ross] was absent at Wauchope where he had been for four days attending the race meeting. He had taken several of his native employees with him. The day of our visit was that following the conclusion of the meetings, but Ross apparently prolonged the festivities by at least another day. As you know, Wauchope is a most unsavoury place for natives at any time. At the time of the race meeting it would be considerably worse.⁶¹

The report also noted that the physical condition of the natives appeared to be satisfactory, but 'their clothing is deplorable, several of the older men and women being practically naked'⁶² and it recommended that a quantity of clothing be forwarded immediately to the Manager of Neutral Junction station for distribution among the aged and infirm.⁶³ The clothing duly arrived and was distributed and accounted for by Lorna. The report recommended that the Aboriginal people on Neutral Junction receive their rations from an employee of the Post Master General's Department at Barrow Creek. An alternative suggestion, 'that the natives be rationed fortnightly from Alice Springs may be too impracticable

⁶⁰ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

⁶¹ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 66. Some of these 'natives' would have been Don's own relatives.

⁶² National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 67

⁶³ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 67

involving as it does a round trip of 370 miles'.⁶⁴ That suggestion was not taken up.

The accommodation for the workers and their families consisted of three G.I. huts, each approximately 10 feet by 10 feet, and 5 feet high [3 metres x 3 metres x 1.5 metres] . This would have been pretty standard for those days, in fact, superior to some. Patrol officer G. Sweeney's inspection report for Neutral Junction station 27 January 1945, lists the employees' accommodation as 'bush wurlies'.⁶⁵ The native camp, the report stated was 'rather depressing. Leaf and bark windbreaks comprise the majority of the shelters, which are situated on exposed rising ground'.⁶⁶ Don, like most station owners, took a laissez-faire approach to cleanliness and order in the camp, claiming that the people quickly fouled their camps and all clothing and bedding issued, and then went out bush or moved their camp to a new site, which they equally quickly fouled.

Don Ross: When there were people staying at the creek camp, there would be a dozen sometimes, or six or only two. They had swags, they'd look after them all right, but they put them in the dirt of course. Most of them had to get a groundsheet, you know. They didn't clean the place, and when it was too dirty they would shift to another ground. Funny buggers. Yes, they would shift to ground that was clean and new, see. But it would soon be dirty again, bones everywhere and bloody rubbish, and then they would shift away. Well, you couldn't do much down there, or you'd be down there all the time instead of up doing your own work.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 66

⁶⁵ National Archives of Australia Darwin CR SE740Item 7114, p. 12

⁶⁶ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item 7114, p. 66

⁶⁷ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

Whilst this might seem a dismissive approach, I don't think Don Ross can be blamed for not solving the problems that those far better equipped, in authority and resources, failed to solve – the poor living conditions of those Indigenous people forced into a relatively resourceless, sedentary lifestyle. It is worth noting, too, that his own living conditions were frequently meagre. But Don Ross's attitude reflects that of Europeans and the 'civilised' 'half-castes' of his times who had chosen to throw in their lot with white society. It also reflects, I believe, the complexity of balancing friendship and authority. Don subscribed to the belief that distance must be maintained if Aboriginal people were to work well for a boss. Don spoke about Jimmy Heaps, to whom Neutral Junction sold horses, a man who was too soft, and who therefore lost all his cattle.

Don Ross: I know who bought the horses, then, Jimmy Heaps. He bought the horses then he took them out to Spring Range. I only had horses. He had cattle there. He got some cattle from Mt Allen Springs I think, from Bohning. He had some bullocks – cattle and calves. But he had no idea of running a bloody cattle station. Bloody blacks ate it on him. Blacks ate em.

Myfany Turpin: Ate all his cattle?

Don Ross: Yeah. They used to kill em and eat 'em.

Myfany Turpin: What station did he have?

Don Ross: He never had a station; he never settled down he just moved from one place to another.

Myfany Turpin: With his cattle?

Don Ross: Yeah.

Myfany Turpin: But they all got eaten did they?

Don Ross: Yeah, he finished up on the Sandover, on one of the government bores. He was on Sandover. He was using the government bore there. That's where he used to get his water there and he finished up with no bloody cattle at all. He never sold a bloody

beast. They should never have eaten them. He was too good, too soft with them [the Aboriginal people].⁶⁸

Dick Riley, an old friend of Don Ross's and a fellow stockman, spoke cheerfully about his 'rough' treatment at the hands of his white bosses and attributed his skills and success as a worker to that harsh training.

Dick Riley: My old Daddy passed away when I was a little boy and old Bill Riley he grew me up, put 'em on a horse. I was only a little boy when I was on a horse. Sometimes get thrown. Yes. Sometimes when I used to take off after a cow, buck jumpers, I used to put up with them 'cause I keep on taught and before that roughest horse, some other horse that somebody else was putting right, I used to get on him myself and give it a fair go.

We used to keep going. We used to work. I taught properly for work. I used to work any job at all... Well I got a good rigout because I used to work for papalunyu, whitefella. He my boss you know. I been knocked about a lot. I taught that way to be good. Well I'm still about.⁶⁹

Up to 1939 there had been little control of Aboriginal living sites in the Northern Territory. Aborigines lived either on reserves, cattle stations, mission stations or unalienated Crown land, or had moved into towns. The Government was concerned that Aborigines were literally beyond their control. No complete record of Aboriginal people existed until a register was compiled and completed in 1957. Births, marriages and deaths passed with only an ad hoc acknowledgement. An example of this is the letter in which Don advised the Native Affairs Branch of the birth of Lorna Pepperell's son.

⁶⁸ Interview with Don Ross by Myfany Turpin 20 November 1997

⁶⁹ Interview with Dick Riley by Terry Whitebeach 13 March 1998

Just a line to let you know that Lorna Pepperell has a baby boy, was born on 23 of this month, father is a [sic] Aboriginal full blood, name is Sandy. Sorry that I'm a bit late in letting you know.⁷⁰

There was no particular orthography for Aboriginal names.⁷¹ Government statistics depended entirely on the erratic record keeping of missionaries, cattle station managers, police and various government appointed settlement managers and patrol officers.⁷²

Rowse maintains that the relationship between the Administration and the pastoral industry was a mutually ambivalent one. The Administration needed the pastoral industry as an agent of assimilation – to hold the Indigenous people in the hinterland and to give them useful employment. The pastoral industry benefited from ration subsidies, low wage rates for Indigenous workers and sympathetic supervision of industrial conditions.⁷³ But conditions began to change, as the Government began to consider ways of effecting assimilation of the Indigenous population.

The *1949 Pastoral Regulations*⁷⁴ obliged pastoralists to pay a minimum of ten shillings a week to experienced stockmen and five shillings to a (female)

⁷⁰ The letter was undated. National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS 740 Item p. 87 CA 7114 ATSIIC Regional Office, Alice Springs

⁷¹ Myfany Turpin, Emily Hayes, Don Ross and Blanche Ross spent a considerable amount of time on one occasion deciphering one of the returns for Neutral Junction station. It contained names spelled incorrectly, wrong kinship attributed to certain people, ages recorded incorrectly and numbers of children incorrectly recorded.

⁷² J.T. Wells. *Welfare Colonists: Contexts and Encounters on Government Settlements*. In T. Austin and S. Parry. (eds) 1998. p. 281

⁷³ T. Rowse. 1998. p. 130

⁷⁴ National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A432/81 Item 47/594 Pt 11918–1947 *Aboriginals Ordinance Act: Employment of Aborigines in the Pastoral Industry*

domestic, although as a Memorandum to the Native Affairs Branch by the Government Secretary 27 June 1949 made clear, ‘The Northern Territory Pastoral Lessees Association [were] making every endeavour to delay the application of these regulations’.⁷⁵ The wage rate, once it was established, was generally honoured, but as Rowse points out, the use of cash could present a problem on cattle stations remote from settlements and towns.⁷⁶ He further points out that these regulations meant not only that the labour of Indigenous workers became more expensive, but that the exercise of the workers’ new liberty to use cash disrupted their predicability and availability as a work force.⁷⁷

Once he lost the Neutral Junction station, Don sold his labour on a contract basis, and although he was obviously sought after by other station owners as a stock worker, contract fencer, and camp cook, and claimed proudly that he commanded the highest wages – he was well known for his stock work skills, his prodigious strength and his ability to work long hours for extended periods of time – this part of his life was less satisfying to him than his earlier, more regulated existence with his old grandfather as boss. He often worked alone, or with other non-Kaytetye people, far from Kaytetye country, and was drinking heavily. Graham Ross recounted taking Ronda, his fiancée, out to the stock camp to meet Don, and during the evening Don drank two bottles of rum, and a further bottle after they had gone to sleep, and then rose before dawn to do a full day’s work. Because of

⁷⁵National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A432/81 Item 47/594 Pt 1.1918–1947 *Aboriginals Ordinance Act: Employment of Aborigines in the Pastoral Industry*, p. 68

⁷⁶T. Rowse. 1998. p. 131

⁷⁷T. Rowse. 1998. p. 130

Don's vigour, strength and astounding physical fitness, it was years before his drinking began to take a toll on his health.

The early 1950s were looked upon as the beginning of a new era in Aboriginal administration. In the federal arena, Paul Hasluck was the key figure in the reformulation of Aboriginal policy. He was appointed Minister for Territories in 1951, and it was under his ministership that the 1951 Native Welfare Conference of the Commonwealth and States declared that the objective of its policy was assimilation and its desire was to see all persons born in Australia enjoying full citizenship.⁷⁸ Hasluck stated his firm belief that 'for good or ill, the future of Aborigines...[lay] in close association with the white community'.⁷⁹ It had been acknowledged finally that tribal Aboriginal people were not dying out, as predicted, and, in contradiction of the predominant view of the first hundred years of 'settlement', that Aborigines were innately incapable because of their racial constitution of 'progress'.⁸⁰ Hasluck stated in a speech in 1952 that 'assimilation means that eventually, as they make progress, all aboriginal people are to live as we [white Australians] do'.⁸¹

Jeremy Beckett argues that Paul Hasluck articulated a vision of Australia which 'turned its back on the past and proposed a new beginning in the form of an

⁷⁸ Cited in H. Reynolds. 2005. p. 209

⁷⁹ C.M. Tatz. 1964. *Aboriginal Administration in the Northern Territory of Australia*. PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, p.12. Cited in P. Read. In A. McGrath (ed) 1995. p. 288

⁸⁰ R. McGregor. *Nation and Assimilation: Continuity and Discontinuity in Aboriginal Affairs in the 1950s*. In J. Wells, M. Dewar, S. Parry. (eds) 2005. p. 17

⁸¹ P. Hasluck. 1953. *Native Welfare in Australia: Speeches and Addresses*. Paterson Brokensha, Perth, p. 35. Cited in R. McGregor. In J. Wells, M. Dewar, S. Parry. (eds) 2005. p. 17

affluent, classless, monocultural society: the poor would forget their former privations; migrants would forget Europe; and the Aborigines would forget their past. In return, all would enjoy ‘the Australian way of life’.⁸² In doing so, the biologically based model of assimilation, by which it would be possible to ‘breed the colour out’ of successive generations of ‘half-castes’ and quadroons’ so they could take their place in mainstream society, leaving their ‘full-blood’ relatives to inevitable extinction, gave way to a socio-cultural model of assimilation, which emphasised the civic dimensions of a national belonging. Aboriginal people would become members of the nation not through conformity to a common complexion, but through their adherence to shared norms and codes of conduct, and their enjoyment of equal rights and responsibilities with other Australians’.⁸³ Aboriginal people, in return for citizenship, would be required to adopt the ‘Australian way of life’⁸⁴ and to reduce their connection to their cultural heritage to folkloric ‘local colour’ (no pun intended).

For men such as Don Ross, this appeared to present no particular problem. But what was enshrined in law was not necessarily what was experienced as day-to-day reality, particularly in places such as the Northern Territory, remote from Canberra, and where racism was a deeply entrenched fact of life and groups such as the Pastoral Lessees Association were vocal in supporting their vested interests

⁸² J. Beckett. 1988. pp. 201–202. Also cited in T. Rowse. 1998. p. 107

⁸³ R. McGregor. 2005. pp 18–19

⁸⁴ A dominant issue of the 1950s (and the focus of current contemporary debate, fifty years on) but also a notoriously nebulous notion. R. White. 1979. The Australian Way of Life. *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 73, pp. 528–545; W.E.H. Stanner. 1953. The Australian Way of Life. In W.V. Aughterson. (ed) *Taking Stock: Aspects of Mid-century Life in Australia*. Cheshire, Melbourne, pp. 1–14. Cited in R. McGregor. Nation and Assimilation: Continuity and Discontinuity in Aboriginal Affairs in the 1950s. In J. Wells, M. Dewar & S. Parry. (eds.) 2005. p. 19 and p.28

whenever they felt a conflict between Aboriginal rights and their own business interests. Post-War Northern Territory, however, saw increasing activism on behalf of Indigenous people by such groups as the Half-Castes' Progressive Association and the North Australian Workers' Union. The old days of unchallenged hegemony of pastoral property owners and white settlers were being challenged and would slowly but increasingly be challenged by more liberal attitudes and policies.⁸⁵

Don Ross was not a man much interested in the wider spheres of the politics of the day, he was first and foremost a stockman, but his life history does illuminate some of these issues, and some of the difficulties he faced in life (such as being prevented from cohabiting legally with his 'straight-skin' Kaytetye partner, Aileen) arose directly from racist policies. His marriage to Lorna Puris complied with the government policy of 'breeding out the colour': Lorna was also 'a fair one' and had been separated from her parents and grown up in the Bungalow in Alice Springs. She was working with her white relatives on a cattle station when Don met her. Don, by his own admission, was 'three quarters [white]' and had thrown in his lot (publicly, at least) with the whitefellas: he and Lorna produced eleven 'fair' children, only the elder ones of whom spoke Kaytetye and maintained close ties with their tribal relatives, during their childhood on Neutral Junction station, but all of whom had a strong sense of their difference from, and

⁸⁵ The Archives contain extensive files documenting this criticism of racist policies and practices. Examples are National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A1/15 Item 38/4793 Packsaddle's Trial – Flogging and other harsh treatment of Aborigines; Investigations into assaults by Aborigines on White Northern Territory women; CRS 431/1 Item 50/277 "Uplift" documents; "Lubra Harem Case" 1947; CRS A431/1 Item 1950/2768 Part 2: Attitudes to Aborigines & Aborigines' Attitudes to whites (quoting missionaries, patrol officers and 'concerned citizens'); CRS A431/150/597 "Shameful Treatment Must Not be Perpetuated"; CRS A431/1 Item 50/597 (1939-1951) containing documents related to Aborigines becoming citizens, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

superiority to traditional Kaytetye people. These children attended the Catholic Convent in Alice Springs, as boarders, only coming back to the station for school holidays, and later they lived in Alice Springs with their mother and Hettie Hayes, Don's mother. Don and I discussed, with some difficulty, as it is neither easy to understand nor convey the ethos of another era, the difference in status between his children and the Kaytetye children who did not go to school, and who lived in the 'native camp' on Neutral Junction.

Don Ross: Graham used to make the kids work. Pull him up the hill. Oh, yes, he used to swear at them. Oh yes.

Terry Whitebeach: And the kids never objected?

Don Ross: No.

Terry Whitebeach: They just did what he said?

Don Ross: Yes.

Terry Whitebeach: Why?

Don Ross: I suppose he made out he was a white man, see....

Terry Whitebeach: Do your children think of themselves as white and not Aboriginal?

Don Ross: Well, they do, a bit, but they do think they're Aboriginals.

Terry Whitebeach: But not like bush Aboriginals?

Don Ross: No, no, different.⁸⁶

Graham Ross commented on this incident and the differences between white, black and half-castes, when he was growing up in the forties and fifties.

Graham Ross: It was a big wagon, something that two or four or six horses would pull, and they [the Kaytetye kids] pushed me up the hill.

⁸⁶ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 7 April 1998

I never got off. I had the stock whip. I was on top with the stock whip. I was flogging them with the whip.

It was taught to me, coming from here [Alice Springs] that a blackfella was a lowly thing....

Terry Whitebeach: Did they try at school to make you less Aboriginal and more white?

Graham Ross: Well, you wasn't allowed to speak language or anything.

Terry Whitebeach: After school, with the other kids?

Graham Ross: Well, we just were told that you were there to be taught to grow up like a European kid and no Aboriginal kid was allowed to speak language in that school or St Mary's (the Anglican hostel in Alice Springs) or anywhere I suppose. It was a bit hard at times, because you were brought up a tribal kid in the bush like I was and could be changed. Well, we accepted that in a way. Us kids we were brought in and put in these boarding schools. Oh, there were white kids there, [too].

I was always saying to the nuns how grateful I was for a lot of the things they taught us and done for us. We learnt discipline the right way, we learnt respect of people and we learned health and hygiene. You wouldn't get that if you were at home. Your parents have got their life to lead and do their own thing a lot, like, Mum was a cook and Dad was on the station. You wouldn't have got that unless you were there with those nuns. And that was a good time in my life. I used to come there and get an education and go to school, get this hygiene training.⁸⁷

The traditional Kaytetye people had the welcoming and open-minded attitude towards children, which seemed to be characteristic of traditional Indigenous people. Graham Ross spent much time with his Kaytetye family in his early childhood.

Graham Ross: I lived in the camp. I didn't live at home with Mum and Dad, I lived in the camp. Myself and a little white boy from Melbourne, Barry Muir, he lived in the camp. The camp down in the creek: we lived down there. We'd corroboree and everything. We never spoke English, we were always speaking Kaytetye, me and this

⁸⁷ Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 2 February 1999

little boy, Barry. His family ran the Home of Bullion mines, eighteen mile past Neutral Junction, and he didn't want to live with his family, too lonely, so he lived at Neutral Junction, in the camp.⁸⁸

They also seemed to accept the 'grandstanding' of Don Ross's children with amused tolerance. But they were not passive recipients of it. According to Graham Ross, they freely expressed their scepticism of the value of the learning Don's children were receiving in school.

Graham Ross: Jenny [Graham's sister] and I would go down there [to the camp] and tease these Aboriginal kids our age, and the old people. We would say, 'You mob don't understand, you don't know the ABC', and we'd spell words out to them. And they'd laugh and say, 'How you gonna go bush with ABC and learn to get goanna or track kangaroo? That ABC, that only rubbish, that can't help you. You mob talking rubbish. That can't get you tucker. You should learn from us, proper way to track'.

I laugh about it now, and think about these old people saying, 'You get more silly, going to Alice Springs and learning that ABC. You come back proper stupid. You can't tell us nothing. You telling us about what you learn at school. We don't go to school, we know more about tracks and bush tucker'. They didn't think much of this bloody ABC.

Lovely old people. I can always remember as a little boy sitting there in the camp, with the old wise people. These old fellas and they'd say, 'If you gonna be a good Kaytetye man, first of all you gotta love everything around you. All the animals and trees. Don't go killing any birds. Don't go chopping those trees down. Don't be troublemaker, and don't go telling lies, because Aboriginal person gotta be proper honest man. Two of the most important things in an Aboriginal person's life is to love everything and be honest, then they'll get by in the world. You remember that when you go to Alice Springs. You be honest to people and you be kind to people'.⁸⁹

Graham was very sad when he spoke of the ravages alcohol later made on these people whom he remembered as kindly old relatives.

⁸⁸ Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 5 February 1999

⁸⁹ Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 5 February 1999

Don Ross was a man fuelled more by passion than politics: later partners were not necessarily in line with government designs and policies that half-castes should become increasingly distant from their traditional origins. His second partner, Emily Furber, was fair, like himself, and she was an ‘educated bugger’, Don said, who knew no Aboriginal languages, and only spoke English. But his last wife, Grace Miller, was closer to her traditional origins. The account Don Ross gives of taking up with Emily Furber is revealing also of the authority he invests white men with, to influence his decision-making.

Don Ross: I’d known [Emily] a long time. She loved me. She cleared out with me. I took her to Annitowa. First of all I sent her away. I was working for the Government, cleaning these cottages here [in Alice Springs], me and another fella. I thought I’d ring Yank [Lyon] and ask for a job and he said yes. So I went. Then the boss sent me back with a mob of cattle and I ran into her that night. The timing chain was slipping and I had to take the truck into the garage. And while I was waiting there at the garage she came around. Old Stan Brown was there and he said, ‘You got a new girlfriend. You oughta take her out there’. He give me the okay. He didn’t like Lorna. She [Emily] was there and heard it all. [When] I was ready to go there she was walking down the bloody road where the weighbridge is now. I caught her up. So she got on the bloody truck and went with me and I kept her till she died.⁹⁰ Lorna was mad. She tried to get me back home, but I wouldn’t go. [And my mother] didn’t like it [either].⁹¹

After Emily’s death Don was living a less well-regulated life, drifting from short-term job to short-term job, and spending much of his free time in pubs, which is where he met Grace Miller.

Don Ross: Grace Miller was the last wife I had. She was a big woman, very tall and big. Her family came from Glen Helen side. Western Arrernte. She could talk a bit of Luritja. She was three-parts black you know. Father was half-caste and the mother was black. She went to school here [in Alice Springs.] She was a lot younger

⁹⁰ Which, sadly, was only three years later.

⁹¹ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

[than me], oh gawd, yes, lot younger. I met her in the pub, in the Stuart Arms. It was a rough old bloody joint. We looked at each other. I had a Landrover I had to pick up; it belonged to the station [Ammaroo]. She slept with me that night and by next morning she was in that car. She's another one I took [out to the stations]. Three kids [we had], Maria the first one, then Dawn and Roseena. And they're small, [her] girls, they're small, but Grace was tall and big. She died when Roseena was a baby. She got bad inside her chest. I was living in Alice by then. Fanny, the old woman, [Grace's mother] was there, to help look after the kids. She was a good woman. And they all turned out good kids. They're the best.⁹²

When Don first came to live in Alice Springs, he camped at Charles Creek, the site of one of the present day town camps. David Ross, Don's son, claims that Don was one of Alice Springs' first 'town campers'.

Although this was historically a time of increased opportunity for Aboriginal people like Don Ross, the laws having theoretically, at least, given them access to the rights of Australian citizens, and secured them decent wages for their work, it was perhaps the time of greatest loneliness and disconnection from family, country and support that Don Ross experienced – it was during this time, he said, that he almost lost his Kaytetye language, since he worked mostly with whitefellas and non-Kaytetye speakers, or alone, and his wives were not Kaytetye. So it was a freedom of questionable quality he achieved, in a society still riven with racial prejudice and tension.

Once Don lost Neutral Junction Station he seemed progressively to lose his hold in the white world. Although he was a sought-after employee for many years, and had many white friends as a younger man, as he grew past middle age alcohol and

⁹² Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

his itinerant lifestyle took its toll, and many of those earlier associations slipped away. Older men, like George Hayes and Stan Brown left the stations, or passed away, and the nature of Don's working life began to change. He trucked cattle, built fences, and worked as a camp cook. It is interesting that after he left station work, and after the death of Grace Miller, after a short period working as a gardener for the Alice Springs Council, Don resumed his relationship with his partner of many decades earlier, Aileen, with whom he lived south of Darwin for nearly a decade, in his senior years. By then he was almost indistinguishable from the old fellows he'd known as a child, who used to 'knock about' the stations, looking for work. Don kept up his saddling and saddle repair and other leatherwork, till all his saddles were stolen. He returned, elderly and infirm, to Alice Springs to live with one or other of his children, in the 1990s.

The *1953 Aboriginals Ordinance* omitted references to race, such as 'half-caste' and concerned itself instead with lifestyle, rather than overt references to race. As Rowley notes, whilst Northern Territory 'mixed bloods' were effectively granted citizenship in 1953, or as Peter Read puts it, 'two thousand mixed descent people became non-Aborigines'⁹³ at the same time some fifteen thousand, seven hundred 'full bloods' were confined to the legal status of 'Wards of the State'.⁹⁴ A Ward was anyone the Administrator declared to be in need of special care.⁹⁵ Proclaimed as a significant advance, the Ordinance was later criticised by Charles Rowley as

⁹³ P. Read. 1995. p. 286

⁹⁴ C.D. Rowley. 1970. *The Remote Aborigines*. Penguin, Ringwood, pp. 295; National Archives of Australia Canberra CRS A452 Item 1955/54 H. C. Giese, Director of Welfare, Report of the Conference on Native Welfare, Sydney 24-25 February 1955

⁹⁵ *An Ordinance to Provide for the Care and Assistance of Certain Persons*: No.16 of 1953. III (1) (14); sections 25, 26, part v

‘one of the last big efforts to use authoritarian legislation to control the processes of social change’.⁹⁶ Nowhere was the Australia-wide push towards compulsory assimilation in the 1950s stronger than in the Northern Territory, Read writes.⁹⁷ This had the result of separating the ‘half-caste’ and ‘full-blood’ communities even further.

There was not a concomitant commitment to equal wages and conditions: Frank Stevens points out that under the *Wards Employment Ordinance* Indigenous pastoral workers’ wages were one fifth of the white workers’ wages. The ‘slow workers’ clause was a convenient loophole for many employees to evade paying the mandatory wage.⁹⁸ This did not directly affect Don Ross, who was paid well for his labour.

Don Ross: After [selling] Neutral Junction [I worked on] Stirling, Annitowa, Ammaroo and Ooratippra [stations] and then Arapunya, the last. Different between when I was my own boss, you see. I always got good pay, top money, ’cos I was a good stockman. Stan Brown gave me £25/-/- a week.⁹⁹ And I didn’t have to work so hard then.¹⁰⁰

Following trenchant criticism of the Administration over the years the Council of Aboriginal Rights was formed in 1951, partly to investigate allegations of human rights abuses in the Northern Territory, and in 1956 Charles Duguid chaired the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines. Such initiatives, aided by the

⁹⁶ C.D. Rowley. 1970. pp. 296

⁹⁷ P. Read. 1995. p. 287

⁹⁸ F. Stevens. 1968. *Equal Wages for Aborigines: Background to Industrial Discrimination in the Northern Territory of Australia*. Aura Press, Sydney

⁹⁹ Don worked for Stan Brown over a number of years.

¹⁰⁰ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

work of the North Australian Workers' Union and the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights, by many church and humanitarian groups, gradually improved things for Aboriginal people. Don Ross was not actively involved in any of these organizations, but many of his children and grandchildren have played significant roles in Aboriginal health, education and land rights in the Northern Territory in later decades. Don Ross was of course aware of the changes the legislation brought to the Aboriginal world, the higher wages, welfare benefits, and the concomitant scarcity of jobs on cattle stations for Indigenous workers now they could claim equal wages with white workers, but his comments and his interest were focused on particular aspects of his immediate environment.¹⁰¹ I asked Don whether the gaining of citizen's rights in the fifties and sixties changed things much for Aboriginal people, in his view.

Don Ross: Yes, it did. But not that much. The money [award wages] made a bit of a difference though. The currency was a lot bigger. Made a lot of difference. Sounded more. And grog. [Aborigines' right to drink.] No grog out on the stations, [but] when I used to come in to town I used to have a lot of drink, till I had nothing left. I'd have too much when I came into town. Drink there all day.¹⁰²

Pubs were important, Cowlshaw notes. 'In an alien land, in unaccustomed solitude, the whites needed pubs for their gatherings'.¹⁰³ Kapferer has argued that in Australia drinking is a sign of personal autonomy, and an 'ingredient in the formation of personal power'.¹⁰⁴ Australian male drinking is symbolic of mateship, - an 'egalitarian principle of natural sociality and reciprocity between

¹⁰¹ Which is the way the majority of people react to and mark social and government policy change

¹⁰² Manuscript of *Good One. Don Ross*

¹⁰³ G. Cowlshaw. 1988. p. 55

¹⁰⁴ B. Kapferer. 1988. *Legends of People and Myths of State*. Smithsonian Institute Press, Washington. pp. 55-56. Cited in J.T. Wells. 1995. p. 75

equals'.¹⁰⁵ It was thus a mark of acceptance and status for men like Don Ross to be able to drink with his grandfather and white station owners, although that status was tenuous, for example he was challenged and insulted in pubs, at times, and he had to obtain a letter from a member of parliament to attest to his right to drink in pubs. But it very clearly indicated that he had cast his lot in with the whites, as he himself stated. And the right to purchase and consume alcohol was one of the clear demarcations of power between black and white. There were strong penalties (not always enforced, but existing as a threat) for supplying Aboriginal people with liquor.

Don Ross: Young George Hayes never drank at all, but Old George Hayes he could drink a lot. 'Sick on the 'erbs', [he used to say]¹⁰⁶. All the bloody hard stuff he used to drink. Them old fellas they get on the bloody brandy or bloody rum. They would drink for days. Kennedy and Riley, from Elkedra, they used to come in to Neutral and they would get on the bloody grog. God, they'd be drinking there for bloody two or three days a week, for two or three weeks. And I'd go into Barrow Creek and get it for them. He used to get a taste and away he'd go. He'd drink and he'd want a reviver. I'd go back and get some more for him, keep him going.

When I used to come into town [Alice Springs] I used to have a lot of drink till I had nothing left. Drink there all day. Made up for lost time. I was drinking a lot of bloody rum. I was strong and could hold it. But I never got that sick. I had plenty to eat. My mother didn't want me to drink at all. I said, 'I like a little bit of drink'. I was a bugger for rum. That's what I used to drink. Rum. Rum. Rum, never beer.

Annie Lock tried to persuade the young Don Ross not to drink. She was initially a missionary with the Australian Aborigines' Mission, but in 1927 she set up as an independent worker at Harding Soak, near Ti-Tree, living in a bush shelter and caring for sick and starving Aboriginal people. She spoke out about the Coniston

¹⁰⁵B. Kapferer, 1988. p. 158 Cited in J.T. Wells. 1995. p. 75

¹⁰⁶ Sick (or 'sic') imperative verb, colloquial, to incite or encourage, to attack: *Oxford Dictionary*

massacre, and in turn was criticized for living alone among Aboriginal people.¹⁰⁷

Don recalled her admonitions:

Don Ross: She had a talk to me. Old lady she was. Said I wouldn't go to heaven if I didn't give up the drink. She told me all them sort of things. I said I'd give it away one day. She was a bit silly to go on like that, I reckon.¹⁰⁸

Don ran the gauntlet of the law in supplying his stock workers with alcohol: but it would have been difficult for him to refuse, particularly his relatives. He recalled incidents from the days before the laws were changed.

Don Ross: Aboriginals wasn't allowed to drink. Oh no, they weren't allowed to have any. If you gave it to them you'll get about six months [in gaol], no option, if you were caught. I used to give my mob [beer] when I go bush, out in the stock camps. I'd get some and take out and give it to them, you know, a little bit to drink. They appreciated it too. They'd sooner have the bloody wine, but that used to send 'em bloody mad. I wouldn't give it to them.

One night I come in from out camp where I was mustering, came into Barrow Creek on the main road and going back we ran into [met] a truck. Man in the truck was sleeping I think. I seen him there and I knew the fella so I pulled up to speak to him, fella called Ivor Weiss. He had a load of bloody grog on see, going to Tennant Creek. Well, while I was talking to him these two boys they get a carton of beer out of his truck and put it in mine. Them two boys riding there in the truck with me you see. One of them, my boy, Dan, was working for me, and the other fella, I forget which one, Ben, I think, was just going down to that other place. They both liked the grog. Ivor wouldn't wake up to the stolen carton till he got to Tennant Creek. He wouldn't know where it went to, [but] he'd know somebody had pinched it. I didn't [know they'd taken it] till we got to Bullocky Camp and they pulled it out. They got drunk that night, some of them, lucky buggers. They had the next day off; they couldn't work. I let them drink a bit, then I said, 'You'd better stop now', I told them, 'drink all that beer before you stop mustering.'^{109, 110}

¹⁰⁷ Anne Lock (1876–1943) worked as a missionary in Central and South Australia until 1936. C.E. Bishop. Ann Lock. In D. Carment and B. James. (eds) 1992. pp. 116–118

¹⁰⁸ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

¹⁰⁹ That is, before they left the stock camp and went back in to Neutral Junction or Barrow Creek.

It is both a cause for sorrow, and perhaps a reflection of the very particular and personal application of political change to people's lives, that the acquiring of citizenship by Indigenous people was referred to, frequently, as 'drinking rights'. But then, alcohol has always played such a predominant role in white society in the Northern Territory, that to be able to drink as white people did signalled equality to Aboriginal people. Graham Ross recalled with sorrow the status of Aboriginal people.

Graham Ross: When the poor old Aboriginals got their rights to drink— I came back from Melbourne and I started coaching [boxing] in '65 or '66, '66 it was, and, whatever year it was the Aborigines got their rights to drink, we went past the pub when I was coaching that year and old fella said, 'Come in and have a drink,' he said, 'human way, whiteman way. Not blackfella way, proper human way.' We just killed ourselves laughing. But he was taught all his life that he wasn't human, in the early days, that he was just an animal. White man used to flog him. We talked to these poor old fellas back there at Neutral Junction, that if you was taken to with a post-hole shovel and you got a flogging you would then become human. They'd tame you with a crowbar or a post-hole shovel or something like that. You'd become human then.¹¹¹

For several years after the *1953 Welfare Ordinance* and the *Wards Employment Ordinance* were passed, the employment of Aboriginal workers continued to be governed by the provisions of the earlier *Aboriginals Ordinance*. By the late 1950s, however, the plight of Aboriginal people had led to the formation of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA), renamed the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) in 1964, which put pressure on government to grant citizenship to

¹¹⁰ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*

¹¹¹ Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 2 February 1999

Indigenous people, and on the unions, including the North Australian Workers' Union (NAWU) to do something about sub-standard wages and workers' conditions experienced by Indigenous workers.¹¹² As a result of lobbying, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) at its 1963 Congress, called for an end to wage discrimination against Aboriginal workers.¹¹³ NAWU, feeling threatened by the competition of non-unionised Aboriginal workers with the white workforce¹¹⁴ called only for the *reform* of the Wards Employment Ordinance in 1961, but the Northern Territory Council of Aboriginal Rights (NTCAR) which was formed in 1962, and had a predominantly Aboriginal membership, exerted pressure on NAWU to lobby for the abolition of the special rates of pay awarded Aboriginal workers and to fight for equal pay for them.¹¹⁵

Until 1964 most Aborigines in the Northern Territory were wards of the Director of Welfare and subject to 'protective' legislation. In 1964 that wardship was abolished with one exemption: as documented above, the Wards Employment Ordinance was continued as an interim measure until other means of wage regulation were provided.¹¹⁶ The outcome of the 1965–6 equal wages case conformed precisely to the template of the gendered social inclusion (the male breadwinner with dependent wife and children – which was the social model for

¹¹² B. Brian. 2001. p. 262

¹¹³ A. Markus. 1978. Talk Longa Mouth. In A. Curthoys & A. Markus (eds) *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class*. Hale & Iremonger, Neutral Bay, pp. 154–155

¹¹⁴ Northern Territory Archives Box 32, minutes of NAWU Central Council, 25 October 1964. Cited in B. Brian. 2001. p. 265

¹¹⁵ J. T. Wells. 1995. pp. 179–201

¹¹⁶ National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS A4940/1 Item C 4171 Northern Territory Aborigines Wage Policy

citizenship): male Aboriginal stock workers were henceforth to be subject to the Northern Territory Cattle Industry Award, but women who had long worked as the pastoral industry's domestics were not.¹¹⁷

The possibility that Indigenous people might change from a rations-based to a cash-based way of life hardly seems to have occurred to those involved in fashioning an assimilation policy in 1939–1940, Tim Rowse writes.¹¹⁸ The change occurred gradually, with Aboriginal people receiving only a 'pocket money' part of their entitlements even after the 1959 reforms. The movement from rations to cash in the 1960s and 1970s was consummated by including Indigenous people in industrial awards and giving them equal access to social security benefits. These changes were linked to the lifting of statutory restrictions on Aboriginal people's movements, property holdings, associations and consumer choices and to the granting of the right to vote.¹¹⁹

In 1962 Barry E. Christophers criticised the Northern Territory administration for making Indigenous people 'appear incapable of working satisfactorily and incapable of handling money. The Aborigines' greatest need is not better morals, temperance or education, but more money', he wrote.¹²⁰ To Christophers, it seemed that the Administration's implementation of assimilation policy was little more than a capitulation to pastoralists' desire for cheap labour. And he scorned

¹¹⁷ T. Rowse. 1998. p. 117

¹¹⁸ T. Rowse. 1998. p. 113

¹¹⁹ The 1964 Social Welfare Ordinance ended restrictions on access to alcohol and introduced award wages. T. Rowse. 1998. p. 129 and p.3

¹²⁰ B.E. Christophers. Northern Territory. In W.M. Murray. (ed) 1962. *The Struggle for Dignity*. Council for Aboriginal Rights, Melbourne, pp. 27–37. Cited in T. Rowse. 1998. p. 114

the defence of limiting access to cash because of Aboriginal people's abuse of alcohol. He wrote

Excessive drinking by Aborigines is a symptom of their complaint. The disease itself is lack of citizenship, low wages and colour prejudice. The Aborigine is pauperised and degraded to such an extent that many seek solace in alcohol. He is degraded and then a painkiller is made available to him. Many have the effrontery to blame the painkiller for his downfall.¹²¹

Don Ross threw in his lot with the whites, but never really was accepted on equal terms. Under the patronage of Old George Hayes and the like, he learned to disregard his tribal heritage, to drink; and when those old whitefellas were gone and Don must make his way alone, the effects of his status as 'not full white' began to take an increasing toll. He became prey to the likes of Ken Milnes, and his athleticism and prodigious skills had bought him little more than a lifetime of hard work and an old age crippled by the many accidents and injuries he had suffered as a stockman. Despite the 'hail fellow, well met' attitude Don felt he had with white people, and I have no doubt he sustained cordial relationships and was valued for his skill and hard work, there was a clear mark, beyond which it was understood that 'half-castes' must not trespass.

Graham Ross: I can remember as a kid, growing up in Neutral Junction in the late '40s and early 50s I wasn't allowed into all those homesteads when we travelled around. You had to sit out in the motor car. 'Stay in the vehicle. Don't get off this vehicle. You wait there. Because these people don't want to have nothing to do with half castes and this is a whiteman's homestead and you stay there.'

Maybe Dad might go and talk to these people about stock work or maybe you'd go with the white manager or something. Or you'd go with the head stockman, or drover, and he'd say, 'Now you wait there now.' And your tucker would be brought out to you and you'd eat it

¹²¹B.E. Christophers. 1962. Cited in T. Rowse. 1998. p. 114

off the back of the truck. Or you'd go and sit down. Might be a bough shed shelter and you'd sit outside. You couldn't go inside, not even to sit on the verandah. There was no place for a part-Aboriginal or blackfella.¹²²

Don Ross stated the ambiguity of the 'half-caste's' position succinctly, when I asked him how he thought of himself. He replied. 'I was brought up by whites, but I was called Aboriginal, I suppose'.¹²³ The end of the assimilation era in 1972 and the subsequent eras of 'integration' and 'self-determination' did not necessarily resolve the issue of identity for Aboriginal people of mixed descent. The assigning of 'degrees' of Aboriginality and 'whiteness' is a European construct. Kaytetye (and other Indigenous language and cultural groups) seemed to contain neither a concept of pan-aboriginality: they were quite local in their interests and loyalties, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous historical accounts have shown: nor a definition of inclusion in the group based purely on colour or 'purity' of 'bloodlines'. They did use the descriptive terms, such as 'yellafella', but its use was not necessarily pejorative, more a statement of fact and an acknowledgement of the difference in status and treatment awarded these people by European bosses and figures of authority. Kaytetye and many other Indigenous languages are very accurate and particular in their descriptions of natural phenomena, flora, fauna etc, as befits a hunter-gatherer society, and their descriptions and prescriptions of social relationships are far too intricately encoded in the language for most Europeans to grasp easily. Out of empathy for non-Indigenous people's lack of understanding, Indigenous people often adopted European terms to describe family and social relationships. In the oral history by traditional Kaytetye people

¹²² Interview with Graham Ross by Terry Whitebeach 2 February 1999

¹²³ Interview with Don Ross by Terry Whitebeach 20 March 1998

included in this thesis, where speakers have mentioned Don Ross they have defined his identity and position by his relation to themselves, according to the Kaytetye kinship system. For example, in Tommy Thompson's narrative of taking stock out east with Don Ross, he refers to Don (and other relatives) in Kaytetye kinship terminology, then adds the European term 'brother in law' in order to elucidate their relationship, in accordance with European notions of family connections.¹²⁴

Tommy Thompson: Aynenathepe atyetheyarte atyengepe arntwenherre atyengepe angkenhepe pwerlelepe nyarte-yenge, Donald rosse-ynge angkenherre, 'Mpwerney-aye! Ngepe atyenge-larlinge apenene!'

We were all over there and that Pwerle, Donald Ross, said to me, 'Brother-in-law, come with me!'

Artweye akelye-rtame ayengepe.

I was just a young man

'Mpwerney-aye.' Aylanthe apewethe elkwaterre aylanthe apewethe, pwelekewe apenkerne.

'Brother-in-law.' So we all went together to get the cattle.

'Tender a muster-we aynanthe apewerne.' Atyenge angkenhe.

He said to me, 'We've all got to go and tender a muster.'

Alkaperte aynake angwerle-angwerle twerarte aynake angwerle-angwerle kwelarte, awayewe-ynenge stockmen-ynenge twerart-apertame, aynake apeyayne.

'OK.' So me and all my Kapetye and Kngwarreye relatives that have passed away went with him as the stockmen.

Acceptance was predicated on inclusion in the family and kin group, not on colour. I asked Don Ross whether the Kaytetye people in the camps accepted the

¹²⁴ Recorded by Myfany Turpin, November 1997 at Artarre community. Margaret Watyale and Nellie Pwerle were also present. The recording and transcript are held at IAD Language and Culture Centre, Alice Springs.

children whose fathers were white, and he confirmed that they did. ‘They didn’t mind’, he added, ‘they were good that way.’¹²⁵ Despite the sensationalised stories of Aboriginal women killing the babies they bore to white men, reputable scholarship has ascertained that these reports have been wildly exaggerated. Certainly by Don Ross’s time it was quite common for there to be children of varying skin colours and parentage included in the group.¹²⁶ It was a European preoccupation to separate the fairer, more ‘European-looking’ children for education and assimilation: it outraged them to see fair children living a traditional life.¹²⁷ Skin colour was a visible sign of the alien ‘other’ that Aboriginal people were reputed to be. This is not to deny that there were and still are very real differences between races and cultures, but science has effectively disposed of the myth of biological racism. There is no gene for race.

As Reece and others have pointed out, the ‘invention’ of ‘Aborigines’ as a ‘convenient if fictitious entity or category fulfilled the linguistic prediction of homogenising the ‘subjects’ of ‘one hundred years of dispossession, depopulation, acculturation, segregation and institutionalisation, including the legal definition of who was an Aborigine’.¹²⁸ According to Indigenous anthropologist, Marcia Langton, it has been noted that there are at least sixty-seven definitions of Aboriginal people, which, she says, reflect:

¹²⁵ Manuscript of *Good One, Don Ross*. And as Graham Ross claimed, when he told of the white child living in the Kaytetye camp.

¹²⁶ It is still the case today. In fact, since the policy of removing fairer children from their parents and communities is not so prevalent these days, it is possible to see the race mixture that characterized Indigenous camps in Don Ross’s childhood.

¹²⁷ In spite of this many Aboriginal and white children grew up together on cattle stations and in missions.

¹²⁸ R.M.W. ‘Bob’. Reece. 1987. p. 15

Not only Anglo Australian legal and administrative obsession, even fixation with Aboriginal people, but also the uncertainty, confusion, and constant search for the appropriate categorisation: ‘full-blood’, ‘half-caste’, ‘quadroon’, ‘octoroon’, ‘such and such admixture of blood’, ‘a native of Australia’, ‘a native of an admixture of blood not less than half Aboriginal’ and so on.¹²⁹

Stephen Muecke states that European ways of talking about Aborigines limit their ways of knowing what Aborigines might be.¹³⁰ Addressing the problem of identity faced by Indigenous people in contemporary times, Stuart Hall writes:

Identity becomes a moveable feast, formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is historically not biologically defined. The subject assumes different identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’. Within us are contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about’.¹³¹

This was certainly the case for Don Ross: different eras imposed different legal and social requirements of, and restrictions upon, the Aboriginal and ‘half-caste’ populations of the Northern Territory. Different cultures have different grammars, Muecke writes, and these ‘favoured expressions’ are not arbitrary but motivated by social function and utility.¹³² Reynolds explicates the centuries of European ‘scientific’ and philosophical theory that underpinned the grammar of racism and its resulting policies in colonial Australia.¹³³ It is no wonder that in old age, Don Ross did not have one coherent, definitive way of stating his identity, as he

¹²⁹ M. Langton. 1993. pp. 28–29

¹³⁰ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 20

¹³¹ S. Hall. 1992. *The Question of Cultural Identity*. In S. Hall, D. Held & T. McGrew. (eds) *Modernity and Its Futures*. Polity Press, Cambridge. P. 277

¹³² S. Muecke. 1992. p. 21

¹³³ H. Reynolds. 2005. Part 1: *Ideas From Overseas*. pp. 15–67

reflected back upon, and was asked to explicate, more than three quarters of a century of social change.

Individuals are born into a language and have no immediate say in its formation, Muecke writes: they are formed by language and, in particular, its discourses.¹³⁴

Don Ross, like many people in Australia, was born into two languages, was formed by two discourses, and, given the varying circumstances of his life and the refusal, for a great part of Don Ross's life span, of the dominant discourse to admit or even consider the 'other', was forced to choose, early in his life, as were his siblings, which one to embrace fully, and which one to retain as a more marginalised entity, or informing element of consciousness. He was required to subject himself to the hegemonic demands of the colonising culture, even before he was fully conscious of the nature of these demands, if he wished to escape the more dire consequences of a closer identification with his Indigenous roots, during the particular historical period in which he grew up. This entailed losses and gains, as outlined in his life history.

Only Blanche chose the 'Aboriginal way' and that perhaps was not totally a free choice. Born of a 'half-caste' Kaytetye woman and a 'full-blood' Kaytetye man, and married to a traditional Kaytetye man with an important ceremonial role, it was almost a foregone conclusion that she would take that path. White society and its laws would have made any other choice next to impossible. Don maintained Blanche was happy with her choice, as his sister Lorna and he were with theirs. But the existence of Don Ross and a great number of other Aboriginal

¹³⁴S. Muecke. 1992. p. 22

people who also had/have non-Aboriginal ancestors and family members has greatly troubled those people who wish to maintain an essentialist notion of Aboriginality. Such a notion is an expression of racism that exists within and without Indigenous communities, and operates to maintain the colonial discourses on Aboriginality, whereby the 'other' was/is both confined to the past and simultaneously described as ahistorical, and the 'hybrid' was/is seen as a dilution of pure blood, less authentic, capable of exhibiting and expressing neither noble savagery nor the full intellectual and technological attainments of European civilisation.

Indigenous scholar Wendy Holland points out that 'essentialist notions of aboriginality that exist within many Murri communities reinforce racism...[and] that although these may be politically expedient at times...essentialist notions of aboriginality often restrict us from acknowledging and celebrating the diversity within our own families and communities'.¹³⁵ Don Ross and I discussed the differences between how Aboriginality had been defined and viewed and valued at different times throughout his life, and how it is now defined. He would have found it hard to comprehend a recent case in Tasmania, in which the courts had been called upon to define the Aboriginality of a person who claimed to be Aboriginal but whose claims the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre had contested. In the Territory everybody 'knew' who was Aboriginal, he said - even those who had 'passed' for white but now were open about their Aboriginality. I tried to explain the complexities of Tasmanian history to him. In the end he likened it to the situation of the 'stolen ones' who lost touch with their families and were never

¹³⁵ W. Holland. Mis/taken Identity. In E. Vasta and S. Castles. (eds) 1996. *The Teeth Are Smiling: the Persistence of Racism in Multicultural Australia*. Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, pp. 97-98

reunited, or couldn't fit in if they did return, or to people like himself who were Aboriginal but had lived a lot of the time in the white world. (That is also how he viewed me.) But he was very puzzled by Tasmanian Aboriginal people's refusal to accept one who might claim to be one of their own. He could not imagine a parallel situation occurring in the Kaytetye community he had known. I asked him how his children thought of themselves. 'A bit white,' he said, 'but they know they are Aboriginal.' And did he think of himself as both white and Aboriginal. 'No', he said, 'not both. Just Aboriginal'.¹³⁶ That was in 1998.

At the end of a long journey, having been pushed and pulled by the various legal and social views about Aboriginality, its definitions and its implications for life choices, freedoms and responsibilities throughout his life, Don Ross, whilst acknowledging the difference between himself and some of the 'bush blackfellas' at the Hettie Perkins Nursing Home, where more traditional elderly Aboriginal people were accommodated, claimed his Kaytetye ancestry as the lynch pin of his identity. We agreed that identity was often a very hard thing to define, and that many people were required and managed to accommodate their dual or multiple race heritages.¹³⁷

Definitions of identity may be observed in, and predicated upon, physical characteristics. In Figure 11, we see this clearly demonstrated. The photograph shows Don Ross standing beside an Aboriginal man, to whom he was introduced briefly, by an anthropologist. (He no longer recalled the names of either man.)

¹³⁶ Notes from unrecorded personal communication between Don Ross and Terry Whitebeach 1998

¹³⁷ Notes from unrecorded personal communication between Don Ross and Terry Whitebeach 1998



Figure 11. Don Ross and unknown companion circa 1989. Photograph supplied by Don Ross.

The photograph clearly shows two *Aboriginal* men (and the shadow of the photographer), but there are also clear differences between these two senior men, and from these physical differences it is possible to infer great differences of status and life experiences in the Northern Territory of their youth and manhood. In terms of eugenics theories of earlier times, and by an essentialist definition of Aboriginality, Don's darker companion is the more successful *Aboriginal* man: within the aims of later assimilation policies and ideals, Don the more successful *Australian citizen*, having distanced himself genetically and socially further from his Indigenous origins. But in 1989 how is that difference quantified? Both are easily recognisable as Aboriginal. Another layer of complexity of identity would have been added if Don's children or grandchildren had also been in this photograph.

Stereotyping Aborigines as an unchanging people in an unchanging environment has been an important factor in shaping Euro-Australian impressions of Aboriginal Australia.¹³⁸ Its antithesis is the 'hybrid' in all its multitude of forms, as described above, by Langton. In her study of historical and contemporary constructions of Australian Aboriginalities,¹³⁹ Lyn Russell defines the hybrid as 'any contemporary representation (of the self or 'other') that incorporates elements of the colonial culture'.¹⁴⁰ She writes:

¹³⁸ J. Beckett. In J. Beckett. (ed) 1988. p. 205

¹³⁹ Which, although she adamantly denies it, unlike Henry Reynolds in *Nowhere People*, is possibly at least partly fuelled by her own investigation of her race heritage: her first book: 2002. *A Little Bird Told Me: Family Secrets, Necessary Lies*. Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, takes as its subject the life and incarceration of her Aboriginal grandmother in a mental institution.

¹⁴⁰L. Russell. 2001. p. 14

Contemporary hybridity is constantly battling against a past, which emphasised and valued *purity* over its antithesis, the degraded and diluted hybrid. The stereotype and the hybrid rely on the notions of authenticity and the authority of European discourse. In many ways the hybrid and the stereotype are reverse images of one another, opposite sides of the same coin; a coin minted by European controlled agencies. Traditionally, in European discourses on Aborigines, the indigenes have been characterised as much by what they were not as what they were perceived to be. They were not to be found in metropolitan situations, they were not to be genetically adulterated and they were not to be heard speaking out. Part of the process of normalising this characterisation was to reject any aberrant form of Aboriginality. Any individual or group that did not fit the stereotypical view was denied authenticity.¹⁴¹

A powerful weapon in colonial times, both of oppression and liberation, and an equally potent inducement to conformity to group norms which still has currency in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities today. Australia's history has turned on conveniently neat contrasts, like that between Aborigines and European Australians. Such contrasts rely on the dichotomies of black and white, 'us' and 'them'. In a climate of uncertainty, such as colonial Australia, the self is formed as antithetical to the 'other', thus defining and controlling membership of the group in power.¹⁴²

But, as Heather Goodall pointed out in the introduction to the jointly authored life history of Aboriginal activist, Isabel Flick, 'the colour lines were actually – sometimes – elastic and flexible. They could be stretched and lifted, even if they did snap back into rigid tension under some sorts of pressure'.¹⁴³ We must recognise, Stuart Hall writes, 'the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions,

¹⁴¹L.Russell. 2001. p. 14

¹⁴² As in the current debate about what constitutes 'Australianness' and 'un-Australianness'.

¹⁴³ I. Flick & H. Goodall. 2004. *Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman*. Allen & Unwin, Crow's Nest

social experience and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, [recognise] that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories, for which there are no guarantees in Nature'.¹⁴⁴

Marcia Langton proposes a theory of Aboriginality as intersubjectivity; identities that are constantly renegotiated according to a triple schema: One: Aboriginal people negotiating with one another in the context of Aboriginal cultures; Two: the stereotyping and mythologising of Aboriginal people by unknowable whites; Three: a dialogic situation in which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people participate in mutual construction of identities.¹⁴⁵ This schema creates a context within which to consider the nature of much of the 'business' in which Don Ross and I participated, during the time we collaborated on creating the text of his life history.

Savage Imaginings, and other post-colonial scholarship focused on identity in Aboriginal history, concerns itself with discourses that link the past with the present – and its mechanisms of the imaginary, the stereotype and the hybrid – mutually dependent yet antithetical colonial constructs that are directly analogous to authentic and inauthentic forms of Aboriginality.¹⁴⁶ But, Russell argues, in representing the past new stereotypes and new ways of viewing old stereotypes

¹⁴⁴S. Hall. 1987. Minimal Selves. In L. Appinganesi. (ed) *Identity: The Real Me*. Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, p. 44

¹⁴⁵ M. Langton. 1993. Cited in S. Muecke. 1994. Narrative and Intervention in Aboriginal Filmmaking and Policy. In T. O'Reagan. (ed) *Critical Multiculturalism. Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media and Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 6 (www transcript)

¹⁴⁶ L. Russell. 2001. p. 97. This is a complex subject of ongoing debate, and not the primary focus of this thesis.

have emerged,¹⁴⁷ and Aboriginal self-expressions have been born in the enunciative spaces of cultural interaction. That is my claim for the life history of Don Ross.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out, 'It is extremely rare and unusual when indigenous accounts are accepted and acknowledged as valid interpretations of what has taken place and yet the need to tell our stories remains...powerful'.¹⁴⁸ Revisiting the past, coming to know the past, have been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonisation – part of the unfinished business of Aboriginal history and historiography – revisiting, site by site, Aboriginal history as it has been documented by white western scholars, and, determining, as Homi Bhabha puts it, to think beyond narratives of ordinary or initial subjectives, and to focus on the 'in-between' spaces that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.¹⁴⁹ For, it may be true, as Muecke writes, 'that it is along the vectors of narrative that identities are carried, histories of individuals or mobs which come up against the blocks of histories of the culture, of society, of the State'.¹⁵⁰

Koori oral historian Genevieve Grieves maintains that, 'Currently history-making by academics and government largely focus (sic) on the creation of elitist narratives that are not accessible to grass-roots people. The limitations of this

¹⁴⁷ The concern of many of those writing Aboriginal history

¹⁴⁸ L. Tuhiwai Smith. 1998. p. 34

¹⁴⁹ H. Bhabha. 1994. pp. 1–2.

¹⁵⁰ S. Muecke. In T. O'Reagan. (ed) 1994. p. 5 (www transcript)

approach are reflected in the nature of the materials they are able to access',¹⁵¹ archival documents and other written 'white' accounts being considered more authoritative 'primary' documents than oral narratives of participants and inheritors of the particular historical events. Koori people do not trust researchers or governments, Grieve asserts, and give only the surface of what is an incredibly rich and complex series of events and narratives. What is required for Aboriginal history making in Australia, she asserts, is the development of meaningful partnerships.¹⁵² This is the argument I too have adopted in this thesis. The life history of Don Ross was developed out of a strong and cordial relationship, the product of which is in the process of being returned to the Kaytetye¹⁵³ and wider communities. The changes in race thinking, the events which accelerated that change, and improved the material conditions of Aboriginal people's lives in the Northern Territory, and the successive amendments to the Government legislation which had closely governed Aboriginal people's lives for so many decades, as discussed in this chapter, were to culminate in full citizenship for all Indigenous people in Australia. But this did not necessarily resolve the issue of identity for Indigenous people, and the exploration of that identity, plus the desire to locate their own and other people's stories in the wider history of the Northern Territory, gave impetus to the documenting of the life histories of people, like Don Ross, whose assigned identity and position in society, varying as they did throughout the course of their life, reflected vast social change.

¹⁵¹ G. Grieves. 2005. The Politics and Ethics of Writing Indigenous Histories: Seminar of the History Council of Victoria 7 July 2005. *Melbourne Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, pp. 4–5

¹⁵²G. Grieves. 2005. pp. 4–5

¹⁵³ Although Don Ross and I are listed as joint authors of *Good One, Don Ross*, copyright will be retained by the Ross family and royalties also will go to the family.

CONCLUSION

With someone else's story it's important to get it right, for those people who were telling the story. It's important to have respect for that.¹

Every story is an act of trust between a writer and a reader; each story, in the end, is social. Whatever writers set down can harm or help the community of which they are part.²

Historians live by believing truth can be extracted from people's memories, including their written memories... the moment...when you know you touch some quite different way of being in the world... as you gently, gently test to see if the shape is indeed as you think it might be – that is the surpassing magic of doing history. Is truth an eel [a potentially dangerous, unwelcome thing] or a trout [the thing you hoped to find]?³

This thesis has located the life history of Alexander Donald Ross in its historical and historiographical contexts: demonstrating the ways in which it elucidates significant aspects of Northern Territory history, in particular the development of the pastoral industry and the legislation and government policies which have affected the lives of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

The thesis has also examined the process of constructing the written text of a life history, *Good One, Don Ross*, from oral narratives – conversations and interviews with the life history's subject, Alexander Donald Ross, and with his relatives and friends – and from archival and other documentary material. It has acknowledged and explored the complexity of the collaborative project and of 'authoring' a

¹ AWAYE: ABC TV's Indigenous News Program. 31 March 2006

² B. Attwood. 2005. p. 15

³ I. Clendinnen. 2000. pp. 74–75

written text based largely in oral occasions, particularly where the two ‘authors’ are stretching across a cultural divide. It has discussed the legitimacy and the limitations of cross-cultural collaboration, and concurred with Hollinsworth’s conclusion:

While the work of collaborating across and within our various differences is often painful and frustrating, the alternative is to invoke righteous but reductionist speaking positions, which undermine our capacities to listen and act. [We] need to move on from such speaking positions to the politics of address in all their elusiveness and mutability’.⁴

Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics’ views of ‘telling someone else’s story’ have been considered. Indigenous historian Jackie Huggins writes:

There are different experiences of the world, different bases of experience. If we begin our understanding as we actually experience the world, it is at least possible to see how we are located. What is known of the ‘other’ is conditional upon the ‘other’s’ relative location. Whites must not ignore this by taking advantage of their privileged speaking positions to construct an external version of ‘us’ which may pass for our ‘reality’. There must be limits to the ways our world are rewritten or placed in conceptual frameworks which are not our own.⁵

Non-Indigenous historian Richard Broome, who works closely with Indigenous people, asserts that rather than insisting that one must be Aboriginal in order legitimately to read and write Aboriginal history, what the historian needs more is skill, imagination and basic human empathy – training, rigour and skills, together with compassion and reflexivity.⁶

⁴ D. Hollinsworth. In P. Van Toorn and D. English. (eds) 1995. p. 97

⁵ J. Huggins, R. Huggins and J.M. Jacobs. 1995. p. 167

⁶ R. Broome. 2005. p. 8

Good history writing, Attwood argues, must be reflexive, compassionate and oppositional. Historians need to be aware of the way sources are shaped by their creators and contemporary discourses, transmitted to the present and ‘read’ by historians. The historian’s responsibility is to attempt to understand ‘someone else’s story’ by exercising curiosity, empathy and imagination, whilst not accepting prevailing discourses too uncritically – neither the orthodoxy of the written records of the ‘winners’, nor the oppositionally positioned stories of the ‘losers’.⁷ Instead, Broome argues, the historian must learn to read ‘against the grain’ of both accounts.

Until the latter part of the twentieth century Indigenous peoples’ rights to narrate their own history, to represent their own experience to a wider Australian audience, were largely denied. Colonial history relegated Indigenous people to the margins, where anthropology and other disciplines ‘interpreted’ their culture through European perceptions, in texts created for a European readership. But, as Muecke has asserted, written texts represent only a small amount of Indigenous knowledge: and in books written for non-Aboriginal audiences, Aboriginal knowledge, narrative, lore and learning lose their Indigenous performative aspects.⁸ For the written is not merely the oral transcribed: meaning is inscribed in quite different ways, to different cultural ends, in oral and written texts and occasions located in widely divergent epistemologies and ontologies.

⁷B. Attwood. 1992. And as demonstrated in B. Attwood. 1989. *The Making of the Aborigines*. Allen & Unwin, North Sydney; B. Attwood. (ed) 1996; B. Attwood and F. McGowan. (eds) 2001. *Telling Stories: Indigenous History and Memory in Australia and New Zealand*. Allen & Unwin, Crow’s Nest

⁸ S.Muecke. 1992. p. 42

Increasingly, Indigenous people began to claim the right to be heard, to be read, to fill up some of the silences with their own truths, entering Western academic disciplines and asserting their autonomous subject positions, and insisting that those post-colonial discourses consider and admit cultural differences. Concomitantly Europeans began to express the realisation, as stated by Barry Lopez:

My voice...was not the only voice. My truth was not the only truth... These other voices were as indispensable to our survival as variations in our DNA... As long as it took me to see that a writer's voice had to grow out of his own knowledge and desire, that it could not rise legitimately out of the privilege of race or gender or social rank, so did it take time to grasp the depth of cruelty inflicted upon all of us the moment voices are silenced, when for prejudicial reasons, people are told their stories are not valuable, not useful.⁹

Indigenous 'life writing' – life histories, biographies and autobiographies and community histories – have played and continue to play a significant role in helping to fill up some of the silences, to be significant voices in the telling of a shared Australian history. They are one of the vehicles by which Indigenous speakers enter the discourses previously denied them, to speak for themselves, tell their own stories, construct their own subject positions and create new ways of 'telling history'. Some of the resulting texts have confronted various European mythologies of Australia's 'settler' past, and brought 'other' versions of what constitutes history into the public and academic arena. They bear witness to numerous constructs and beliefs on which the Australian colonial historical record was predicated; for example, the inevitable extinction of Indigenous people; the minimal effect on Indigenous families of the removal of their children; the

⁹ B. Lopez. 1998. *About This Life*. The Harvill Press, London, pp 12-15

incarceration of the stolen generation's being the vehicle by which they would be able to dispense with their 'unfortunate' Indigenous origins; the incapacity and unreliability of Indigenous workers; the moral degradation of the 'half-caste'; and the fiction of Terra Nullius.

Attwood points out that 'the refusal of the Aborigines and the settlers to accept the legitimacy of each other's rights is reflected in the oppositional histories formulated for a long time'.¹⁰ Some of these histories are still being created and are the subject of much public debate. But, as historians working in the area of Aboriginal history in the last thirty years have demonstrated convincingly, the frontier never constituted an uncontested barrier between races. There was movement between and occupation of both sides of the frontier, by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Richard Broome writes:

The entangled history of Indigenous and 'settler' peoples in Australia since 1788 has been a bound-together story, that is the nature of colonialism. Colonialism is not only a relationship of economic exploitation, but one of psychological potency. At times a strange fraternisation develops, which Ann McGrath explores in *Born in the Cattle*. In a colonial society each can only be understood as part of the other.¹¹ Aboriginal history and white Australian history, seemingly separate, are thus bound together and their different perspectives challenge one another, but belong together. The shared nature of our past demands a shared writing of our history'.¹²

Don Ross's life history bears witness to this fact: as a man of both European and Kaytetye ancestry he was denied an essentialist position, by not being able, by the circumstances of his birth, and the nature of the society in which he lived, to define his identity either as 'purely' Aboriginal or as white, and thus was required

¹⁰ B. Attwood. 2005. p. 15

¹¹ As Franz Fanon and others have shown.

¹²R. Broome. 2005. p. 9

to negotiate the contesting claims and requirements of European and Indigenous identity, culture and law in differing ways throughout his lifetime. He inherited both a black and a white world: in neither was he a full citizen, but in both he had meaningful congress. Whilst Don Ross defined himself, finally, as Aboriginal, he also acknowledged that he was 'three quarters white' and that he had been called 'a half-caste' by the white administration, and therefore had been subject to restrictions and controls not exercised over 'full whites', to varying degrees during his youth and adulthood. His traditional Kaytetye relatives located him in their own kinship system – as pwerle – thus he had an equally fixed position in Kaytetye society, as a member of a large extended family, and also as an uninitiated man; both of these positions carrying responsibilities, rights and restrictions. But there were additional aspects to that identity that transgressed the boundaries of each world – to the Kaytetye stock workers he was he was also Don Rathe, a 'yella fella' boss, to the Kaytetye women, a fair one, 'lovely one' and, to his cousin-brothers, 'witchetty grub', whilst to the white cattlemen he was a fellow worker, an employee, the son and grandson of white men, but only ever granted conditional acceptance by some of these white men.

Apart from his racially defined position in Northern Territory society, Don Ross's identity and self-image were bound up with the Northern Territory pastoral industry. Stock work was what he loved most, and his days in the stock camp were the happiest in his life, he said. His greatest loves were horses and cattle and he had been a very experienced and proficient cattleman in his day. His knowledge and skills were extensive and various: esteemed for his skills by both

black and white, he had been known in Central Australian pastoral circles as ‘the versatile man’.

Don Ross was a first class stockman, who had bred, raised and mustered horses for stock work and racing, camels and cattle, he was an experienced drover, an excellent camp cook, builder of mills, fences, stockyards, houses and station buildings. He had slaughtered, dressed and smoked killers, done his own welding, tin smithing, saddlery and other leatherwork. He was adept at things mechanical, engines and vehicles of all sorts: he loved cars and trucks almost as much as he loved cattle. He had been a superb athlete, swift, prodigiously strong and hardy. He was also a skilled speaker of a number of Central Australian Indigenous languages and a fluent speaker and writer of English. And he was an intelligent, gregarious, entertaining, easygoing and generous man. He had his faults, of course: some of his blind spots and weaknesses are discussed in the thesis.

He loved to talk about horses and cattle and cars – they were his three most loved topics of conversation. His anecdotes were peppered with characters from Northern Territory history, pastoral pioneers, members of Parliament, police, government officials, and whilst his was not a chronological narrative of his nor of Northern Territory history: for example, his references to events like World War Two and the bombing of Daly Waters appeared almost as peripheral strands to the main narrative, which concerned relationships centred around horses and cattle and pastoral work: nevertheless his life history provides much valuable historical material, adding detail to the historical record, and at times disputing some of its accepted ‘facts’.

Nevertheless, some would not have considered his life a worthy subject of investigation or documentation. Some would have preferred that he had not existed at all. One of Daisy Bates' stated aims was 'to keep the dreaded half-caste menace from our great continent'.¹³ The 'half-caste' was once reviled as a psychologically, morally and spiritually debased descendant of the 'purer' Indigenous race.

White academics preferred to study the anachronistic stone-age primitives.¹⁴ Two reasons that earlier anthropological studies among 'mixed bloods' had been considered unworthy was that those studies lacked the prestige of the classic field studies of 'traditional' people, and that the content of the culture was judged uninteresting. The ethnographic studies often supported the romantic ideas of 'authentic' Aboriginality associated with primitivism. Historians began the work of documenting the violence visited upon Aboriginal people and deconstructing the 'savage rhetoric' of racist discourse, which paved the way for more inclusive accounts, which made a more accurate reading possible because they considered Aboriginal life in relation to the wider society in which they were required to live.¹⁵ There is still some resistance to the notion of authenticity including any but

¹³ D. Bates. 1938/1966. *The Passing of the Aborigines*. John Murray, London, p. 243

¹⁴ I remember reading a text for primary school children, in the 1950s, which stated categorically that Tasmanian Aboriginal people had been scientifically proven to be the most primitive race of people in the world. Respect for their primitive savagery was contingent upon their being judged extinct.

¹⁵ An example is J. Collman's study of fringe dwellers' camps in Central Australia. 1988. *Fringe-Dwellers and Welfare: The Aboriginal Response to Bureaucracy*. Queensland University Press, St Lucia, p. 236

the most obviously ‘traditional’¹⁶ of Aboriginal people, an essentialist notion as noted above, which is found in both black and white communities. And whilst the existence of people like Don Ross was once anathema to those who believed in the biological purity of race, and the right of these debased products of miscegenation to be heard was unthinkable, neither may their participation in contemporary public discourse suit those who exhibit ‘nostalgia for tradition, for the romance of Aboriginal spirituality and otherness’.¹⁷

Representation is a well-recognised problem for post-colonial historians, Muecke writes.¹⁸ If the voices and methods of participation of those whose way of doing history are so different that their intervention may confuse and/or threaten the hegemony of the prevailing discourse, then in a post-colonial discourse we need to create ‘the cultural politics of difference [which] means living with incommensurability through new ethical and democratic frameworks, within a culture that both recognises difference and is committed to resolving its antagonisms’, Rutherford asserts.¹⁹ It was with issues like this I grappled, when working with Don Ross, and writing his life history.

¹⁶ By which is meant ‘full-blood’ – although that term is not in current usage - and refers also to those Indigenous people living outside urban centres, in a way that is not in accordance with mainstream white society.

¹⁷G. Cowlishaw. 1992. p. 28

¹⁸ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 13

¹⁹ J. Rutherford. A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference. In J. Rutherford. (ed) 1990. *Identity, Community Culture, Difference*. Lawrence & Wishart, London, p. 26

Cowlishaw asks, 'Who is likely...to gain a better grasp of the nature of racism – its victims or its perpetrators?'²⁰ It seems obvious, she says, that 'specific and different blindness will affect both. Subjective experience is not a separable and inferior, nor yet superior, form of knowledge, but to the extent that the subject is present, the knowledge may be shaped to a different end. Thus discourse generated within Aboriginal society will have a different purpose from discourse about Aborigines'.²¹ Two problems exist here; 'the problem of silence, and the shortcomings inherent in any representation of the silenced'.²² These problems need to be acknowledged and confronted by all researchers working cross-culturally, and an attempt made to solve them. In order not to perpetuate generations of oppression of Indigenous people, the historian must be reflexive and as transparent as possible about his/her methods and terms of involvement.

It is important to acknowledge the subjective relationship to the past one researches, Bain Attwood reminds us.²³ He explicates this statement by referring to LaCapra's work on traumatic history.²⁴ Historians usually have a transference relationship to the past they study, LaCapra argues, identifying emotionally with it, particularly with the testimony of trauma survivors.²⁵ There is a need for what LaCapra calls the 'empathic unsettlement' that this identification

²⁰ G. Cowlishaw. 1992. p. 30

²¹ G. Cowlishaw. 1992. p. 30

²² M. Wallace. 1990. *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*. Verso, London, p. 245

²³ B. Attwood. 2005. p. 181

²⁴ D. LaCapra. 1989. *Soundings in Critical Theory*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, chapter 1; 1998. *History and Memory After Auschwitz*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, chapters 1 and 6; 1998. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. John Hopkins University, Baltimore, Introduction and Chapter 6

²⁵ I perceived much of what Don Ross and other Kaytetye people related to me, in this light.

creates, but he recommends that the historian stop short of full identification and realise the difference between their own and the historical subject's position, so that they can better understand each historical actor as well as the relations between them. By doing this, LaCapra suggests, the historian can attain a more complex subject position in relation to the past – can broaden and deepen an historical understanding of the past and acquire a richer sense of our relationship to this history.²⁶

I stated my own position in the Introduction and early chapters of this thesis: that I empathised with the shifts and balances of Don Ross's life and the complexities with which his contested identity infused his life actions and choices: that I had decided to privilege Indigenous accounts of events over 'authorised' Western versions where there was a conflict over 'the facts': that I held a strong belief in the legitimacy and efficacy of life histories to/in the historical record. And I strongly agree with Attwood's suggestion that new forms of historical narratives may be required to represent conflicted and often traumatic histories, such as the history and its aftermath of Australian 'frontier times.'²⁷ Perhaps that's why I found models in literature, rather than history, initially, to assist me in my multifaceted task – to write a life history that was historically valid; which 'stuck to the facts'; which was accurate (by whose definition of history, though? I often asked myself); which clearly revealed its methodology and construction, thus enabling the reader to deconstruct it; to create a narrative form that provided a sense of the oral occasions from which the written text was created; to

²⁶B. Attwood. 2005. pp. 181–183

²⁷ D. LaCapra. Cited in B. Atwood. 2005. pp. 182–183

contextualise the narrative and the speaker; to refrain from speaking *for* Don Ross, to facilitate his speaking for himself, but not to deny my participation; and to ‘highlight the conjunction between past and present as the ground upon which all history making occurs’²⁸, which necessitated my reflection on the nature of the relationship I had to the life history I was receiving and retelling.

Collaborating with Don Ross and other members of his family and focusing and reflecting on his life and history for almost a decade has yielded an extra and unexpected dimension to the work: it has revealed to me a desire of which I was unaware at the beginning of almost a decade focused on Don Ross’s life history, the Northern Territory pastoral industry and the complex history of race relations in the twentieth century, during which I investigated the effects of ‘the colour lines’, which account for some of the most traumatic aspects of Australia’s history of the last two hundred years, on one man’s life. That desire is to find a way of entering, understanding and documenting the circumstances of my own and my extended family’s contested identities. I have not yet found it possible to realise that objective, but the process of telling someone else’s story, of celebrating the life of ‘the versatile man’, Don Ross, has persuaded me not to relinquish the hope that historical discourse will extend itself eventually to accommodate discussion of all facets of the consequences of colonialism in Australia, even those whose stories appear to be lost or whose stories may not easily be able to be woven into one seamless Australian historical narrative.

²⁸S. Muecke. 1992. p. 190

Individual stories matter, as do the ways in which they support or contest the larger regional and national stories. They enrich and extend the possibilities of history, by provoking further questions, revealing complexities which may or may not be resolved, but which add depth and richness to the dominant story. The specificities of individual lives and their histories and the way in which the stories of these are constituted also matter: the lapses and distortions of memory alert us to the human processes of telling history, the differences between oral occasions and documentary traces alert us to the cultural constructs and uses of language.

Muecke asserts that if one is prepared to take a regional and itinerant position, rather than a position whose point of view is based in metropolitan centres, settlement, capital, singularity, the stories of Australian Aboriginal people become seen less as material to be reworked into acceptable forms for colonial consumption, but more as containing truths valid for their own territory – truths that carry ancient knowledges of survival, ecology, health and social relations.²⁹: Examples are that in Aboriginal cultures, survival has been about movement rather than settlement, a workable economy about two-way exchange rather than greed and accumulation, and at the heart of social relations has existed the idea that a community has patterned groupings which limit individual's authority in relation to their country – no-one seeks to have quality control, authority must always be deferred.³⁰

²⁹ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 47

³⁰ S. Muecke. 1992. p. 47

Don Ross's life story, and his actions and attitudes both illustrate this point and demonstrate the disruption of it – pointing to where the two systems are incompatible or have incompatible aims, where the goals and values of each subvert or operate against the other. He was successful in carrying many of his Kaytetye values into the white world and successful by many white Western standards: he also failed to maintain Kaytetye cultural mores in many ways and failed also in significant areas of his life to become successfully white in outlook, lifestyle and actions.

But it is not useful to consider Don Ross's life merely as a struggle between the black and white parts of himself and his worlds. Sneja Gunew states, 'We need to think in terms of mutual illuminations offered by juxtaposing various texts and reading for cultural difference in a non-binary manner'.³¹ Don Ross's identity was complex, and he was forced to operate within a range of changing social and political conditions over his eighty-four years of life. And if, as Hall asserts, identity is formed at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture,³² then Don Ross's identity, as revealed in dialogue with myself and others, and as represented in his life history *Good One, Don Ross* and cited and analysed in this thesis, demonstrates not only his versatility, but the complexity of the shared history of the Northern Territory.

Telling someone else's story – by such means as the life history of Alexander Donald Ross, and the life histories of all whose lives and positions have been until

³¹S. Gunew. 1990. Postmodern Tensions. *Meanjin* Vol. 1, p. 30

³²S. Hall. 1987. Minimal Selves. ICA Documents 6 *Identity*. Cited in S. Muecke. 1992. p. 186

recently largely excluded from the historical record – through a ‘difficult and delicate’ process of collaboration, with all its short-comings and possibilities, may make a significant contribution to the complex heteroglossic ‘Australian story’ being written, discussed, elaborated, contested and constantly enriched by contemporary Australian historians, writers and narrators of ‘trustori’.

APPENDIX 1

BLANCHE HAYES DECLARED ABORIGINAL WITHIN THE MEANING OF THE ABORIGINALS ORDINANCE 1918-1953

National Archives of Australia Darwin CRS E740 Item CA-7114, pp. 84,
114-115

ECE/BJE
P.87

17th August, 1954.

ACTING PATROL OFFICER KITCHING :

In connection with the application made before you by Blanche Hayes of Neutral Junction Station that she and her children be declared to be Aborigines, would you please advise on the following points -

1. Are Blanche Hayes and her children completely illiterate?
2. Are they in any way mentally retarded?
3. Has Mrs. Hayes or her children always been subject to the Ordinance prior to the coming into operation of Amendment No. 9 of 1953, and does she frequently seek the advice and assistance of officers of this Branch?
4. Is she tribally or legally married to Sandy Chungarai?
5. Are her social standards primitive?
6. Does she associate with full-blood Aborigines and seek them out for companionship? and
7. Do you consider that she needs the care and control of the Ordinance?



(E. C. Evans)

ACTING DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

ACTING DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT :

BLANCHE HAYES

The points raised in reference to the application of Blanche Hayes to be declared an Aboriginal are classified as follows -

- (1) Blanche Hayes and her children are illiterate.
- (2) They do not appear and there is no history of them being mentally retarded.
- (3) The family has always been under the jurisdiction of the Ordinance, with assistance or advice given by officers of this Branch when required.
- (4) She is tribally married to Sandy Chungarai.
- (5) Her social standards are semi-primitive.
- (6) - All her associates are full-bloods.
- (7) Considering her environment, even if she was not brought under the care and control of the Ordinance, she would still depend on officers of this Branch for assistance. Her children are also being supported as branch dependants.

H. S. Kitching
(H. S. Kitching)
A/PATROL OFFICER

Trant Clerk

Please prepare recommendation that Blanche Hayes & her children be declared, i.e. if you can find the names of the children. If not refer back to me.

*Noted B/4
7/4
(F)*

DWO *a recommendation that Blanche be declared was forwarded to Darwin on 31/12/54 File 416, Dolo 91.*

*B
5/4 & children
Goffers 6/4/55*

F

ABORIGINALS ORDINANCE 1918-1953.

I *Blanche Hayes* being a person at least one of whose ancestors was an aborigine as defined in the Aboriginals Ordinance No. 9 of 1953 hereby request the Director of Native Affairs to declare me to be an aboriginal within the meaning of the Aboriginals Ordinance 1918-1953.



Signed

Witnessed *Alan Hayward*

APPENDIX 2

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ABORIGINAL CAMP: temporary collection of shelters for traditional Indigenous people.

AGENT: a person who acts for another in business. **Stock & station agent:** agent or firm or dealing with farm supplies. In the context of this narrative, also refers to companies responsible for leasing cattle stations.

ATE US OUT: exhausted the supply of cattle for butchering.

BAY MARE: female horse, chestnut (reddish-brown) in colour with black mane and tail.

BEAN TREE: *Erythrina vespertilio*, tree, grows eight to ten metres tall, with thorny branches, bright red flowers in spring and summer, hard, shiny bright red seeds. Wood is light and easily worked, and favoured for shields and coolamons. Seeds are used as ornaments, usually necklaces.

BED: in stock camps, wire stretchers.

BEDOURIE (oven): light-weight baking dish and cover, usually made of tin, carried originally on camels, and used for cooking out in bush camps.

BEFORE THE WAR: refers to the years before World War II, 1939-1945.

BELT: hit repeatedly, thrash.

BEYOND THE BLACK STUMP or 'back of beyond': remote from cities.

BILLYCAN: a cylindrical tin or enamel container used as a kettle, cooking pot, food or water container.

BLACKFELLER/ BLACKFELLA: Indigenous Australian.

BLACKS: Indigenous Australians.

BLACKS' CAMP: collection of rough shelters where indigenous family groups set up living quarters on a temporary or longer-term basis.

BLACKSMITHING: working in iron for implements, tools and horseshoes.

BLOKE: man.

BLUCHER BOOTS: strong leather laced half-boots or high shoes. The stockmen took the laces out when riding, to enable them to extricate their feet quickly, in an emergency

BLUDGER: a loafer, a shirker, a hanger-on, who doesn't participate fully, or work hard.

BORE: deep narrow hole made in the earth, especially to find water.

BOSS: manager of a cattle station or person in charge in an employment situation.

BOUNDARY FENCE: a fence marking the limits of a property, or cattle station - a property owned or leased for the raising of cattle for the meat market.

BOY: man, as applied (disrespectfully) to Aboriginal men by white people, in the past.

BRAND: burning a permanent mark on cattle, by means of a hot iron, to mark ownership.

BREAK IN (horse) - tame, subject an animal to discipline, accustom to use.

BROKE: without money, penniless.

BRONCO HORSE: 1. very strong horse especially trained to drag a beast to the rail for castration or branding 2. (more generally) a wild or half-tamed horse.

BRONCOING - lassoing cattle from horseback, for branding and castrating

BRONCO RAIL: rail to which the beasts were dragged and secured by hide ropes, traditionally, for castration or branding.

BRONCO YARD: temporarily or permanently erected holding yard for cattle.

BROWNIE: sweet currant bread, or eggless cake.

BRUMBY: a wild or unbroken horse.

BUCKJUMPER: horse that bucks.

BUGGER: (coarse slang) an unpleasant or undesirable person or thing. May be used in an affectionate way.

BUGGERED: stymied - left in an untenable situation.

BUGGERED UP: ruined, spoiled, messed up.

BUILDING ON: anticipating, where a sense of certainty, or strong expectation is implied.

BULLOCK: a bull, after castration, cattle bred for the meat market.

BULLY BEEF: boiled corned beef, in tins, especially army rations.

BUSH BANANA: *Marsdenia australis*. Woody, winding vine, which climbs up other trees and shrubs, creamy flowers. An important and favoured food. Sweet flowers, young fruit and young leaves are eaten raw. Mature fruits are either cooked or eaten whole. Older leaves are steamed.

BUSH COOK: person who can improvise recipes and cook up a meal with very few utensils, ingredients or facilities, under fairly primitive conditions.

BUSH MECHANIC: self-taught person or person who shows great ingenuity and can improvise with materials available to hand, to repair equipment and machinery.

BUSH POTATO: *Ipomoea costata* - also known as bush yam. Viny shrub, usually about one metre. Longer branches creep on the ground. Often roots at nodes. Sometimes climbs up trees. Leaves smooth, green and leathery. Flowers large and showy, pink with red throat.

BUSH TUCKER: bush food. Collective term for fruits and vegetables harvested by traditional Aboriginal people from the bush; collective term. for game native to Australia, hunted by Aboriginal people for food.

CAMP MOB: the Indigenous traditional people, family groups who live in the temporary camps.

CHEEKY: dangerous, aggressive, or life threatening.

CHISEL: cheat, defraud, treat unfairly.

CHUMMIED UP: become friendly or intimate (in a sexual way).

CLEANSKIN: an unbranded animal.

CLEARED/CLEARED OUT: left the area, absconded, moved away.

COLOURED: (now considered racially offensive) wholly or partly of non-European (mostly Aboriginal) descent, having a skin colour other than white, an ancestry other than fully European.

CONDITION: desired state (weight, fat etc) of cattle.

CONTRACT: (to supply bullocks for the army) a formal and binding agreement between two parties.

CONVOY: a group of vehicles, a supply of troops, provisions etc, being led under escort.

COOLAMON: a vessel made of wood or bark; shallow wooden dish; carrying trough.

CORN/CORNED MEAT: salted and cured, to preserve the meat in the absence of refrigeration.

COOLER: structure (building or room) which has been chilled, by one of a number of methods, and sealed against flies, where possible, and which is used for storing bulk supplies of perishable foodstuffs, particularly meat.

CRACKED UP: 1. collapse under great strain. 2. extolled, praised.

CREAMY MARE: female horse, a soft rich cream colour.

CROC: crocodile.

CROOK: 1. bad, unpleasant, unsatisfactory, 2. annoyed, angry, as in 'go crook' or 'be crooked on' 3. Out of sorts, injured, sick.

CROOKED: angry, resentful.

CRUPPER: a strap buckled to the back of a saddle and looped under the horse's tail, to prevent the saddle from slipping forward.

CUT OUT: removed or selected a detachment of horses or cattle from a larger group, for a special purpose.

CUT: castrate (cattle).

DAMPER: bush bread made of flour and water (and sometimes bicarbonate of soda) cooked in the ashes of a fire.

DE-KNACKER: castrate.

DINGO: native dog.

DINNER TIME: midday meal, usually consisting of damper and salt meat.

DIVINER: a dowser who searches for hidden water or minerals by passing a forked stick or rod over the surface of the ground under which it is hoped to find them, so that it might dip suddenly when brought over the right spot.

DOSE: bout of illness e.g. chickenpox.

DRAFT: remove or select a detachment of horses or cattle from a larger group, for a special purpose.

DRAFTING HORSE: horse specifically trained for use in the process of drafting cattle or horses.

DRIPPING: melted fat from roasting meat and eaten cold or used in cooking.

DROVE: take a number of cattle in a body, moving together to market along a specified stock route.

DROVER: stockman on horseback who guides the cattle along the route to the railhead, or market, camping out with them along the way.

DRUM: a cylindrical container for storing bulk fuel or food supplies e.g. 44-gallon drum - holding 44 gallons of petrol or diesel.

DRY BLOWER: 1. A person who separates gold from the soil in which it is found by means of an air current, 2. to be relatively or completely infertile - have no, or few, offspring.

DRY CAMP: stopping or resting place where there is no creek or bore to water the cattle.

EMPTY PLANT: the greatly reduced equipment, stock etc, and the vehicles of a drover, which return to the cattle station once the cattle have been delivered to market.

EURO: species of wallaby.

FAIR GO: reasonable treatment, or opportunity.

FEED: a meal.

FINISHED: died, ended, destroyed.

FIVE DRILL: short drill, up to one foot long, used in mining.

FLAT: level plain, without inclination.

FLOG: beat, whip, punish with repeated blows of whip or cane.

FOGARTY'S: one of Alice Spring's earliest stock and station agents, and equipment stores.

FULL BLOOD: an Aboriginal person all of whose ancestors are also Aboriginal.

FUNNY: odd, peculiar.

GALVANISED IRON: iron coated with zinc, to prevent rust, sheets of which were often used to make temporary shelters for the army, also used for workers' huts.

GAWD: slang, exclamatory phrase, mild oath.

GHANS: Afghani people. This term was used in the pioneer times in Australia.

GIMPY HAMMER: used in mining.

GIN: (now considered an offensive term) an Aboriginal woman.

GIRTH STRAP: a leather strap around the horse's middle, to secure the saddle.

GO BUSH: leave settled areas and lifestyle to live a more traditional life away from white influence.

GO WALKABOUT: to travel over the countryside in a nomadic way, often for ceremonial purposes.

GOLDEN SYRUP: a bright, golden-yellow syrup drained off in the process of obtaining refined crystallised sugar.

GO TO BUGGERY: (coarse slang – used imperatively) – Get lost. Go away.

GOVERNED: refers to speed limit imposed - in this case, on trucks transporting cattle to markets or railheads (40 mph).

GOVERNMENT BORE: a well dug by the government workers who were responsible for making sure there were water supplies for stock routes and Overland Telegraph maintenance workers.

GROG: alcohol.

GULLY: narrow valley.

HALF CASTE: person of Aboriginal and European ancestry. Term in currency during much of Don Ross's lifetime, now considered derogatory.

HEAD: a method of counting stock - one hundred head = one hundred bullocks.

HEAD ROPE: made from bullock hide, used to lasso and secure the bullocks that were being drafted.

HEADS: the side of a coin, which depicts the monarch's head.

HE (she): refers to Aboriginal usage of personal pronouns in English: 'He' may indicate a person of either gender.

HIGH COUNTRY: elevated country, hilly or mountainous areas.

HOBBLE: leather straps (sometimes with bells) attached to the feet of horses and camels, restricting their ability to walk, in order to prevent the animal from straying whilst grazing.

HOMESTEAD: main (permanent) dwelling on a cattle station, of the owner or manager.

HORSE BREAKING: taming a horse. Training a horse to accept harness, and become accustomed to work.

HORSE TAILER: the person who rounds up and saddles the horses, and who is responsible for the stock horses out in the stock camps.

HUNT SOMEONE AWAY: force him or her to leave, chase him or her away, probably with threats of violence, or actual violence.

JOEY: young kangaroo, carried in the mother's pouch.

KEEP SOMETHING QUIET: not speak about it especially to anyone in authority. Keep a secret.

KID: child

KNOCKED ABOUT - strike repeatedly, treat roughly.

KNOCK "EM UP: exhaust or make ill (the horses).

KWEYEYE: Indigenous word meaning girl (used as 'woman' also - colloquially).

LANE: a long narrow enclosure from which cattle are driven into a pen or pound.

LANGUAGE: an Aboriginal language, e.g. Kaytetye, Arrernte, Alyawarr.

LEARNT: taught.

LINESMAN: a person employed for the maintenance of the overland telegraph line.

LOG CABIN, HAVELOCK, and CLIPPER: brands of tobacco.

MAKING MEN: refers to the initiation puberty rites of Indigenous males.

MILL: wind or mechanically powered device, for drawing water up from bores, to water the cattle.

MINGY: stingy, mean, and niggardly.

MOB: group of people, possibly related.

MOB OF BOYS: group of Aboriginal stockmen.

MONGREL: a term of abuse, a contemptible person.

MULGA: a desert tree, very hardy, also used colloquially to mean out in the bush.

MUSTER: a round up of stock

MYALL: 1. ignorant or wild 2. Aboriginal people who remained out in the bush, and didn't live on missions or work as stockmen.

NAMBING AND CHATTING: childish behaviour and avoidance of work by indulging in weak, silly talk.

NEW CHUM: novice, newly arrived (with the implication of relative ignorance).

OLDEN TIME: when used by Aboriginal people, usually refers to the time before or just after contact with Europeans, when most Aboriginal people were living traditional lives, according to their ancient law.

OLD MAN / OLD WOMAN: a person who has reached maturity and is worthy of respect. Usually applies to someone of middle age or older, and, unlike in English, it is usually a term of respect.

ON THE PIG'S BACK: well off, on a good thing, in a position of advantage.

PACK HORSES: horses that carried bags/packs of supplies.

PACK SADDLES: saddles adapted for supporting packs.

PAD: path or track made by a mob of cattle all travelling along in a line.

PAPALUNYA: (Warumungu) white people.

PART: a portion of a human or animal body, (plural) genitals.

PASSED AWAY: died.

PICTURE NIGHTS: film shows, held in the evening. The earliest ones in Central Australia were shown in roofless buildings, with Aboriginal and European people sitting in different parts of the building. Dogs were often present and many scuffles occurred during the screenings.

PINCH: steal a thing or rob a person.

PIZZLED HIM UP: whipped him (in this case, the horse).

PLANT: the equipment, stock, vehicles etc of a drover.

PLUG: a cake or stick of tobacco, especially for chewing.

POLLIE: cattle with docked horns.

POPPET HEAD: a frame at the top of a mining shaft, or well, supporting the pulleys for the ropes used in hoisting.

POSTS - vertical pieces of timber used in the making of fences

PROPER: as in 'proper snakes', 'proper gambler': genuine, real, extreme, emphasises the degree of something.

PUB: inn, hotel.

PULL THE PUD: coarse slang for male masturbation.

PULL UP: cause to stop.

PUT HER IN MY SWAG: a euphemism for the initiation of a sexual relationship.

PUT IT OVER: achieve by deceit, get the better of, outsmart, defeat, trick.

PUTTING RIGHT: breaking in, taming.

PUTS HIS TIME IN: completes a period of employment, employs oneself, formally or informally.

QUART POT: a billycan for boiling tea, a vessel used for drinking, may be called pannikin, also .

QUIETEN: to make more peaceable, more tractable; when related to traditional Aboriginal people's training by Europeans it may have sinister overtones because of the violence involved in forcing Aboriginal people to accept occupation of their land by Europeans and to cease their reprisals.

QUIET MOB: calm herd of cattle, not stampeding, no excessive noise or motion.

RAINMAKERS: in Kaytetye culture, a ceremonial responsibility of a certain group of 'lawmen' or Aboriginal elders.

RATIONS: provisions, food, usually a fixed daily allowance provided by the government or an employer.

RUN INTO: meet with, by chance.

REAR UP: care for or be responsible for a child, to the point of maturity, bring the child up, train him - usually as a stockman. Often the white station manager or owner would choose a boy from the Aboriginal camp, train him as a stockman and assume much of the authority of father and boss.

RIGOUT: costume, outfit, and style of dress - clothes and gear or equipment appropriate for an occupation (in this case, stockman).

ROAD GANG: a group of workmen engaged in maintenance work on roads.

ROO: kangaroo.

ROUSTABOUT: a general hand employed in stock work on a station.

RUBBISH BOY: worthless man, person of little use and poor character, valueless person.

RUSHING MOB: stampeding herd of cattle.

SAVAGE: angry, violent, fierce.

SCRUB: vegetation consisting chiefly of stunted trees, shrubs and brushwood, an area of land covered thickly or thinly with shrubs and stunted trees.

SERGE: a durable woollen fabric used for clothing.

SHAFT: a long, narrow, vertical or slightly inclined well-like excavation or hole giving access to underground workings in a mine.

SHAKES: disease characterised by a trembling of the muscles and limbs, such as Parkinson's disease.

SHOE HORSES: provide horses with a band of iron etc shaped to the hard part of the hoof, and secured by nails to the underside to prevent wear or injury.

SHORTHORN: breed of cattle, with short horns, originally bred in County Durham.

SING OUT: yell, or bellow, cry out, especially in pain.

SINGLE WATCH: short watch of three hours, whilst looking after cattle at night.

SISTER: in Aboriginal usage, often refers to cousin as well.

SIT DOWN AT: establishes a temporary home or camp, stays for a time .

SLACK: lazy, unhurried.

SOAK: water hole, a hollow in the ground where rain has collected, a place where water has seeped through the ground and collected.

SOAKAGE WATER: water from a soak, subterranean source of water. Can seep to the surface, or can be dug for.

SOFT: weak and foolish, pleasant and agreeable.

SORRY BUSINESS: Mourning rituals, ceremonies and cultural obligations surrounding the death of an Aboriginal family member.

SPELL (THE CATTLE): let them take a brief rest.

TUSSOCK: tussock forming spiny-leaved grass found in the desert areas of Australia.

SPOIL THEM FOR WORK: make the workers unfit for work or unused to working hard, by being very lenient, and not forcing them to hard work and insisting on obedience.

STAKED: spiked by a sharp branch or twig of mulga.

STRAIGHTEN [SOMEONE] UP: discipline them, set them right.

STRAIGHT ONE: within the laws of the traditional Aboriginal kinship system
Legitimate potential marriage partner: may be referred to also as 'right skin'.

STATION: large parcel of land for grazing cattle or sheep. Can be leasehold or freehold.

STATION BOYS: the Aboriginal workers (men usually) on a cattle station, often drawn from the people whose traditional country the station occupies.

STICK IT OUT: stay with a course of action until it is completed.

STOCK CAMP: temporary quarters out in the bush, whilst en route to the market with the cattle, or whilst mustering and branding cattle.

STOCK ROUTE: a right of way for cattle travelling over occupied land.

STOCK YARD: a fenced area where cattle are contained for short periods of time, for example, whilst being branded.

STRAIN (FENCE WIRE): extend and make taut.

STRAIGHT AS A DIE: straightforward, honest, fair dealing.

STRANGER: unbranded cattle (often the object of cattle duffing).

SUGARBAG: wild bush honey.

SWAG: bundle of blankets & personal goods carried by someone travelling in the bush.

TACK: the saddle, bridle etc of a horse.

TAIL: follow, drive or tend horses.

TAUGHT PROPERLY FOR WORK: trained well so that one becomes a skilled and hard worker.

TECHNICIAN (ON THE OVERLAND TELEGRAPH LINE): a person employed to look after technical equipment and carry out practical work.

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR: a person who operates a signalling device for transmitting messages to a distance; operating a transmitter and receiver connected by a wire along which an electric current passes, the signals being made by making and breaking the circuit.

TELEGRAPH MASTER: person in charge of a transmitting station.

TENDER (a muster): go to, be part of a group of stockmen on an occasion where the cattle are sorted and the cleanskins branded.

THIS SIDE OF THE BLACK STUMP - THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BLACK STUMP: mythical geographical point in Australia – within or beyond the last outpost of civilisation, towns or city goods and services; isolated rural location.

THOROUGHbred : pure breed stock.

TINSMITHING: fashioning equipment and implements from tin.

THREAD: shoot, fill with bullet holes.

TOUCHY: easily moved to anger, apt to take offence on slight cause.

TRACKER: a person who follows the traces or course of a person or an animal.

TRACK RIDING: pursuing, seeking or following the cattle.

TRUCKING CATTLE: taking cattle to market in trucks or trains.

TURNOUT: 1. course of events, situation 2. collection of possessions and equipment: plant..

TWO UP: a gambling game played by tossing two coins, bets being laid on the showing of two heads or two tails.

UTE: farm vehicle designed to carry both passengers and goods, light truck with an open tray on the back.

WALKABOUT: a trip out in the bush, possibly for hunting, food gathering or ceremonial reasons. Often judged by Europeans as aimless meandering.

WAR PEOPLE: soldiers.

WATER CANTEENS: water flask or drinking utensil.

WATERHOLES: a hole or depression in which water collects, a cavity in the bed of a river, especially one that retains water when the river itself is dry, this as regularly drunk from by animals.

WELL PARTY: group of workers whose job it is to sink a well.

WETHER: a castrated ram.

WHALE: to beat, to flog.

WHEEL (v.): turn the cattle, when they are stampeding.

WHITE BULLOCKS: signify good luck (superstition).

WHITEMAN: non-Indigenous person, usually of European origin.

WINDBREAK: a fence, a wall, a screen, used to break the force of the wind.

WING THEM: pass swiftly around the wings, to cause the cattle to change direction.

WITCHETTY BUSH: desert bush (acacia).

WOLFRAM: tungsten.

WOMANS: Aboriginal English for women.

YAM STICK: stout stick used by Indigenous people to dig for bush foods, roots such as yams. When Dick Riley says young people today can't even make a yam stick he's referring too not only a general laziness and unwillingness to work, but to their lack of traditional skills, knowledge of country (where and how to dig for yams, and which tree yields the wood for the best sticks, and how to fashion and use traditional tools).

YANDYING: separating grass seeds or bush fruits from refuse by shaking in a coolamon, or shallow dish; also separating ore by winnowing in a shallow dish.

YANG YANG: crazy, stupid, not effective, wasting time talking and playing around. Possibly derived from gang gang cockatoos, noisy Australian birds.

YANKS: Americans. May also refer to Canadians e.g. Yank Lyon.

YARD (v.) (the cattle): gather the cattle into an enclosure.

YARN/YARNING: tell a long rambling story or tale, especially an implausible one; talk, gossip.

YELLOW BAY MARE: light chestnut coloured female horse.

YELLAFELLA / YELLOW MAN: person of mixed European and Aboriginal descent. Now felt to be a derogatory term, but was in general use during Don Ross's lifetime.

APPENDIX 3

KAYTETYE LANGUAGE NOTES COMPILED BY MYFANY TURPIN, 2001¹

DON'S USE OF LANGUAGE

Don Ross grew up in a bilingual environment. From early childhood he spoke both Kaytetye and Standard English. The relatively brief period of European contact may have meant that Aboriginal English was not yet fully developed, or at least not used between Aboriginal people themselves. Few Aboriginal language speakers grow up learning Standard English alongside their Aboriginal language, although many now speak Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English is used to communicate across many language groups and differs from Standard English in many ways. Commonly, speakers of Standard English find it difficult to understand Aboriginal English and vice versa. Increasingly Aboriginal children are learning only Aboriginal English. Don moved with ease between Standard English, Kaytetye and Aboriginal English, which he used when quoting Aboriginal people in their interactions with Europeans.

Don could also speak Arrernte and Alyawarr. It undoubtedly was an asset for a station owner to have a multilingual and bicultural worker who could speak the local language. It may have been for this reason that many head stockmen and people with regular station work were men who had grown up bilingual. Bob Smith of Crown Point station grew up speaking Luritja and English, Jack Cuzack spoke Warlpiri and English, Mort Conway, Walter Smith and Tom Williams all spoke Arrernte and English.

In the presence of white people Don favoured the use of English. The first time I met Don was with his niece, Emily Hayes, with whom I was doing language work, and her granddaughter, Shirleen McLaughlin, who was a trainee linguist. Emily extolled Don's language prowess and asked him to talk in Kaytetye. However, much to Emily's frustration, Don kept speaking both to Emily and myself in English. After giving this some thought, he reflected, 'Because she's white, that's what make me talk like that, I think'. I have since worked with other Kaytetye people of Don's age group who also find it difficult to switch to Kaytetye in my presence. No doubt the effect of being told 'not to talk blackfella' by white people is deeply ingrained in this generation of Aboriginal people.

Don's language skills were significant. When I began work on the Kaytetye Dictionary, I was referred by Kaytetye speakers to Don Ross, who spoke 'proper Kaytetye'. He was a delight for a linguist to work with as he liked to reflect on the nature of language. 'Kaytetye is a backwards language', he said, chuckling, and illustrated this with a Kaytetye sentence. Don's chuckle was over the ambiguity in the word 'backwards' which has been used as a derogatory way to describe Aboriginal languages. But he was referring to the fact that in Kaytetye, the words

¹ Some of the information has been included in the body of the thesis

do fall in the reverse order to English, for example, ‘Arretyele anteyane artweye nharte’, ‘That man is over there’. Literally, the sentence reads, ‘Over there is man that’. His fascination with these differences and his appreciation of the humour in ‘mistranslations’ came up many times in our work.

As with many bilingual people, features of one language often influence the other. Some features of Kaytetye crop up in the way Don’s English departed in minor ways from Standard English, especially when he talked in English with Aboriginal people.

For example, in Kaytetye, if one is moving while doing something, then this movement must also be expressed, to be grammatically correct. This is reflected in the following statement: ‘Yeah, they cut it [the sugarbag] down and got a bloody quartpot full. We were eating it going along’. This would be presented in Kaytetye as ‘Aynanthe aynter-apeyayne (We ate while going along)’, and in Standard English as ‘We were eating it as we went along’.

Another way Kaytetye influenced the structure of Don’s English can be seen in the way Don sometimes omitted parts of the sentence that are already known, and put additional information at the end of the sentence, as one would in Kaytetye. ‘Brand them then, next morning. Start them off, the cows in the yard’. In Standard English this would read, ‘The next morning we would then brand them. We started with the cows in the yard’.

TRANSLATION

The translations of the Kaytetye stories are the collaborative effort of Emily Hayes Alison Ross, both of whom are relatives of Don Ross, and Myfany Turpin. Where stories have been translated from the Kaytetye, we have sometimes opted for a non-literal translation in order to capture the overall meaning of a story. For example, the meaning of words such as ‘this way’, ‘here’ and ‘there’ are obvious in speech, but not on the printed page. We have chosen to translate such sentences by using a compass direction, as in the example below:

Start-lkepe nantew-apertame eylenye-ngerne.
start-then horse-again got-this way
Then we started mustering cattle again, heading northwards
Literally: Then we started mustering cattle again, heading this way.

SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION OF KAYTETYE WORDS

The spelling system used here may seem daunting to those unfamiliar with Central Australian languages; however this is necessary as Kaytetye (pronounced Kay-ditch) has many sounds not heard in English. The spelling system follows that used in *Kaytetye Country*, although there is more breaking up of words, as is commonly practiced by literate speakers of Kaytetye.

Below is an approximate guide to pronouncing the letters used in Kaytetye, taking English as a comparative base. Stress is usually on the first vowel after a

consonant or consonant cluster. For a more detailed guide to the language and pronunciation see *A Learner's guide to Kaytetye*.

- m, n, y, l, r like these letters as they sound at the start of English words
- k sometimes like k, sometimes like g
- p sometimes like p, sometimes like b
- t sometimes like t, sometimes like d
- h similar to ch in Scottish loch, sometimes like English aa
- rr trill, similar to tt in butter
- ng like ng in sing
- th sounds like t, sometimes d to English speakers, but is actually pronounced with the tongue touching the upper teeth
- nh sounds like n to English speakers, but is actually pronounced with the tongue touching the upper teeth
- lh sounds like l to English speakers, but is actually pronounced with the tongue touching the upper teeth
- rt sounds like American English rd in guard, but is actually pronounced with the tongue tip curled back
- rn sounds a little like American English rn in barn, but is actually pronounced with the tongue tip curled back
- rl sounds a little like American English rl in Carl, but is actually pronounced with the tongue tip curled back
- yt sounds a little like t to English speakers, but is actually pronounced with the tongue raised close to the roof of the mouth
- yl sounds like l to English speakers, but is actually pronounced with the tongue raised close to the roof of the mouth
- yn sounds like n to English speakers, but is actually pronounced with the tongue raised close to the roof of the mouth
- ty sometimes like j, sometimes like ch
- ny like i in onion
- ly like ll in million
- pm no equivalent sound in English. Sounds like m but the air is released through the nose
- tnh no equivalent sound in English. Sounds like nh but the air is released through the nose
- rtn no equivalent sound in English. Sounds like rn but the air is released through the nose
- tn no equivalent sound in English. Sounds like n but the air is released through the nose
- ytn no equivalent sound in English. Sounds like yn but the air is released through the nose
- tny no equivalent sound in English. Sounds like ny but the air is released through the nose
- kng no equivalent sound in English. Sounds like ng but the air is released through the nose
- w after a consonant sometimes sounds like English oo, sometimes like English wa otherwise sounds like w in water.
- e sometimes like ey in key, sometimes like i in third, sometimes like er in batter
- a sometimes like a in father, sometimes like a in gate

Stress

In Kaytetye the stress is usually on the first vowel after the consonant(s). A difference in stress makes a word sound strange. In some cases a difference in stress can change the meaning, such as the difference between the two words per-MIT (I permit you to do it) and PER-mit (a liquor permit).

Myfany Turpin is currently a postgraduate student in linguistics and music at Sydney University. She has provided linguistic assistance in teaching Aboriginal languages, taught linguistics and Kaytetye literacy and has produced Aboriginal language teaching resources for the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs.

She completed her Honours thesis in Kaytetye semantics at the Australian National University in 1997. Since 1996 she has been compiling a Kaytetye dictionary. She has assisted in the production of Kaytetye language videos and musical recordings and published a number of linguistic and musicological articles.

Publications include:

2002. *A Learner's Guide to Kaytetye*. Institute for Aboriginal Development Press, Alice Springs

2003. (with Tommy Thompson) *Growing Up Kaytetye*. Institute for Aboriginal Development Press, Alice Springs

2004. *Kaytetye Picture Dictionary* (for children). Institute for Aboriginal Development Press, Alice Springs

APPENDIX 4

GEORGE HAYES' LETTER 29 MAY 1922

Northern Territory Archives Darwin CRS P.L. (Pastoral Leases)
1915-1925 Correspondence Files Item F27, PP 19-20

SL 1922/432

20
Darwin Creek
29 May 1922

Director of Lands,
Darwin.

Sir.

Herewith please find cheque for sixty pounds six shillings £60/6/0 Rent on Miscellaneous Lease N° 57 £30 and rent on pastoral lease N° 2380 £29.6.0 to June 30th 1923.

During my occupation, I have made the following improvements.

On pastoral lease N° 2380.

I have erected a two roomed house 30 feet by 13 feet, horizontal slats, Galvanized roof, verandah one side good substantial branding yard at house.

One well at house 27 feet deep, good supply good water, 5000 gallon squatter tank, + troughing.

One well 8 miles north of homestead 36 to 40 feet deep, small supply of good water.

One well 15 miles north of homestead



homestead.

is down about 30 feet, unfinished, no water yet.

On miscellaneous Lease No 57.

I have erected a small working yard, + intend putting big yard there later.

I cannot erect a homestead on this lease, as well as on adjoining pastoral lease, where I have my home.

It is impossible to live on Taylor Well water, it is fit only for stock, when I am working there, I have to cart water for drinking six miles.

Am also enclosing \$6 for grazing licence, application herewith.

Understand Mr. Scott has surrendered pastoral lease No 2343, on Taylor Creek.

Thereby apply for a grazing licence 100 square miles, starting point S.W. corner of my pastoral lease No 2380, then ten miles south, ten miles east, ten miles north, ten miles west to starting point.

Trusting this application will receive your favourable consideration.

Yours Faithfully,
G. E. Hayes

Letter written by Frank Scott signed by Geo Hayes. Geo says it's not his grant father's handwriting.

100 square miles of grazing licence for 4 years. Scheduled for left hand pastoral lease & dated 29/1/1922. South, ten miles north, ten miles west.

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CRS TS Item 593 Sandy Ross. Oral History Transcript

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ORAL HISTORY RECORDINGS

All oral history tapes and transcripts are held in the archives of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, except where otherwise stated.

Peter Horsetailer

22 April 1990. Recorded by Francis Good, Northern Territory Archives Service. Transcribed by and archived in the Northern Territory Archives Service, Darwin. (HORSETAILER, Peter. NTRS 226 –Oral History Interview – TS 591.) (Transcript in Aboriginal English and standard English: Grace Koch (ed) 1993. pp. 62–65)

Daisy Kemarre

1986. Recorded by Emily Hayes at Alekerange for the Kaytetye program, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association. (Also present were Amy Ngamperle and Katie Ampetyane.) Tape transcribed by Myfany Turpin. 2000. Translated by Emily Hayes and Myfany Turpin. Corrections by Daisy Kemarre.

Tracker Mick

1986. Recorded by Emily Hayes (Tracker Mick's cousin) at Alekerange for the Kaytetye program, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association. Tape transcribed in 2000 by Myfany Turpin and translated into English in 2002 by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes. Corrections February 2002 by Jacob Peltharr and Cookie Pwerle at Stirling Station.

Jackie Tywekertaye

28 November 1997. Recorded by Myfany Turpin at Artarre (Neutral Junction Station) for the Kaytetye Dictionary Project, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs. Translated 4 December 1997 by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes.

Jackie Tywekertaye and Tommy Thompson

28 November 1997. Recorded by Myfany Turpin at Artarre (Neutral Junction Station) for the Kaytetye Dictionary Project, Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs. Translated by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes 4 December 1997.

Dick Riley

13 March 1998. Recorded in Tennant Creek by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed and edited by Terry Whitebeach March 1998.

Alec Ross

14 March 1998. Recorded in Tennant Creek by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed 20 March 1998 by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Alec Ross.
15 March 1998. Recorded in Tennant Creek by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed 21 March 1998 by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Alec Ross.

Don Ross

10 October 1996. Recorded in Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin. Emily Hayes, Shirleen McLaughlin and Graham Ross also present. Transcribed 14 December 1996 by Linda Gittens. Edited by Myfany Turpin.

11 October 1996. Recorded at Jay Creek by Myfany Turpin. Graham Ross, Emily Hayes, Ginger Ross and Shirleen McLaughlin also present. Transcribed 14 December 1996 by Linda Gittens. Edited 18 February 1998 by Myfany Turpin.

23 October 1997. Recorded in Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin. Transcribed 28 October 1997.

25 October 1997. Recorded in Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin. Transcribed 28 October 1997.

29 October 1997. Recorded in Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin. Corrected and details added to transcripts 1–4.

30 October 1997 Recorded Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin and Emily Hayes. Corrected by Ronda Ross and details added to transcripts 1–4.

13 November 1997. Recorded in Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin. Transcribed 11 November 1997 by Myfany Turpin. Corrected and details added to transcripts 5–6.

20 November 1997 Recorded in Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin. Transcribed 24 November 1997 by Shirleen McLaughlin. Edited 19 February 1998 by Myfany Turpin.

5 December 1997. Recorded in Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin, Graham Ross and Shirleen McLaughlin. Transcribed by Shirleen McLaughlin.

29 January 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Myfany Turpin and Graham Ross. Transcribed and edited by Myfany Turpin.

26 February 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Graham Ross and Myfany Turpin present. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 20 March 1998.

2 March 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.

6 March 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.

17 March 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.

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1 April 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.

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7 April 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.

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4 May 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.
14 May 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.
15 May 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.
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19 June 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.
26 June 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Don Ross 1998.
27 June 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach 1998.

Don Ross and Dick Riley

27 May 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by David Alexander. Transcribed by David Alexander.
29 May 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by David Alexander. Transcribed by David Alexander.
30 May 1998. Recorded in Alice Springs by David Alexander. Transcribed by David Alexander.

Graham Ross

2 February 1999. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Graham Ross 1999.
5 February 1999. Recorded in Alice Springs by Terry Whitebeach. Transcribed by Terry Whitebeach. Edited by Terry Whitebeach and Graham Ross 1999.

ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSIONS

EMAILS from Craig Bellamy to members of the Australian and New Zealand History list

Email Address: H-ANZAU@H-NET.MSU.EDU

Subject: CONTESTED HISTORIES

(Focused mainly on the Windschuttle vs. Manne et al controversy about the nature of history, writing history and Aboriginal and European history in Australia. N.B. Those cited below represent only a small portion of an ongoing discussion.)

Cathie Clement: Discussion Forum: Australian Council of Professional Historians Association Inc (includes details of newspaper and journal articles, lectures, debate, book reviews and the ongoing discussions between proponents of and commentators on, the 'three cheers' and 'black armband' versions of Australian history)

30 January 2003

11 February 2003

26 February 2003

16 March 2003 Includes a transcript of Stuart Macintyre's address, 1 March 2003: Blackheath Philosophy Forum: History, Politics and the Philosophy of History

2 April 2003

9 April 2003

23 April 2003

1 May 2003

4 December 2002 John Dargavel: re Mark McKenna's 'Looking for Blackfellows'

9 December 2002 James Franklin: re Henry Reynolds' error or fraud?

9 December 2002 Karen Duder: re past injustices: being told and 'hearing'

13 December 2002 Andrea Humphreys: comment on above

13 December 2002 Christine Brett: comment on above

13 December 2002 Naomi Parry: re government records providing an 'empirical' history of Aboriginal people.

20 February 2003 Gillian Davey: re 'Keith Windschuttle debates Pat Grimshaw'.

23 May 2003–3 September 2003 Paul Sendziuk to Gillian Hardwick: re race, dispossession, writing history.

3 September 2003 Gillian Hardwick reply:

3 September 2003 from Bobbie Oliver: re Windschuttle's allegations of sloppy research

3 September 2003 from Gillian Hardwick: re concept of race

3 September 2003 from Martin Crotty: reply to Gillian Hardwick

