

The idea of 'genocide' in the Australian context
1959-1978

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Abstract: This study attempts to trace the meaning of the word ‘genocide’ in its use in the Australian context. Adopting an historical contextualist approach, the study finds that ‘genocide’ emerged in 1959, in the assimilation critique of Stanley F. Davey, where it was used to condemn the perceived psychological effects of assimilation policy upon Aborigines as an emergent social collectivity. This idea of ‘genocide’ was predominant in Australian discourse throughout the 1960s and 1970s, gaining recognition as ‘the Aboriginal perspective’. As such, it encountered the obstacle of European Australians who maintained an objective understanding of Aboriginal identity, contained in visions of both ‘assimilation’ and ‘integration’. I examine the case of Tasmanian discourse history, where these two perspectives on Aboriginality and ‘genocide’ came into direct conflict over the claim of Tasmanians’ extinction. The study concludes by raising the question of how scholars may approach the identification and discussion of this Aboriginal concept of identity genocide in a scholarly context, given that its meaning is predicated on subjective historical experiences and feelings.

Introduction

In 1944, the Polish legal theorist Raphael Lemkin published his concept of ‘genocide’; in the following decade he drafted a manuscript where he developed the concept in a discussion that included Tasmanian colonisation, but he did not go on to publish this manuscript.¹ The term was subsequently never used in the Australian context prior to the 1960s, despite the United Nations’ well-known 1948 convention on genocide. In his 1959 submission to the political magazine, *Smoke Signals*, Stanley F. Davey applied the word ‘genocide’ to describe Australia’s treatment of Aboriginal peoples in what was probably the first time after Lemkin - though this has since become a familiar practice. Since the mid-1980s, the idea that various policies and events in the European colonisation of Australia constituted forms of ‘genocide’ has been popularised and corroborated by (mainly Australian) legal and historical scholarship. The judgement now stands as one of the chief historical perspectives on the history of Australia; it is known as the view held by the political ‘left’, a ‘black-armband’ view of Australian history. This view appears to cohere around a shared moral and political ideology defending the rights and dignity of Aboriginal people, which began to take hold of the Australian imagination in the 1930s. However, exactly *how* and *where* Australian history resembles ‘genocide’ has been interpreted differently according to different intellectual contexts and agendas.

In contrast to the existing historiography of ‘genocide’ in Australia, mine is an intellectual history of the *idea* of ‘genocide’ as it has developed in the Australian context. While Australian historians have been concerned to answer the normative question of whether or not genocide occurred, I am interested in the critical question

¹ Reference Lemkin manuscript - explain its history with Docker/Curthoys/Moses, cite their editions of Lemkin’s manuscript.

of *how* different people have variously asserted that ‘genocide’ occurred - or is still occurring – in Australian society. Taking a contextualist approach, I understand the expression of that idea to be confined to the verbal or textual applications of the word ‘genocide’. Sifting the archives with this objective, I compiled a chronology of instances where ‘genocide’ was used by Australian people to describe Australian events.

I asked of my sources: *who* was using the word ‘genocide’, *when* were they using it, and *how* were they using it. I regard the last of these questions – *how* – to be most significant for understanding the development of genocide as an idea in Australian consciousness. I follow the philosophy made famous by Ludwig Wittgenstein and J.L Austin; their linguistic theories showed the meaning of ideas to be embedded in language and language use. In his seminal 1969 essay, Quentin Skinner gave clear expression to the intellectual historian’s inheritance of this paradigm: ‘there *is* no history of the idea to be written’, he said, only a history of ‘how an idea has been used by various agents, and their varying situations and intentions in using it.’² Accepting that meaning is contingent upon context, my investigation into the idea of ‘genocide’ has not been directed towards the recovery of any ‘true’ definition, but to historicise what meaning it has had to historical agents. Therefore, in tracing the history of how ‘genocide’ has been understood in Australia, my intention has not been to evaluate the accuracy or validity of those interpretations, but to objectively delineate and honour each of them in their historical peculiarity.

This search led me to locate the emergence of the idea of ‘genocide’ in Australian discourse in the period 1959 – 1979, where it developed distinctly within the context of Aboriginal and European Australian’ political campaign to give Aboriginal people

² Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (1969), p. 37.

self-determination. My first chapter examines the emergence of this discourse in the political ideas of Stanley F. Davey and Doug Nicholls and the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League, showing their usages to have inaugurated a new idea of metaphysical identity 'genocide'. My second chapter follows the development of that idea, as both the international human rights discourse and the movement for Aboriginal self-determination gained ground in the 1970s. I highlight the way in which this interpretation of 'genocide' in Australian political discourse was wedded to the development of Aborigines' sense of collective identity, and the correlative shift in Australian political and intellectual consciousness towards understanding Aboriginality as a social or 'cultural' identity, rather than 'racial' identity. My final chapter compares and contrasts this scenario with the development of 'genocide' as an idea for Aborigines in Tasmania during the same period. The idea of Tasmanian genocide was uniquely influenced by the primary association with the Tasmanian Aborigines' *extinction*, which it had gained by its use in international scholarship and popular Australian discourses throughout the postwar period. The eventual separation of these ideas allowed 'genocide' to be appropriated by both Tasmanian Aboriginal rights activists and Australian scholars of Tasmanian history, which became vocal in responses to *The Last Tasmanian* documentary in 1978.

Chapter One: ‘Genesis or Genocide?’

Introduction

As far as it exists in historical documents, the Australian ‘genocide’ discourse appears to have begun in 1959, with an article authored by Stanley F. Davey (1922-2010), who was at that time serving as General Secretary to the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League (VAAL; sometimes referred to as the Australian Aborigines League) and of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA).³ In one of the League’s early issues of its magazine, *Smoke Signals*, Davey reported that ‘for Aboriginal people’, the government’s current approach to assimilation constituted ‘racial genocide’. Davey reiterated this perspective in 1963, in an independently published ‘provocative pamphlet’ called ‘Genesis or Genocide: The Aboriginal Assimilation Policy’; there, Davey invoked the idea of European ‘genocide’ comparatively, to describe the effect of the federal government’s policy of assimilation. His representation of the Aboriginal perspective on this issue was attested to in 1965, when his colleague, Pastor Doug Nicholls, publicly criticised the paternalistic enforcement of assimilation policy as ‘cultural genocide’. In their indictment of Australia’s assimilation policy as inflicting a ‘genocide’ upon the Aboriginal population, Davey and Nicholls introduced the idea of Aboriginal genocide into Australian public discourse. This chapter seeks to explain how Davey and Nicholls interpreted Lemkin’s concept of ‘genocide’ by providing a context for their particular application of that idea.

³ The FCAA was later renamed the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI).

In popular international discourse, the idea of ‘genocide’ in the early 1960s was still firmly attached to Europe, and specifically to the Nazi Holocaust.⁴ As exemplified by the Holocaust, the idea of ‘genocide’ was widely understood as a crime of physical killing of objectively defined groups; racial violence was a measurable, empirical phenomenon. Buoyed by their belief in Aboriginal peoples’ right to collectively define and govern their own racial identity, however, Davey and Nicholls identified ‘genocide’ in assimilationist policies that administered Aboriginal identity and regulated Aboriginal life. In their view, a threat to Aboriginal ‘existence’ inhered in attitudes and practices that prevented them from owning and perpetuating their Aboriginal identity, both as individuals and as a cultural collectivity.

Stanley Davey and the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League (1955-1963)

Davey produced his pamphlet whilst administering the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League (VAAL), which he had helped to found five years earlier. Born in Western Australia in 1922, Davey worked as a pastor before becoming involved in political activism. As well as founding VAAL, he went on to play a role in establishing the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA) in 1958, serving as Secretary for both organisations until his resignations in 1968. For his activist efforts, Davey is now considered ‘perhaps the most important non-Aboriginal campaigner’ of the 1960s.⁵

Davey was raised in a Church of Christ household, and would follow an impassioned belief in Christianity throughout his schooling, university, and first

⁴ Scholars did hold a more complex conception of ‘genocide’, noting Lemkin and the United Nations’ definitions. For the present purposes, I make the point that ‘genocide’ was a crime largely associated with physical killing.

⁵ Attwood, Bain, *Rights for Aborigines*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2003), p. 202. This evaluation of Davey is also adopted by the National Museum of Australia, see , *Stan Davey*, n.d, http://indigenoustrights.net.au/people/pagination/stan_davey, viewed 23 May 2015.

employment; he was attracted to the sense of ‘law and orderliness’ of Christianity, and the ‘sense of belonging’ and community which permeated its practice.⁶

In 1954, after completing studies at the College of the Bible in Glen Iris in Melbourne, Davey was working as a pastor at the Ivanhoe Church of Christ, and decided to join the newly established Council for Aboriginal Rights (CAR; March 1951). The Council aimed to ‘obtain justice for all Aboriginal Australians’, and was soon driven by its honorary secretary, Shirley Andrews (1915-2001).⁷ From the beginning of his involvement in the world of Aboriginal activism, Davey was educated and inspired by his dealings with Andrews. Meeting her at CAR meetings, Davey was immediately ‘impressed by Andrews’ dynamic activism and fact finding’.⁸ It was here that he also acquired the influential friendship of Doug Nicholls (1906-1980), a Yorta Yorta man, who was then a pastor at Davey’s church, and an active member of CAR.⁹ In Broome’s account, it was through Nicholls that Davey learned about contemporary indigeneity: ‘Nicholls took Davey to meet his Yorta Yorta kin who mostly camped in makeshift accommodation on the river at Daish’s paddock, surviving on fruit picking and cannery work.’¹⁰ Davey recalled:

I remember the first trip I ever made up there with Doug [...] I felt quite strange. I was the only white person in the car. And it was quite an adventure. The first time I’d been just with Aboriginal people [...] I really didn’t know a great deal about Aborigines at that stage.¹¹

⁶ Broome, Richard, *Fighting Hard The Victorian Aborigines Advancement League*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2015).p. 50

⁷ Broome, p. 24; see Sue Taffe ‘Shirley Andrews’.

⁸ Jan Richardson cited in Broome, p. 24.

⁹ Nicholl’s mother was of Yorta Yorta descent; though Nicholls heritage as from many clans of northern Victoria: Yorta Yorta, Baraparapa, Dja Dja Wurrung, Jupagalk and Wergaia, cf. Broome *Fighting Hard*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

¹¹ Davey cited in Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 51.

Davey's education continued in 1955 when Don McLeod, who had assisted Aboriginal people in the successful Pilbara pastoral strike (1946-1949), visited Victoria. Davey toured central Victoria with McLeod, meeting Aboriginal people. As Broome has gathered, '[t]he trip had a profound effect on Davey'.¹²



Figure 15: Stan Davey. **Source:** Courtesy Dr Jan Richardson, photo taken by Margaret Pate.¹³

The catalyst for Davey's involvement in Aboriginal rights politics was the Warburton Ranges controversy, which had surfaced in 1955 in response to the distribution of a film made by William Grayden, the member of the Western

¹²Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 51.

¹³ National Museum of Australia, *Stan Davey*, n.d, http://indigenoustrights.net.au/people/pagination/stan_davey, viewed 23 May 2015

Australian parliament. The film was made in 1956–57 with the purposes of delivering evidence of the significant health and living issues faced by the dispossessed people of the Laverton-Warburton Range Area: Wongi, Pitjantjajara and Ngaanyatjarra peoples. The film was never intended for theatrical release, but it was shown in a Perth cinema, a local Northern Territory cinema, and on the new medium of television in 1957 under the title ‘Manslaughter’. Subsequently, it was circulated by rights activists, being shown at public meetings, churches, town halls, and activists’ conferences across the nation for years after its production, giving the Aboriginal cause widespread publicity.¹⁴ It was at one such meeting that Davey saw the film - on 5 February 1957 at the Presbyterian Church in Collins Street. Davey was in his mid-thirties and still working as a pastor when he became affected by what he saw. He was not unique in the experience; Grayden’s 16 mm colour footage of unclothed children with swollen bellies, their faces covered with sores and flies, and their parents skeletal thin - revealed to horrified viewers, the disjuncture between the governments’ high ideals and the realities of Aboriginal deprivation¹⁵. The silent film ran for eighteen minutes, accompanied by a narrated script written by Grayden. It showed Warburton Mission children in neat attire playing games and being given rations, juxtaposed with forty-three people in tattered clothing who had come into the mission some weeks before in a ‘starving condition’. The film concluded with the discovery of a man’s body near a waterhole, allegedly a victim of thirst. Doug Nicholls featured in the film, shown speaking with, sitting beside, and comforting children and adults. Nicholls,

¹⁴ The film was made by William Grayden in 1956-1957. It lacks a title and production details because it was never intended for theatrical release. It was shown in a Perth cinema under *Their Darkest Hour* and is sometimes referred to as that, or *Manslaughter*. See Brooks, David and McGrath, Pamela Faye, ‘*Their Darkest Hour*: the films and photographs of William Grayden and the history of the ‘Warburton Range Controversy’ of 1957, *Aboriginal History*, Vol 34, 2010.

¹⁵ My description of the film’s content comes from Broome *Fighting Hard* (2015), pp.36-37; McGregor, Russell, *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011), pp. 101-102; Broome, *Fighting Hard*, pp. 36-37.

along with Dr Charles Duguid, had been the one to bring a copy of the film to Melbourne, and arranged for its screening in Collins Street. The meeting was convened by the 'Save the Aborigines' committee, which Shirley Andrews had organised several years earlier in specific response to the Warburton Ranges issue. Following the Warburton film screening, Davey resigned from his Church position and devoted himself to working fulltime for Aboriginal justice - what he called 'the cause'.¹⁶



Figure 16: Doug Nicholls addresses a group of people at Blackstone, February 1957. Footage of this meeting appears in the Warburton Ranges film. **Source:** William Grayden 1957.¹⁷

Following the film screening in February, Davey and Nicholls decided to form a new coalition body in Melbourne that would give prominence to Aboriginal membership and leadership. Davey recalls 'I just felt strongly one morning that we

¹⁶ Davey interviewed by Sue Taffe [29 November 1966], cited in *Stan Davey*, National Museum of Australia, http://indigenoustrights.net.au/people/pagination/stan_davey, viewed 23 May, 2015.

¹⁷ McGrath and Brooks, *Their Darkest Hour*.

should be starting a separate agency and went down and saw Doug at the [Northcote Cricket] grounds.’¹⁸ In conversation with Andrews, they established the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League in March that year, incorporating the Save the Aborigines’ Committee into what they predicted to be a larger, more influential body.

Davey, Nicholls and Andrews: VAAL’s position on assimilation policy

When Nicholls and Davey made their friendship at the Church of Christ in the early 1950s, it was in the context of a conventionally Christian liberal humanist attitude towards Aboriginal welfare. The message sent by the Warburton Ranges film was consistent with people who expressed compassion towards their Aboriginal protectorate - those whose living conditions were ailing under their limited access to health, education, housing – and faith in the doctrine of assimilation in delivering Aboriginal welfare. This uncomplicated view of assimilation promised to make Aborigines *constitutional equals* with other Australians and it anticipated that Aborigines would also benefit from becoming the *same* as other Australians. However, amongst campaigners for Aborigines ‘advancement’ there was also an emergent critique of the government’s enforcement of assimilation that emphasised the preservation of Aboriginal people as a distinct racial community. The years following the Warburton Ranges film screening would see Andrews, Davey and Nicholls consolidate and lead this critique of assimilation policy through the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League.

The immediate context for expanding Save the Aborigines’ Committee into VAAL was in order to help address the recent plea for help that the committee had received

¹⁸ Davey cited in Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 39.

from the Aboriginal people of Lake Tyers Reserve.¹⁹ In May 1955, Charles McLean, a former magistrate, had been appointed by the Victorian government to make a formal investigation of the living conditions and capacities of Aborigines in Victoria, which resulted in his order to dissolve Victoria's last remaining Aboriginal Reserves, Lake Framlingham and Lake Tyers, against the wishes of its inhabitants. 'McLean's views were driven by white middle class respectability' Broome has written, 'which emphasized outward appearances, hard work, thrift and individual achievement. Thus, McLean believed 'many are found to be indolent and unreliable in employment', they were not thrifty with their money, and 'they dress badly, and are frequently dirty and unkempt'.²⁰ McLean called for an intervention - in his view, a rescue. Deeming Lake Tyers a place of 'demoralisation', he recommended the assimilation of youthful inhabitants of Lake Tyers through education, training and re-housing in small groups among the general populations. In 1957, this agenda was consolidated in a new *Aborigines Act*, which gave power to an Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board to assist select Aborigines 'to become assimilated into the general life of the community'.²¹ The Board was dominated by white representatives and, in contradiction to the Save the Aborigines Committee protests, passed regulations to tightly manage those who were living at Lake Tyers.

The Victorian Aborigines' Welfare Board's supremacist and protectionist attitude towards the doctrine of assimilation helped the founding members of VAAL to

¹⁹ The other was Framlingham Reserve, which Mclean was also instructed to investigate.

²⁰ Broome, *Fighting Hard*, (2015), p. 27. Broome notes that McLean had also proposed more measures including the repeal of 'outdated restrictions on drinking and laws about consorting' and a relaxation of the blood-quantum measure of Aboriginality. Cf. pp. 26-28. Also see Corinne Manning (2002) 'The McLean Report: legitimising Victoria's new assimilationism' *Aboriginal History*, 26. pp. 159-176.

²¹ 'Aborigines welfare regulations', *Victoria Gazette*, no. 680, 27 August 1958, cited in Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 28.

distinguish their alternative vision of assimilation, which involved granting Aboriginal people the right to both constitutional equality *and* cultural difference.

In 1957, Davey and Nicholls placed VAAL in staunch opposition to McLean's proposals, laying the ground for a years-long struggle against Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board in conjunction with the Lake Tyers people. For Davey at least, this campaign was a significant statement of his allegiance with the emergent discourse of assimilation critique. Shirley Andrews was a key influence upon his views. 'Davey and Andrews had enormous respect for one another and worked well together,' Attwood says, 'Andrews had realised that Davey could "play a very valuable role in [the] whole campaign" for Aboriginal rights.'²² Broome tells us that in their conduct of the Lake Tyers affair, Andrews had advised Davey on where to stand. She 'was more advanced' in her ideas and 'helped Davey to see the light'²³. Davey thus came to view the offer of equality as demanding too high a price of cultural absorption.

²² Shirley Andrews cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 152.

²³ Broome notes that in their conduct of the Lake Tyers affair, Davey and Nicholls were advised by Shirley Andrews of the Council for Aboriginal rights; in her ideas she 'was more advanced' and 'helped Davey to see the light', cf. Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 97.



Figure 17: ‘Lake Tyers for the Aborigines’, 1963. Pastor Doug Nicholls, Eric Onus, Laurie Moffat and Joe McGuinness lead 40 Aboriginal men and women protesting at the government's plans to close Lake Tyers Reserve. **Source:** Courtesy of Ian Spalding.²⁴

The League remained committed in its opposition to the Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board throughout the 1960s, achieving success in aligning itself more closely with the needs and perspectives of Victoria’s Aborigines than any government or non-government organisation had before.²⁵ Though it was founded with a mainly white executive - Gordon Bryant as president, Doris Blackburn as deputy president, Davey as secretary and Nicholls as field officer – all of the executives had been directly involved in the protest against the closure of Lake Tyers leading up to the League’s establishment. As Broome has described, the League was at the forefront of a ‘new

²⁴ National Museum of Australia, *Campaign to Save Lake Tyers*, http://indigenousrights.net.au/land_rights/lake_tyers.1962-70/campaign_to_save_lake_tyers, viewed 23 May 2015.

²⁵ See Attwood, *Rights of Aborigines*, c.f pp. 147-148; Broom, *Fighting Hard*, p. 45; See the personal testimony of Jocelyne Scott in her chapter ‘Descended from a Matriarch’ in *Living Generously – Women Mentoring Women*, Jocelyne A. Scutt, ed., Artemis Publishing, Melbourne, Australia, 1996 cited in Women’s History Network, *Pastor Stan Davey*, <http://womenshistorynetwork.org/blog/?tag=pastor-stan-davey>, viewed 23 May 2015.

philosophy' of 'a combined black-white approach' to Aboriginal politics, which was being realised in the 1950s through the Council for Aboriginal Rights in Melbourne, and in the Australian Aboriginal Fellowship (1956) in Sydney.

The Victorian Aborigines Advancement League (1957), with the Council's input, followed suit. Doug Nicholls and Stan Davey, both pastors of the Church of Christ, and close friends, deepened the philosophy of black and white working together.

However, for over a decade the League remained mostly white.²⁶

The organisation grew rapidly, and branches were established throughout suburban Melbourne and in country Victoria. It was immediately classified as a 'radical' organisation by ASIO, with its early political activity including the drafting and circulating of a petition requesting a referendum to amend the Australian constitution to allow the Federal government to legislate on Aboriginal affairs, establishing a legal defence fund for Albert Namatjira, after he was charged with supplying liquor to an Aboriginal ward of the state, and in May 1957, it launched a magazine called *Smoke Signals*.²⁷

²⁶ Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.43, 45; Attwood, *Rights ofor Aborigines*, p. 155.

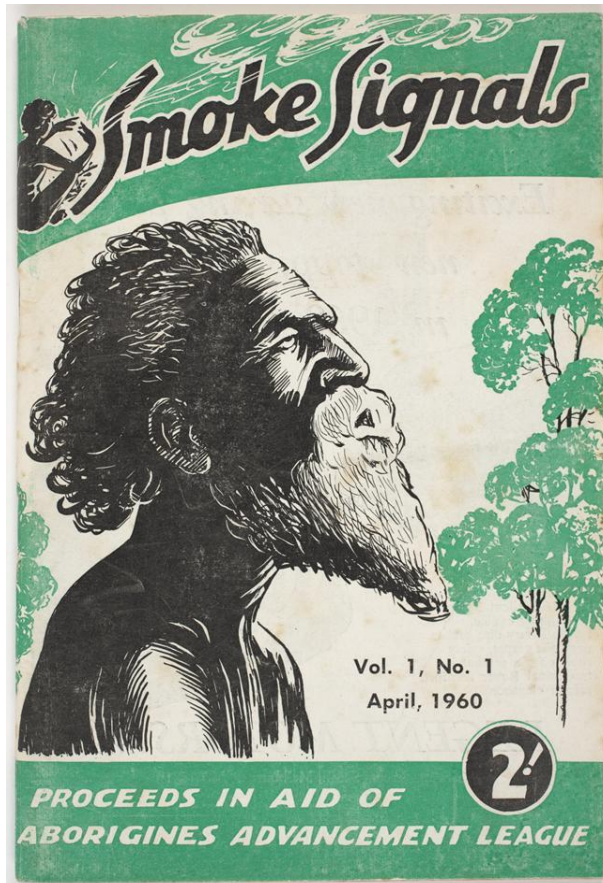


Figure 18: The Victorian Aborigines Advancement League magazine, *Smoke Signals*. The cover of Volume 1, no. 1, April 1960, which contained the League’s first official mission statement. **Source:** Museum of Victoria.²⁸

The postwar critique of assimilation: ‘integration’ and the protection of Aborigines’ distinct tribal culture.

The postwar critique of assimilation was based upon esteem for the distinctiveness of Aboriginal life and culture. The 1960s saw a general shift in Australian cultural consciousness, towards the valuation of Aborigines’ traditional cultural heritage as a distinguishing feature of Australian nationality.²⁹ Preserving indigenous cultural heritage thus became a new basis for critiquing the federal policy of racial absorption. In the 1950s, Tom Wright condemned assimilation as a ‘pseudo-progressive cloak.’ It

²⁸ ‘Magazine – Smokes Signals, Aborigines Advancement League, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1960’, Museum Victoria, <http://museumvictoria.com.au/collections/items/1550206/magazine-smoke-signals-aborigines-advancement-league-vol-1-no-1-apr-1960>, viewed 23 May 2015.

²⁹ McGregor, Russell, *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011), cf. ‘Chapter 7: Enriching the Nation’, *Indifferent Inclusion*, pp. 119-140.

was, he claimed, ‘basically a policy of extermination of the Australian Native Race’ by means of ‘the destruction of tribal life...and [the] “gradual” elevation of the individual Aborigines to “citizenship”’.³⁰ Similarly, Andrews emphasised the importance of regarding Aborigines *as a people*. In 1957, she proposed:

In other countries where minority groups of previously oppressed people have been rehabilitated, it has always been found necessary to set aside areas that these people could regard as their own and develop for themselves. Cultural ties can be maintained and the minority people are not just absorbed and swallowed up by the larger group as it is envisaged by the present policy of assimilation put forward by the Federal Government [...] We do not want a policy that would destroy [Aboriginal] heritage by assimilating all the Aborigines in such a way that they would disappear into the general population and lose all connection with the past.

Like Wright, Andrews argued that Aborigines should be regarded as ‘an equal minority group’ and ‘have the right to maintain [their] own identity in Australia on the basis of equal status with other sections of the population’.³¹ Due to the governments’ promulgation of assimilation as a policy of cultural absorption, by the late 1960s, the word ‘assimilation’ was coming into disrepute; and ‘integration’ was becoming the preferred model of assimilating, or including, Aboriginal people in mainstream society as constitutional equals.³² With Davey as architect, both VAAL and the FCAA developed a political agenda founded upon ‘integration’, protecting Aboriginal people as a culturally distinct group. Months after its foundation in 1957,

³⁰ Tom Wright cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p.199.

³¹ Shirley Andrews cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 200.

³² See Attwood, Chapter 8: ‘To be Recognised as a Race of People’, *Rights for Aborigines* (2003). Attwood traces the rhetorical development of ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’, Attwood says that in the 1960s the term ‘integration’ was being used by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal campaigners as a means of articulating opposition to assimilation of Aborigines as individuals; Russell McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion* (2011), pp. 98-118. McGregor argues that both ‘assimilation’ and ‘integration’ were used so loosely that it is not possible for the historian now to attribute a distinct vision of the nation and of government programs to those who proposed ‘integration’.

the League drafted its Constitution, which included the basic objectives of: the procurement of full citizenship rights for ‘people of Aboriginal descent’ and the ‘complete *integration* of people of Aboriginal descent with the Australian community with full recognition of the contribution they are able to make.’³³ The League’s intention to preserve the Victoria’s Aborigines’ ‘cultural-ties’ was also indicated in their first mission statement, issued in 1960 and reprinted in each issue of *Smoke Signals*, which stated that all remaining Aboriginal reserves be retained for individual or communal ownership.³⁴

³³ (My emphasis added). Victorians Aborigines’ Advancement League Draft Constitution 1957; reprinted by Stan Davey in *Smoke Signlas* October 1959. In 1958 the FCAA was also founded upon the integrationist vision of equality and difference, but its constitution reflected a disproportionate fixation on equality, at the expensive of maintaining Aboriginal difference. See Bain Attwood, p.153-154

³⁴ The mission statement was first printed in Volume 1, no. 1, April 1960, and reprinted in each issue of *Smoke Signals* up until 1970. See Victorian Aborigines Advancement League, *Smoke Signals* (04 Sydney Road, Coburg, East Melbourne: Challenge Press).

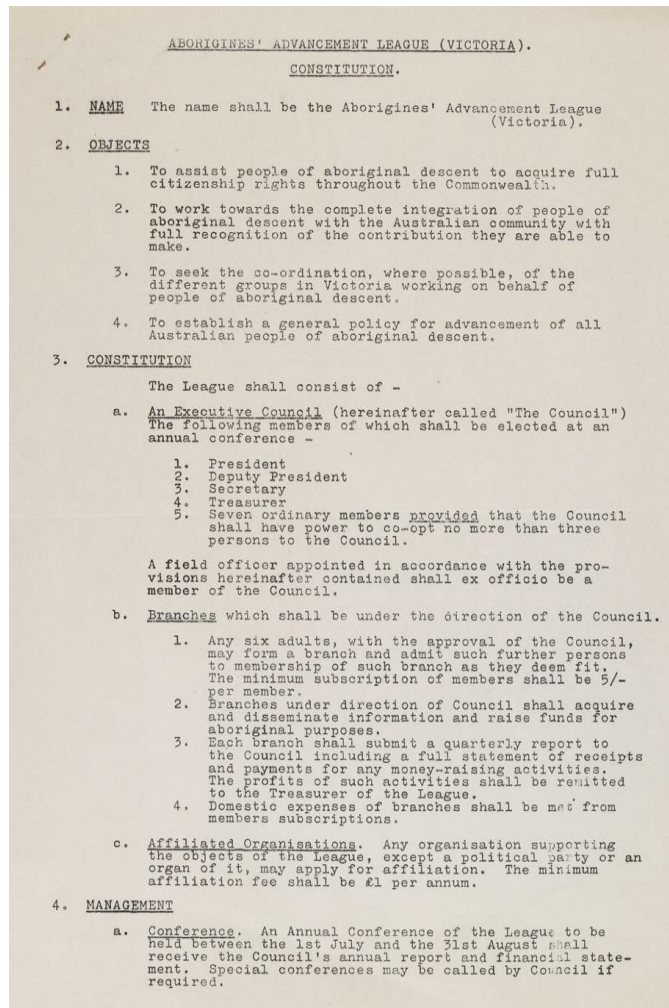


Figure 19: Victorians Aborigines' Advancement League Draft Constitution 1957. **Source:** Council for Aboriginal Rights (Vic.) Papers, MS 12913/8/1, State Library of Victoria.³⁵

Davey understood 'integration' to involve 'a smaller group retain[ing] its identity while living within and in harmony with the National community' and giving Aboriginal people 'a voice in their own affairs'.³⁶ In 1962, he publicly criticized the federal government's vision of a homogenous, monocultural nation in a letter to Melbourne's *Age* newspaper. 'The "ideal of one people in Australia"', he pointed out, carried 'different meanings'. One could create 'a united people' in such a way that

³⁵ Victorian Aborigines' Advancement League Constitution [1957], National Museum of Australia website, Victorian Aborigines Advancement League, http://indigenoustrights.net.au/resources/documents/victorian_aborigines_advancement_league_constitution, viewed 23 May 2015.

³⁶ Davey, Stan, 'Assimilation! Which way?', in Victorian Aborigines Advancement League, *Smoke Signals* (04 Sydney Road, Coburg, East Melbourne: Challenge Press), p. 4.

‘everyone had equal rights and opportunities’ but also respected ‘differences in one another.’ He believed ‘the “ideal” espoused by government authorities’ left ‘small room for differences’.³⁷

Davey’s divergence from Andrews on the question of assimilating people of Aboriginal ‘descent’

However much Davey gained from his intellectual relationship with Andrews, his conception of Aboriginal integration and welfare differed from hers on the important question of what marked a person as being ‘Aboriginal’. Different answers to this question affected what it was that integration campaigners took to be at stake in the policy of racial absorption. Amongst both assimilationists and integrationists Aboriginal racial identity was conventionally understood to be a wholly empirical phenomenon. As Charles Rowley was soon to write, ‘if special laws are to apply to special persons, such persons have to be legally defined.’³⁸ These definitional frameworks assumed a scientific conception of ‘race’, designating identity according to the proportion of Aboriginal descent, or as it was often expressed, ‘the quantum of blood’.³⁹ For some postwar critics of assimilation, it seemed to follow that what racial absorption threatened to eliminate was Aboriginal peoples’ *objective* distinctiveness: their biological purity, and their traditional or ‘tribal’ way of life. It was during this time that the word ‘culture’ began to be used to denote Aborigines’ distinctiveness, rather than the words ‘race’ or ‘racial’.⁴⁰ Bain Attwood has shown how those pioneering critics of assimilation policy, Tom Wright and Shirley Andrews, were

³⁷ *Age*, letter to the editor, 3 May [1962], cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 206.

³⁸ Rowley, ‘Who is an Aboriginal? The Answer in 1967’, in *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, (Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1970), Appendix A.

³⁹ Curthoys, A, Genovese, A & Reilly, A, *Rights and Redemption: History, law and Indigenous People*, UNSW Press, 2008) p. 193.

⁴⁰ Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 97.

exemplars of this position: making tribal Aboriginal 'culture' the primary object of integration.

A member of the Communist Party, Wright had called for a government policy that accommodated 'Aborigines as a race or people similar to that of national minorities in other countries.' His stipulations, however, only applied to those he classified as Aborigines, namely 'full bloods' or 'tribal aborigines' in remote Australia. It was this sense of Aborigines' classical culture that he, and other such advocates, wanted to preserve. Wright insisted that the problems of 'mixed-blood' people in Southeastern Australia were very different from those of Aborigines in Central and Northern Australia. There was 'obviously...no Aborigine question' in these settled areas, and so he thought that their 'citizenship and the removal of all discrimination and absorption into the White community was correct and necessary'.⁴¹

Similarly, Andrews' denied the presence of an Aboriginal culture among urban Aboriginal people, and so denied their Aboriginality. This led her, in terms very similar to Hasluck, to advocate the 'absorption' of these 'hopelessly broken up' peoples. Attwood has said of Andrews' position:

Her criticism of assimilation rested largely upon the policy of the Communist Party – which purported to be critical of assimilation and to uphold the right of Aborigines as an indigenous people but was actually assimilationist inasmuch as it treated Aboriginal problems as merely an aspect of a broader class question – rather than being grounded in a true appreciation of the historical experience and aspirations of Aboriginal people themselves.⁴²

Wright and Andrews are emblematic of a kind of scientific racialism that maintained that all peoples would undergo a transition from antiquity to modernity, and that it

⁴¹ Thomas Wright cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 199.

⁴² Andrews' is quoted from her letter to Stan Davey [8 november 1957], cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 200.

was impossible to reverse or manipulate that direction. Echoing the influential eighteenth-century Enlightenment theory that all human societies evolved through four stages, Andrews wrote:

The Aborigines must now face the difficult adjustment involved in progressing in one generation from the primitive Old Stone Age culture to modern industrial life. This progress took our ancestors some 10,000 years to accomplish.⁴³

Under Andrews' Secretaryship, the Council for Aboriginal Rights (March 1951) followed contemporary racial convention in differentiating between 'full' or 'tribal' Aborigines on the one hand, and 'half-castes' or 'part Aborigines' on the other and in assuming that only the former had Aboriginal culture and were, therefore, truly Aboriginal. In accordance with Hasluck's perspective, the Council thought that such Europeanised Aboriginal people resembled 'any group of underprivileged people' who had 'existed in oppressed conditions'. The solution lay, therefore, in their being given 'equal' – which is to say the same – place as non-Aboriginal people in Australian society⁴⁴.

⁴³ Andrews [1955], cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 145.

⁴⁴ CAR Papers [1955 and 1957]; Andrews interviewed by Bain Attwood [25 February 2000], cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 145.



Figure 20: Shirley Andrews 1947. **Source:** National Library of Australia.



Figure 21: FCAA conference, Telopea Park High School, Canberra, circa 1963. Shirley Andrews (second from right) with Lady Jessie Street and Lorna Lippmann. **Source:** Courtesy Margorie Broadbent.⁴⁵

⁴⁵National Museum of Australia, *FCAATSI Legislative Reform Committee* http://indigenoustrights.net.au/civil_rights/the_referendum_1957-67/fcaatsi_legislative_reform_committee, viewed 23 May, 2015.

The status of Aboriginal descendants in the campaign for integration: Interpreting the ILO's Convention 107

Postwar critics of assimilation, Andrews and Davey included, were deeply influenced by the draft of the International Labor Organization's 1957 Convention 107 on indigenous peoples, which Attwood says had reached Australia in 1956 in the form of a preliminary report.⁴⁶ The Convention 107 was concerned with the 'Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries'. It made several demands of its signatory states, some of them more explicit than others:

One demand was compatible with the aims of Australia assimilation policy, which was to give indigenous people equal citizenship rights with non-indigenous peoples. A second demand had formed the basis of assimilation critique; that was its emphasis upon cultural 'integration', in contrast to cultural absorption. The ILO's Convention 107 was clear upon the point that in delivering political equality, indigenous populations' traditional cultural 'customs and institutions' must not be dismantled. Thus, while governments had a responsibility to impart 'the general rights of citizenship, without prejudice', they were also warned of the 'danger involved in disrupting the values and institutions of said populations', and should be concerned with 'the protection of the institutions, property and labour of these populations'.⁴⁷ The ILO gave governments a mandate that was dual in nature; their 'primary responsibility' was to 'the protection of the populations concerned *and* their

⁴⁶ This is a discursive comment by Attwood, see *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 200.

⁴⁷ International Labour Organisation (Official Website), *International Labour Organization C107 Convention concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries*, Conference Session no. 40, Geneva, Switzerland, 1957, http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312252:NO, viewed 23 May 2015.

progressive integration into the life of their respective countries.⁴⁸ Thus, although the terms of Convention 107 were consistent with the assimilationist stance taken by the ILO since the Second World War, it projected a future for Aboriginal people as Australian citizens, with all the rights and entitlements attached thereto, while at the same time retaining the ‘values and institutions’ of Aboriginal people.

This aim resonated for people like Wright and Andrews, who perceived the Aboriginal population and culture in substantive terms; that is, as pertaining to forms of Aboriginal existence that predated contact with Europeans. In her discussions with Davey over the formation of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement over the summer of 1957–1958, Andrews encouraged the use of Convention 107, believing it to be ‘ideally suited for future plans for raising the status of the Australian Aborigines’. However, as Attwood has noted, these critics of assimilation ‘failed to grasp that the international body was, however ambiguously, seeking to expand the definition of “indigenous” to include those of aboriginal “descent”’.⁴⁹ This feature of the ILO Convention was expressed in its explicit application to ‘members of tribal or semi-tribal populations in independent countries which are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country,’ who, ‘irrespective of their legal status, live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions of that time than with the institutions of the nation to which they belong.’⁵⁰ For Davey and Nicholls, if not for Andrews, this stipulation had the important implication of endorsing Aboriginal people’s right to determine the status of their racial identity, and the process of their own collective integration. ‘The

⁴⁸ (my emphasis). ILO *C107 Convention concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries*.

⁴⁹ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 154.

⁵⁰ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, C107*, 26 June 1957, C107, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ddb66804.html> [accessed 9 May 2015]

primary objective of all such action’, the Convention stated, ‘shall be the fostering of individual dignity and the advancement of individual usefulness and initiative’; therefore, ‘Recourse to force or coercion as a means of promoting the integration of populations into the national community shall be excluded.’⁵¹

This implicit endorsement of *racial* self-determination was ignored by those campaigners of integration, such as Andrews, who understood people of mixed descent to be ostensibly white, or on their way to becoming assimilated as such. However, the fluidity of racial identity implied by the ILO was recognised and seized upon by other campaigners of integration, and explicitly by Davey.

The Convention was adopted by the ILO in June 1957; and under Davey’s Secretaryship, in 1959 the FCAA embraced the document. The FCAA drew mainly on the Convention’s positive stress upon ‘integration’ advocating ‘Equal citizenship rights with other Australian citizens for aborigines’ as its leading principle. However, the FCAA also passed a resolution defining Aborigines as ‘Any person of Australian Aboriginal descent’.⁵²

Davey’s critique of assimilation as an affront to Aboriginal self-determination: the intellectual influence of A.P Elkin

Davey envisaged the project of integration applying to Europeanised Aboriginal people, not only to Aborigines who were considered to be ‘tribal’. In other words, ensuring Aborigines as a distinct cultural group was, for Davey, not only about the preservation of an Aboriginal ‘culture’ or ‘population’ in the substantive sense; it was also about protecting Aborigines’ emergent *cultural identity*; that is, their consciousness of being part of a self-defined Aboriginal community. Davey’s thinking on this issue of

⁵¹ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, C107*

⁵² Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 201.

racial identity seems to have been strongly influenced by the work of Australian anthropologists, particularly the ideas of A.P Elkin (1891-1979), a contemporary who had been publishing since the 1930s.

Elkin had been an Anglican clergyman before rising as an anthropologist to chair of the Anthropology Department at the University of Sydney, and Vice Chairman of the New South Wales Aborigines' Welfare Board. According to Tigger Wise, he was 'virtually in total charge of anthropology in Australia, he was an adviser to governments, editor of *Oceania* and director of field-research through the Australian National Research Council.'⁵³ As an early advocate of 'assimilation', Tim Rowse has noted, Elkin articulated his belief that 'rounded and psychologically integrated persons could flourish only in culturally integrated societies.' He thought that the culture that Aborigines had shared, and in some places still shared, was a source of individual psychological strength for its members.⁵⁴ In his 1944 book *Citizenship for the Aborigines*, Elkin listed and expounded the principles that he hoped would guide policies for Aboriginal citizenship; one of them was that 'Group – or community – life is of fundamental importance to persons of Aboriginal descent.' Government settlements and missions should therefore preserve

Aboriginal group life [...] with its social and ceremonial aspects, thus aiding the development and integration of the individual personality. The Aborigines, like the whites, need in all normal cases, to belong to a community, and not be mere hangers on and survivals.⁵⁵

⁵³ Tigger Wise, 'Elkin, Adolphus Peter (1891–1979)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/elkin-adolphus-peter-10109/text17845>, published first in hardcopy 1996, accessed online 13 April 2015.

⁵⁴ Rowse, Tim, *Rethinking Social Justice: from 'peoples' to 'populations'*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012), p. 41.

⁵⁵ Elkin [1944], cited in Rowse, *Rethinking Social Justice*, p. 42.

This element of Elkin's thinking had been taken up by critics of assimilation policy in the 1950s, and given expression in the political vision of 'integration'. However, Elkin made other important stipulations about how to ensure Aborigines' survival and wellbeing as a people. Elkin's oft repeated principle of group or community life applied 'whether the region be isolated, marginal, or closely settled; whether the Aborigines be full-blood or mixed-blood and even of lighter caste.' Despite the undertone of protectionism that infused Elkin's concern with Aboriginal 'progress', his work recognised the ultimately subjective property of cultural adaptation, according Aboriginal people with a significant measure of agency; he believed in the capacity for Aboriginal people to accommodate European influences without detriment to their Aboriginality, if they were entrusted as the agents of their own acculturation. Thus, while cultural exchange was inevitable, Elkin believed that any attempt to coerce assimilation carried 'the almost certain risk of utter disintegration'.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Elkin, [1943 and 1941], cited in McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion* p. 65



Figure 22: *Elkin Expedition* - A.P. Elkin looks into the camera (second from right). Pictured at their camp during an expedition to Maranboy, Northern Territory, 1948. Photographer unknown. **Source:** National Library of Australia.⁵⁷

In the 1950s, Elkin's ideology of assimilation was given its antithesis in the political vision of Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories (1951-1963). Hasluck's conception of 'assimilation' was consistent with conventional federal policy and determined Commonwealth practice in the Northern Territory; it involved intervening in Aboriginal life and aiding their absorption into white society. Hasluck was an intellectually and politically influential exponent of the idea that Aborigines had ceased to be a people; in his eyes, they were a category of Australian citizens who needed help in overcoming racist attitudes based upon their apparent aboriginality. Hasluck thought that as their way of living conformed more and more to the

⁵⁷ ABC Radio National Official Website, *Elkin Expedition*, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/hindsight/elkin-expedition/2994472>, viewed 23 May, 2015.

mainstream Australian way of life, their physical differences would cease to be signifiers of cultural or behavioural inferiority. To this end, he campaigned to eradicate any social or cultural markers of aboriginality, and pushed Australians towards homogeneity. He explained this agenda in his 1959 Lyceum speech:

Any heightening of race consciousness becomes an obstacle to the process of assimilation ... we do not want to become more and more conscious of their differences from us but of their likenesses to us...'

Hasluck even thought of subsuming the term 'aboriginal' into the more general phrase 'wards of the state', which would refer to various populations regarded by the government as being 'in need of guardianship'. However, as Rowse notes, only in the Northern Territory was the term 'ward' written into legislation: 'The governing of the Aboriginal population in the States otherwise perpetuated one of the historic conditions of an emerging, politicized Aboriginal identity – the very terms "Aboriginal", "Torres Strait Islander" and "native"'.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The language change was put forth in a statement issued by the 1951 Commonwealth and States Conference on Native Welfare. Hasluck [1959] cited in Rowse, *Rethinking Social Justice*, p. 35, p. 37.



Figure 23: Minister for Territories Paul Hasluck opening a new building at Retta Dixon Homes, Darwin, in 1961 to move its wards away from Bagot reserve. **Source:** National Archives of Australia.⁵⁹

Throughout the 1950s, Elkin developed his critique of Hasluck's approach to assimilation in private correspondence; and when the campaign for integration emerged in the late 1950s, he was there to deliver his considered opinion, which was that Hasluck jeopardized assimilation by discounting Aborigines' embeddedness in their own social group. It was this public exchange between Elkin and Hasluck in the late 1950s that helped to bring Elkin's ideas to light for critics of assimilation such as Andrews, Davey and Nicholls. Indeed, the adoption of the term 'integration' - exemplified by CAR, VAAL and the FCAA - can be seen in part as a response to the adverse appropriation of the term 'assimilation' by Hasluck.

Perceiving the subtlety of Elkin's ideas to have been overlooked by most campaigners, Davey set out to become its champion. Davey made clear his disregard for Hasluck's approach to assimilation, and explicitly stated his endorsement of

⁵⁹ <http://www.smh.com.au/national/the-price-aboriginal-children-paid-at-retta-dixon-20140929-10mb2z.html>

Elkin's. In 1958, Davey had responded to Hasluck by writing an opinion piece to the *Herald*: 'Aborigines should be assimilated into the community socially and economically,' Davey asserted, but instead of 'biological assimilationism' their 'racial identity' should be 'preserve[d]'. This could be done, he argued, by maintaining 'aboriginal culture', particularly Aborigines' strong sense of community⁶⁰. Davey made his most significant statement of solidarity with Elkin's perspective in 1959, when he formulated Elkin's critique into his own indictment of federal assimilation policy as 'racial genocide', the first application of this idea in Australian political discourse.

In 1959, Elkin delivered a paper at the biennial conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) in Perth; Elkin's paper was 'one of the special lectures open to the public' and he used the occasion to air his disagreements with Hasluck.⁶¹ The paper was part of a session on *The Assimilation of the Australian Aborigines*, which was opened by Hasluck himself. Hasluck expressed the view that the problem was 'not one of finding ways in which two or more societies can live side by side in the same continent, but of finding the way in which the remnants of the aboriginal race can best become members of a single Australian society.'⁶² Following Hasluck's speech, Elkin delivered his paper called *The Aborigines and Ourselves*. In it, Elkin emphasises rather the 'protest against abortion', and the danger of over-estimating similarities. He told his audience, it had become apparent that assimilation was 'up against a barrier', that the majority of Aboriginal people in settled Australia 'did not want it'.

⁶⁰ *Herald*, letter to the editor, 1 September 1958; *Courier* (Ballarat), 15 September 1958, cited in Attwoot, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 202.

⁶¹ Elkin's paper was reportedly 'one of the special lectures open to the public'. See Berndt, Catherine H., 'A.N.Z.A.A.S.: Perth, Western Australia, 1959', *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Vol. 68, No. 3 (September, 1959) p. 242.

⁶² Berndt, 'A.N.Z.A.A.S.: Perth, Western Australia, 1959', p. 243.

They do not want assimilation in the form of dispersal amongst the white community. They want to keep their own identity. This trend is not news but it has lately become vocal.⁶³

Against Hasluck's representation of assimilation as a process of rescuing 'stranded individuals', Elkin reiterated his idea that 'the advancement of Aborigines will be in *group formation*, not as individuals'. Both 'full-bloods and mixed-bloods', he noted, 'want to keep [their own] identity and continuity and sense of belonging as a distinct group', and should be permitted – even encouraged – to do so.⁶⁴

The conference took place over Thursday 24th and Friday 28th of August, with the whole of the *Assimilation* session recorded on tape; on Saturday, the exchange that had taken place between Hasluck and Elkin was reported by the *West Australian* newspaper.⁶⁵ Davey was not in attendance at the conference, but he was alert to the article, and seized upon it; two months later, in the October issue of *Smoke Signals*, Davey published his own critique of the government's implementation of assimilation policy in which he disseminated the comments by Elkin and Hasluck that had been relayed by the *West Australian*.

Under the heading 'ASSIMILATION! WHICH WAY?' Davey paraphrased Hasluck's message in scathing tones: 'the 70,000 aborigines in Australia represented crumbling groups held together by tattered threads of kinship, Territories Minister Hasluck told the ANZAAS Congress yesterday'. Davey was determined to distinguish VAAL's ideal of 'integration' from Hasluck's vision of 'assimilation'. In making this explanation, however, Davey provides us with the opportunity to draw a clear comparison between

⁶³ Elkin quoted in *The Western Australian*, newspaper, 29 August, 1959, cited in Stanley Davey, 'Genesis or Genocide the Aboriginal Assimilation Policy', *Provocative Pamphlet*, Series no. 101, (Glen Iris, Melbourne: Federal Literature Committee of Churches of Christ in Australia, 1963), p. 7.

⁶⁴ McGregor, p. 103.

⁶⁵ Berndt, 'A.N.Z.A.A.S.: Perth, Western Australia, 1959', p. 242; *West Australian* [29 August 1959] cited in *Smoke Signals*, October 1959.

his formulation of ‘integration’ and that held by others critics of assimilation such as Andrews.

Like Andrews, Davey understood ‘integration’ to involve ‘a smaller group retain[ing] its identity while living within and in harmony with the National community’ and giving Aboriginal people ‘a voice in their own affairs’.⁶⁶ However, following Elkin, Davey was not objecting so much to the *principle* of homogenisation, as to its coercion. ‘For integration to take place’, he explained, ‘Aboriginal groups must have the opportunity to establish themselves wherever practicable as socially and economically independent and self-reliant people. On the other hand, where individuals and families desire to be totally identified with the white community, they too should be assisted to this end.’⁶⁷ Guided by Elkin, it was not ‘sameness’ itself that Davey feared, but the attempt to *impose* sameness upon unwilling subjects. “‘Assimilation’”, he said, quoting Hasluck, ‘means “to be made like”’ and it ‘implies the total absorption of the lesser into the larger community’. This policy was ‘For the Aborigines’, Davey asserted, ‘racial genocide.’

By placing Aboriginal agency and self-definition at the centre of his vision of ‘integration’, Davey subtly revealed his difference from other critics of ‘assimilation’ who continued to apply a paternalistic stance towards Aborigines who they perceived to be already ‘de-tribalised’. Understanding himself to represent ‘the’ Aboriginal perspective on this issue, Davey for the first time likened the practice of controlling Aboriginal identity to the crime of racial annihilation, or ‘genocide’. Exactly what Davey understood this ‘aboriginal’ claim to mean became clear in July 1963, when Davey was compelled to reiterate this stance in another publication.

⁶⁶ Davey, *Smoke Signals* October 1959, (04 Sydney Road, Coburg, East Melbourne: Challenge Press), p. 4.

⁶⁷ Davey to Fox-Pitt [7 April 1959], cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 203.

Identity control as ‘genocide’: Davey’s 1963 pamphlet critique

Davey’s second major critique of current assimilation policy followed the affirmation of coercive and absorptive assimilationism by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments. In 1961 the Commonwealth and State authorities responsible for Aboriginal affairs (meeting as the Native Welfare Council) had offered a comprehensive definition of assimilation; it emphasised the desired sameness of Aboriginal and other Australians in rights, responsibilities, customs, beliefs, hopes and loyalties that had informed Native Welfare the policy under Hasluck since 1951. The policy statement asked

that all aborigines and part-aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians’ and ‘Thus, any special measures taken for aborigines and part-aborigines are regarded as temporary measures not based on colour but [...] to assist them to make the transition from one stage to another.’⁶⁸

The belated definition was effective in reinvigorating support for the government’s policy in the face of growing critiques. Soon after, the One People of Australia League (OPAL) was established in Queensland. Despite claiming to be an organisation in the service of Aboriginal people, it was composed of a predominantly mainstream Australian membership, and echoed the then active policy of cultural absorption, working towards the ideal of making Australia ‘one people’; as such, it was one of the few Aboriginal advancement organisations to never affiliate with the FCAA.⁶⁹

Davey hit back at these developments by publishing a pamphlet to be distributed as part of a ‘provocative pamphlet’ series, which had just begun to be put out by the

⁶⁸ Bennett, *White politics and black Australians* (St.Leonards: Allen and Unwin 1999), p.20.

⁶⁹ National Museum of Australia, *One People of Australia League*, http://indigenoustrights.net.au/organisations/pagination/one_people_of_australia_league, viewed 23 May 2015.

Federal Literature committee of the Church of Christ in Melbourne.⁷⁰ In it, Davey gave expression to his view that the most dangerous element of assimilation policy was its effacement of Aboriginal self-determination, again using the concept of ‘genocide’ to describe this process.

Davey attacked OPAL explicitly, but he took their agenda to be representative. He thought that ‘it expressed jointly the policy each government authority had been seeking to implement for differing periods of time extending from the 1940s’. In fact, he mentioned parenthetically,

It should be noted that Victorian legislation from 1886 and N.S.W from 1909 had the same *intention* as the prevailing Acts of today. They provided for the dispersal of persons of mixed ancestry from the Reserves and Stations with the intention that such persons would become “absorbed” in the general community.⁷¹

Again, Davey inserted quotes from Elkin’s 1959 diatribe against Hasluck’s coercive approach to assimilation, “They do not want assimilation in the form of dispersal amongst the white community. They want to keep their own identity. This trend is not news but it has lately become vocal.”⁷² Here, he also noted Strehlow’s similar observation made in his 1960 *Nomads in no-man’s Land*.⁷³

Guided by these views, Davey stressed the *vital* importance of allowing Aboriginal people to navigate the process of cultural exchange upon their own terms; this was not only a matter of rights, but also a matter of life and death. ‘Apart from the moral issue inherent in the policy,’ Davey wrote in his pamphlet, ‘it [federal assimilation policy] is further condemned by its inability to achieve its stated aims [of saving Aboriginal

⁷⁰ Published through the Federal Literature committee of the Church of Christ in Melbourne, the pamphlet was part of a series called ‘provocative pamphlet’, which ran through the 1960s. Later called ‘Pamphlet Club’, the series ran to 1967.

⁷¹ Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’, p. 3.

⁷² Elkin quoted in *The Western Australian*, newspaper, 29 August, 1959, cited in Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’, p. 7.

⁷³ Strehlow *Nomads in no-man’s Land* (1960: 15), cited in Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’, p. 7.

people]’⁷⁴ The biological and cultural integration of Aboriginal people into mainstream society will happen naturally, Davey argued, without threatening their existence as a cultural community:

‘The process of assimilation whereby people of different races intermingle and become more and more closely identified with one another will continue in Australia with Aborigines, migrants and Australian born Europeans, no matter what policy is adopted by Australian governments.’⁷⁵

The danger of enforcing a policy of assimilation, as Davey saw it, was not that it might eventuate in a wholly white society, but that its implementation in legislation was already enacting a ‘threat to the existence of their identity as a race’.⁷⁶

Assimilation policy was like European fascism, Davey suggested, insofar as it was imposing a kind of existential dictatorship, where individuals of Aboriginal descent were being robbed of the power to decide who they are and what constituted that identity. ‘In Queensland’, Davey wrote, ‘restrictions are such that the Aborigine virtually lives in a “police state.”’⁷⁷ The legislation of assimilation there, he explained, rules that “a person with more than 25% of Aboriginal blood may be declared an Aboriginal, therefore subject to the benefits and restrictions of the ‘Aboriginals preservation and Protection Acts, 1939-1946.’”⁷⁸ Davey was aware that such definitional legislation had been conventionally used across Australia throughout the era of assimilation policy. Across ‘the Commonwealth and State governments,’ Davey highlighted, ‘Persons defined as “Aboriginal” subject to the different [assimilation] Acts, vary from “full blood” to a “person of Aboriginal descent.”’⁷⁹ Regardless of whether their status as ‘Aboriginal’ brought them benefits or not, for

⁷⁴ Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’, p.6

⁷⁵ Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’, p. 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Davey, it was critical that ‘The person appears to have no right of appeal against such a declaration [of their ethnic identity], which may be made at the discretion of the Director of Native Affairs.’⁸⁰

In contrast to other campaigners of integration, such as Andrews, Davey understood the most dangerous aspect of assimilation policy to be its obstruction of individuals’ subjective ownership and pride in their own Aboriginality. For other critics of assimilation, however, integration remained an ideal that could and should be administered to Aboriginal people in a systematic fashion; from this perspective, the objective identification of Aboriginal people was both possible and necessary. This divergence is clearly illustrated in the different way that Andrews’ formulated her critique of the government’s frameworks of Aboriginal identification.

Andrews condemned the governments’ Aboriginal identification upon the basis of its flawed practice. The identification frameworks that were in action during this period used classifications from ‘full-blood’ to ‘half-caste’ and then on to ‘quadroon’ and ‘octoroon’; and they differed so that a person could be Aboriginal in one state and not in another. Given that many administrators did not have good information on individuals’ Aboriginal descent, they often took skin coloration or ‘Aboriginal features’ as signs of descent.⁸¹ In her article about Andrews, Sue Taffe has noted that:

Andrews was particularly struck by the lack of a scientific basis in the formulation of different state definitions of ‘Aborigine’. She described the various state Aboriginal acts as ‘racist theorizing in the traditional of Aryan[sic]-race theories of the Nazis and quite contradictory to modern trends in biological and anthropological thought’ and she set out to counter such thinking.

⁸⁰ Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’, p.4.

⁸¹ Rights and Redemption, p. 193.

The subtle difference between Davey's and Andrews' respective attacks on the frameworks of racial identification was that Andrews sought to clarify and standardise those frameworks within an objective schema; she sought a 'clear picture.'⁸² By contrast, Davey - along with Nicholls and anthropologists such as Elkin - understood the problem to be inherent in the pretension of the law enforcement to prescribe Aboriginal identity without involving, and deferring to, the subjective opinion of the peoples in question.

Eight months earlier, Davey had expressed similar concern for the Aborigines' right to define and direct their own Aboriginality in relation to Lake Tyers. In October 1962, Davey had explained to the Lake Tyers school teacher JG Stevenson: 'while accepting that assimilation policy should be assisted where the Aboriginal people desire to be absorbed within the community, we have been opposed to its application where Government authorities seek to enforce it without reference to the wishes of the people.'⁸³ In countering expressed support for McLean's recommendations to reform the people Lake Tyers five months later, he claimed, the policy is 'inflaming rather than eliminating the disease of drinking, extravagance and living off relatives' by treating Aboriginal people as simply 'depressed whites'. From a position of subjective observation, Doug Nicholls also highlighted the basic flaw in coercing Aborigines' assimilation (or integration): 'assimilation in a forced manner will destroy my people's social structures and *kill them as a people*.'⁸⁴ Though Nicholls did not use the word 'genocide' on this occasion, the grave imperative that he accorded to

⁸² Andrews [1962] cited in Sue Taffe, 'Shirley Andrews: Architect of the national Aboriginal civil rights movement, 1952-1968', *History Australia*, Vol. 8, no. 2, (2011), p. 132.

⁸³ Davey cited in Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 97.

⁸⁴ (my emphasis) Davey and Nicholls in *Sun* 26 March 1963. Their article responded to Noel Hawkins *Herald* article supporting the government's solution on Lake Tyers [March 1963], cited in Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 103.

Aboriginal self-determination foreshadows the way in which the idea would be used by he and Davey over the next several years.

In his 1963 pamphlet, Davey delivered his explicit critique of the view – held by assimilationists and uncritical integrationists alike – that people of mixed European and Aboriginal descent should be precluded from the Aboriginal population and encouraged to identify completely with European culture. He explicitly denounced both Hasluck and the Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board for conducting this approach to Aboriginal protection.

Mr Hasluck states:

“In the long run I think myself that he (the Aborigine) will also be biologically assimilated and become part of the general infusion that makes up the Australian of the future...” And, “It appears there has to be a breakdown of the Aboriginal society and a loosening of the compulsions and emotional links with Aboriginal life before there is any real chance of entry into Australian society.”⁸⁵

The Victorian Aborigines Welfare Board (1959), Davey continued, gave the same clear impression. He quoted the Board:

Some of the people now regarded as Aborigines could ‘pass’ as whites and become assimilated if they broke away from their old mode of living, associate, surroundings and behaviour.⁸⁶

‘In the light of these statements [by the federal and Victorian governments], which can be taken as a true representation of the underlying purpose in all States, and the actions taken to assure the steady assimilation of their people,’ Davey concluded that ‘the Aboriginal fear of euthanasia (or is this “humane” genocide?) has a very real basis.’⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’, p. 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

It was not only the administration of Aboriginal identity that was significant for Davey, but also the life it prescribed to those classified as Aborigines - whether 'full' or 'part' Aboriginal. His pamphlet contains details of policies active throughout Australia that dictated specifically to Aborigines, showing them to perpetuate Aboriginal disadvantage by denying them access to basic rights and privileges enjoyed by European Australians. Targets of his criticism included, for example, the prerogative adopted by the Queensland Director of Native Affairs to 'cause any aboriginal ... to be removed from any district to a reserve and kept there for such time as may be ordered by the Director'. '[F]amilies are this day', Davey emphasised, 'being held on Palm Island reserve against their will, and without right of appeal against their incarceration.'⁸⁸ He noted that under Queensland's Acts, the government maintained 'control over all marriages' involving Aboriginal people, and 'Aborigines are not paid their wages in full'. In the Northern Territory, he pointed out, 'Though performing tasks on equal footing with European Australians, wards [of the state] with few exceptions are paid according to a minimum wage rate laid down by the Administrator of the Northern Territory,' and 'In all States the Aboriginal pastoral worker is excluded from the Commonwealth pastoral workers' award.'⁸⁹

Significantly, Davey locates the pathology of these regulations in the psychological impact that was imparted by the experience of comparative disadvantage. 'Throughout the Commonwealth, legal and economic restrictions are applied to Aborigines as a race and are used as instruments of "assimilation" maintaining them in an inferior status.'⁹⁰ Such 'restrictive discriminatory legislation applied specifically to Aborigines', Davey wrote, 'has been a constant heavy yoke, weighing them down, preventing the people from sharing in the benefits and

⁸⁸ Davey quoting Queensland DNA legislation, 'Genesis or Genocide?', pp. 4-5.

⁸⁹ Davey, 'Genesis or Genocide?', pp. 5-6.

⁹⁰ Davey, 'Genesis or Genocide?', p. 6.

responsibilities of the rest of society,’ and it has left those subjected to it ‘humiliated and exploited’.⁹¹ ‘Under such circumstances is it to be wondered at that Aboriginal parents are unable to adequately provide for their families, and feel a constant pressure from their inferior legal, social and economic position?’⁹²

Davey made it clear that he was concerned with the consequences for Aboriginal people as an emerging collective consciousness. ‘The concern of this pamphlet’, Davey wrote, ‘has been to show that there are strong and real objections to an assimilation policy which assumes one of the races involved in the process has nothing to contribute to the national character and whose only hope is to “get lost” in the dominant community.’⁹³ Like Elkin, Davey was concerned with the survival of Aboriginal people as a subjective identity, and this meant that the task of an alternative approach to assimilation was to create the conditions for a collective Aboriginal consciousness to flourish. A proud, self-determining, pan-Aboriginal identity was not only an aspiration but also a constitutive need if Aboriginal individuals (from all different nations) were to integrate with mainstream society without conceding their cultural difference.

It was the health and survival of this emerging collective ‘self’ that Davey wished to protect. Davey’s innovation was to explicitly liken policies that compromised the strength and survival of Aborigines’ racial consciousness to a physical attack on Aboriginal existence. Between ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’, he proposed, Aboriginal people faced the ultimatum ‘genesis or genocide?’

In Davey’s view, Aboriginal people in the 1960s faced a similar threat of ‘elimination’ to those who were massacred under European dictators. Here, the same pressure to disappear was being exerted, only by ‘a different method’: government

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

efforts to administer Aboriginal identity. The pressure that Davey observed was psychological, rather than physical; and it inhered in policies that were paternalistic and discriminatory, not murderous. Was this ‘humane genocide’ of Aboriginal people going to be accepted, Davey challenged readers, when ‘elimination by extermination in Nazi Germany, Czarist and Communist Russia has been condemned’? ‘Is it to be condoned in Australia because of a different method in achieving the objective?’⁹⁴ As is discussed in the following chapter, Davey’s merging of physical and metaphysical concepts of racial violence gives an indication as to another major influence upon his thinking, apart from Elkin’s anthropology, which was the perspective of an emergent pan-Aboriginal subjectivity.



Figure 24: Doug Nicholls (date unknown). **Source:** The State Library of Victoria.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’, p. 6.

⁹⁵ National Museum of Australia, *Doug Nicholls*, http://indigenoustrights.net.au/people/pagination/doug_nicholls, viewed 23 May, 2015.

Two years later, late in 1965, Doug Nicholls delivered a public indictment of assimilation policy in which he, too, targeted policies and attitudes that suppressed Aboriginal identity consciousness; and he condemned their effects as ‘cultural genocide’. Evidence of this pronouncement comes from its reportage in two separate newspaper articles, both published in December 1965 by *The Canberra Times*. In these reports, Nicholls’ critique was cited favorably by two different politicians, from the Liberal and Labour parties, and was presented as an alternative, distinctly Aboriginal perspective on the harm caused by ‘assimilation’. In the first article, Kim Beazley (Labour Minister for Fremantle) invoked Nicholls’ assessment of assimilation in a discussion of what he thought the policy had come to mean in Australian political discourse:

Assimilation is a baffling concept to those who seek to find the meaning of Australian aboriginal policies. It is in itself an ambiguous word. It can mean “absorbed by inter-breeding.” It can mean “being made similar to”, or “having a similar dignity.” To the majority of Australians it seems that the expression has the first meaning. To Mr Paul Hasluck who, when Minister for Territories spelled out the policy, and [to] a minority of welfare officers it has the second meaning. To aboriginal leader Pastor Douglas Nicholls it means a policy of “cultural genocide”, a denial of the right of Aborigines to exist as a people.⁹⁶

A week later, Mr Allen Fraser (Federal Member for Eden-Monaro) was reported on television and in *The Canberra Times* voicing his affirmation of Nicholls’ statement. ‘Assimilation is not the answer’ Fraser was reported to have said, ‘Many Aborigines wanted the chance to develop their own lives on their own reserves.’ Responding to

⁹⁶ Beazley cited in 'Last Friday The Canberra Times published an article by Mr K. E. Beazley, MP, giving details of Mr Wentworth's plans to amend the Constitution in favour of aboriginal rights. Today, in the first of two articles, Mr Beazley looks at the very roots of our aboriginal problem... The mystery of “assimilation”. *The Canberra Times* (ACT : 1926 – 1995, 1 December 1965), p. 2, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/105875745>, viewed 12 May, 2015.

proposals to give the Federal Parliament power to legislate for aboriginal welfare, he continued, 'Most of us have a kindly belief that the Aborigines ought to be assimilated. Perhaps we are not sure what it means, but to aboriginal leader Pastor Doug Nicholls it means a policy of cultural genocide.'

To Doug Nicholls and his fellow aboriginal leaders we are, under the euphonious title of assimilation, applying cultural genocide to the Aborigines. In other words, we are denying them the right to exist as a people. Why must Aborigines be assimilated into the European race? Many of them want the chance to develop their own lives on their own reserves. They deserve an acknowledgement of their ownership of tribal lands.⁹⁷

Though his reference to *cultural* genocide may have been variously interpreted, it was evident to both Beazley and Fraser that Nicholls was referring to the effacement of Aboriginality as a living social or 'cultural' consciousness. For Nicholls, the primary object of 'cultural genocide' was not Aborigines' substantive cultural institutions or practices, but rather their subjective sense of community; in other words, their 'right to exist' as Aborigines in whatever way they determined. Nicholls' statement thus helped to announce a peculiarly 'Aboriginal' perspective on the pathology of assimilation policy, which Davey had evidently shared.

It would seem that Davey and Nicholls' close friendship helped to mould one another's political perspectives. In the 1960s, Davey appears to have been among a minority of non-Aboriginal campaigners who had acquired an insight into that distinctly Aboriginal perspective. Referring to this particular insight into Aboriginal welfare, Attwood has suggested that 'the only white campaigners who seriously questioned the policy of assimilation at this time seem to have both known Aboriginal

⁹⁷ Allen Fraser, 'Assimilation not the answer, says Fraser.', *The Canberra Times* (ACT : 1926 - 1995, 6 December, 1965) p. 4, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article105876536>, viewed 12 May, 2015.

people well and been familiar with international discourses regarding race and indigenous rights.’⁹⁸ Campaigners such as these, Attwood writes, ‘were very rare at this time [in the late 1950s]’, though in remembering Davey as ‘probably the most radical critic of assimilation amongst non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal campaigners’ he suggests that Davey may have been one of them.⁹⁹ Davey was ‘a good listener,’ Attwood has said, ‘he got to know Aboriginal people well and became acquainted with what he called “the Aboriginal point of view”’.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, adopting ‘the Aboriginal perspective’ was an explicit agenda for Davey, and in his 1963 pamphlet he clearly stated that his aim in delivering a critique was to represent the Aboriginal subject-position: he understood his pamphlet to represent the mounting critique of assimilation that he had personally observed amongst ‘Aboriginal people and a growing number of European Australians’ at the time.¹⁰¹

Thus, in their felt and observed experiences of contemporary indigenous policy, Davey and Nicholls were united in their perception of Hasluck’s ‘one people’ ideal as an affront to Aboriginal agency and pride. In this, they recognised assimilation policy as a non-physical form of ‘genocide’. The following chapter attempts to contextualise this critique by showing it to have been representative of an ‘Aboriginal perspective’ that was becoming increasingly articulate, and increasingly well regarded by non-Aboriginal campaigners as an ‘insider’ perspective on the pathology of assimilation.

⁹⁸ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 200.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁰¹ Davey, ‘Genesis or Genocide?’ p. 4

Chapter Two: A new conception of racial violence in the 1970s

Introduction

Davey's and Nicholls' had indicted of assimilation policy for inhibiting the conditions for Aboriginal self-determination as a form of 'genocide' – this represented an understanding of Aboriginal existence and racial violence that was directly informed by their familiarity with Aboriginal peoples' experiences. By contrast, Andrews' critique of 'assimilation' assumed that the 'Aboriginality' that was at stake could be defined in objective terms, as blood quanta and/or as persisting 'tribal' practice and outlook. The government's wholesale disregard for the maintenance of Aboriginal culture and difference in the 1950s and early 1960s had evidently constituted a firm enough basis for both critiques of assimilation to stand together under the banner of 'integration'; indeed, Davey and Nicholls had worked closely with Andrews throughout the period. However, in the late 1960s and 1970s, the different accounts of Aboriginality implied by these critiques became more apparent to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. If the 1960s had seen the proliferation of Aboriginal organisations with largely white executives fighting against assimilation policy under the broad banner of 'integration', the 1970s was characterised by the rise of 'black power' organisations and the demand for Aboriginal 'self-determination' and 'identification'. Those who predicated the future of Aborigines' survival upon the distinction between tribal Aborigines and Europeanised Aborigines became labeled as 'assimilationist' by those who envisaged the future of Aboriginal people in their capacity to collectively control and redefine the meaning of Aboriginal community autonomously, without practical or

psychological interference from non-Aboriginal systems and people. As Aboriginal subjectivity became a principal concern for many European, as well as Aboriginal, Australians, the idea of ‘genocide’ as a form of psychological violence gained currency in mainstream political discourse.

Aborigines’ social and political ethnogenesis, and the movement for self-determination

As Australians grappled with the politics of assimilation in the 1960s and 1970s, Aboriginal people gained visibility and audibility in the eyes and ears of European Australians. Through their increasing interaction with Aboriginal people, white Australians were made to reconsider their preconceptions about what it meant to be Aboriginal, and what constituted racial identity. The insight gained into Aboriginal subjectivity contributed to the gradual displacement of scientific conceptions of race with the idea of Aboriginality as a social identity. There was a growing feeling that Aboriginal people should have authority in deciding who is or isn’t ‘Aboriginal’, but systematic identification remained necessary for legal and administrative purposes. In Australia, political scientists –most notably Charles Rowley - applied themselves to formulating new working definitions of the Aboriginal group. Barrie Dexter recalls Rowley’s contributions to the Council for Aboriginal Affairs in the 1960s.¹⁰²

We held meetings with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, as it then was, and with Charles Rowley. He argued strongly that our programs should include “part-Aborigines” on the basis that the white community had treated them as “Aborigines”, and this had imposed an attitude of mind in them which, although not

¹⁰² The Council for Aboriginal Affairs (CAA) was established as an advisory body in 1967, following the referendum, by the Liberal Prime Minister Harold Holt. It was comprised of three eminent non-Indigenous people: its Chair Dr H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs, Australian diplomat Barrie Dexter, and anthropologist William Stanner. Later the Office of Aboriginal Affairs was established as its administrative arm.

the same as that of tradition-oriented Aborigines, was nevertheless different to that of the wider Australian community. On this basis we developed a definition of Aboriginal and Islander for the purpose of our programs: “An Aboriginal or Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Islander and is so accepted by the community with which he or she is associated.” There were, in other words: three tests: descent (with no question of relative proportions of mixed ancestry, as in the past); identity; and acceptance. In some apprehension we put it through Wentworth to Cabinet in mid-1968, and somewhat to our surprise it was accepted. The definition still applies.¹⁰³

The development of this framework shows the formalization of a conception of racial identity to which Elkin had already showed himself captive in the 1930s, and which was now underpinning Davey’s and others’ faith in ‘integration’.

These changes also reflected an increasingly self-conscious articulation by Aboriginal people about what this social dimension of their identity was, where it had come from, and what it meant to them. The emergent Aboriginal consciousness was understood by many Aboriginal intellectuals to be the result of their shared experience of persecution, but also as the potential vehicle for political action and cultural survival. The social collectivisation of Aboriginal people was therefore heralded by Aboriginal intellectuals of the time in terms that were ambivalent. For example, reflecting on the genesis of this ‘modern aborigine’ in his 1973 *A White Man’ll Never Do It*, Kevin Gilbert described the development as both a product of racism, and a political opportunity.

The one fact which all blacks – full-blood and part-blood, tribal and detribalized – meet, is the shared fact of persecution by whites. All shared the hatred and the

¹⁰³ B.Dexter ‘Stanner: reluctant bureaucrat’ in J.Beckett and M.Hinkson eds *An appreciation of difference: W.E.H.Stanner and Aboriginal Australia* Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press 2008, p.79.

overwhelming realization of the enormity of white racial injustice; this is the cement that binds all blacks in unity.¹⁰⁴

Charles Perkins, too, explained the emergence of this ‘Pan-Aboriginal feeling’ as the product of a particular social experience. In response to a question asked in a letter to *The Australian* in March 1968, asking ‘why part-Aboriginal people such as [Charles Perkins] identify as Aboriginals’, Perkins explained that

firstly we were usually born on Mission Stations, Government Reserves or shanty towns. We received aid only as far as it was convenient for the white people. We were therefore identifiable to ourselves as well as white people as “the Aborigines.”¹⁰⁵

During this period, the idea that Aboriginal existence pertained largely to the subjective consciousness or feeling of Aboriginality, had gained considerable recognition. The significant point to draw from these changes in both Aboriginal and mainstream Australian consciousness was that ‘racial’ consciousness became synonymous with Aboriginal ‘existence’. This can be observed in several features of the ensuing rights discourse. One is that *racial pride* emerged as a critical demand for Aboriginal activists. The second is that the idea of *racial violence* became inclusive of processes that were psychological or subjective. These conceptual and rhetorical changes are significant for contextualizing the recognition of racism as a form of ‘genocide’, showing how from an Aboriginal perspective, this was a plausible idea and not simply a rhetorical flourish.

Advocates of Aboriginal ‘pride’ understood that the freedom to identify as Aboriginal required more than legislative approval; it also required the removal of social and psychological stigma. In 1962, Kath Walker explained that the successful

¹⁰⁴ Gilbert, Kevin, *Because a White Man'll Never Do It* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Perkins in Attwood and Markus ed., p. 241

integration of Aboriginal people to be contingent upon the maintenance of their collective autonomy and dignity:

Integration means the bringing forward of a race of people with their own identity and their own pride intact. They would come forward ... proud of the fact that they were of Aboriginal blood, happy to be what they are, and not going forward as replicas of the white race; this is not what we desire, we desire to be Aboriginals, proud of this fact.¹⁰⁶

‘All our lives Aboriginals have lived in a secondary position to the white Australian,’ Perkins continued in his article. ‘I no longer wish for this situation. Therefore I, and approximately 250,000 others, claim our ancestry. We are Aboriginal Australians – proud of our country and our race.’¹⁰⁷

In 1971 a quarterly magazine entitled *Identity* was started by a number of Aboriginal people, including Kath Walker, to provide a platform for Aboriginal people to voice their ideas about Aboriginality as a subjective social identity. ‘It strives for identification for the indigenous people and true, sincere understanding of their situation.’¹⁰⁸ Appearing for eleven years, the publication was described at one point as being ‘the single most important and influential Aboriginal periodical in the country’.¹⁰⁹ Its first issue featured an article by Gilbert, in which he concluded:

The main problem [for Aboriginal people] is one involving loss of a valued identity. Such identity can only be re-established by according dignity and justice

¹⁰⁶ Kath Walker [1962], cited in Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p. 205-206.

¹⁰⁷ Perkins, Charles, ‘letter to the editor’, *Australian*, [8 April, 1968], reprinted in Attwood, Bain and Markus, Andrew [eds.], *The Struggle for Aborigines Rights: A Documentary History*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p. 242.

¹⁰⁸ Walker, Kath, ‘editorial’, *Identity* magazine, Vol. 1, No 1, July 1971, reprinted in Rose, M., [ed.] *For the Record: 160 Years of Aboriginal Print Journalism*, (St Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin Press, 1996), p. 127.

¹⁰⁹ Adam Shoemaker [1989] cited in Rose [ed.], *For the Record*, p. 126.

to the aboriginal, by recognising his national, self-viable, status by according him land rights and right of participation...¹¹⁰

The subjectivity of Aboriginal ‘existence’: a new conception of racial violence

The second thing to highlight is that, in recognising their existence as a social identity, Aboriginal people developed a language of racial violence that conceptualised *psychological* threats to Aboriginality as synonymous with *physical* threats to their survival. Often the two were seen to be part of the same action; for example, in the government’s neglect for Aboriginal healthcare, Aboriginal rights activists complained of both the direct physical peril it posed to Aboriginal people, and the indirect psychological message it sent in regard to their sense of worth in Australian society. ‘Extermination campaigns, detribalization, denigration, exploitation; many, many factors pointed to the impending death of a people,’ wrote Gilbert in 1973 -

all these factors combined to leave the Aboriginal psyche shattered, ripped, tattered. A black man became a thing to joke about. No longer a mighty hunter, his personality had become so crippled that he could no longer either fight for his human entitlements or work for them. So he became a stockman without pay or a mission black on government rations or a cringing shadow on the street that cadged off whites for a feed and a bottle of plonk.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Kevin Gilbert, ‘My Countryman, My Country’, *Identity*, [July 1971], reprinted in Rose [ed.], *For the Record*, pp.128-129.

¹¹¹ Gilbert, *Because A White Man’ll Never Do It*, p. 6.

In both America and Australia, Roberta (Bobby) Sykes wrote in 1971, the government's response to the question of its indigenous population, placed pressure on their indigenous populations to disappear.

[These governments] began a very delicate process of demeaning and soul-destroying tactics which can only be defined as Ignoring – or refusing to admit the existence of. The will to live and the instinct for survival is obviously impaired in these circumstances, and both the [American] Indians and the Aborigines let their numbers dwindle and their interest in life almost died before they could see the danger.

She concluded defiantly, 'The time for ignoring us [Aboriginal Australians] is obviously past.'¹¹²

Conceptual definitions of Aboriginal people in policy and in practice that told select Aborigines that they were not black, but white or half-caste, were being perceived by Aboriginal intellectuals in terms of their physical disappearance. The reworking of 'race' from a purely scientific concept into a largely social concept resulted in the conceptual merging of physical and non-physical forms of racial violence.

In March 1972, a 23 year old Paul Coe featured on an episode of *Monday Conference* – an ABC current affairs program hosted by Robert Moore that aired weekly (on what channel?) on Monday nights from 1971-1979. Coe was introduced as a law student and founder of the Aboriginal Legal Service in Sydney; he was also a spokesman of the Wiradjuri people and would become influential as a political activist. On that evening's episode, Coe was being interviewed, alongside Bobby Sykes, about the new generation of Aboriginal political activism. Coe was questioned

¹¹² Roberta 'Bobby' Sykes, *Identity* magazine, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 1971 reprinted in Rose [ed.], *For the Record*, pp. 130-132.

about the potentially violent tactics young Aboriginal people might employ to enforce social and political change:

MOORE: Are any of them advocating – here's a very white question – are any of them advocating violence?

COE: Well it depends what you mean by violence.

MOORE: Carrying guns.

In response, Coe answered at length:

[...] Now when you talk about violence I would like to talk about the violence, the legalised white violence that is perpetrating us black people. The legalised white violence that denies us our rights, both human, political, social rights. The classical example again is the Yirrkala people's decision, that one white man got the sole arbitrary power to decide Aboriginal people should not be given land rights. Now that is to me violence, legalised white violence. The killing of black kids from malnutrition, that is to me white violence. You've destroyed our environment, our way of life, and you've put us in a void; cultural, economic, and political void [...] where you expect them, all of a sudden, once you destroy their way of life, to compete successfully, equally in a white system against white people, on the same terms ... the most important point is that the white man dictates those terms. Now [...] for every white kid that dies from malnutrition there are six black kids. Now to me that is white violence, legalised white violence... when you consider that this is one of the most wealthiest countries in the world, per head of population, to me it is a scandal that there are so many aboriginal kids dying from malnutrition, that there are so many blacks living in ghettos and shanty towns, when in fact this is our land, and as such we should have some control or [...] some slice of the economic and political resources of this land, to ensure that kids, Aboriginal kids, are not dying from malnutrition [...] So when you take into account the 200 years of suppression that the black people have had to live under, denial of our rights, that has tried to

make us become imitation white men, on what absurd justification I don't know, the sort of justification that a white society is more superior as such we've got to conform to it. Now that to me is white violence, because it denies you the right, the human rights, to decide your cultural, your economic, your political beliefs.¹¹³

When Coe spoke about the 'malnutrition' of Aboriginal people, he showed his concern for the physical health of Aboriginal people in so far as it indicated a social and political problem, and a threat to the psychological health of Aboriginal people as a collective self or consciousness. Malnutrition was just one consequence of racial discrimination, to be considered alongside the metaphysical pain of being put into a 'void' and treated as inferior to white people. In 1973 Aboriginal writer and activist Kevin Gilbert physicalised Aboriginal people as a collective demographic. 'The modern Aborigine' Gilbert felt, was 'sick, very sick' with an illness that 'has been forced upon him.'¹¹⁴

In the context of this new conceptualisation of racial violence – or in Coe's words, 'white violence' – it is possible to imagine how Aboriginal rights activists plausibly moved to interpret policies that controlled and alienated Aboriginal peoples' sense of identity as a kind of racial killing, or act of 'genocide'. A statement made by Inga Clendinnen in 2001 represents the difficulty many people, including historians, still find in fathoming a comparison between the iconic genocides that occurred in Armenia and central Europe, and the persecution of Aborigines in Australia. 'When I see the word "genocide" Clendinnen wrote,

I still see Gypsies and Jews being herded into trains, into pits, into ravines, and behind them the shadowy figures of Armenian women and children being marched into the desert by armed men. I see deliberate mass murder: innocent people

¹¹³ Paul Coe, transcript of *Monday Conference*, [20 March 1972], reprinted in Attwood and Markus (eds.) *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History*, pp. 262-263.

¹¹⁴ Gilbert, *Because A White Man'll Never Do It*, p. 6.

identified by their killers as distinctive entities done to death by organized authority.

I believe that to rake the murder out of genocide is to render it vacuous.¹¹⁵

Though Clendinnen's comment has earned her notoriety amongst many historians, she is not alone in wanting to protect the integrity of 'genocide' by preserving its association with mass killing. However, it is possible to say that thirty or forty years earlier than these recent criticisms, 'genocide' was firmly presented and well understood by Aboriginal people as a way of making sense of their experience of racial invisibility, worthlessness, and self-alienation. The development of this new language of racial violence peaked in 1970 with the creation of a petition to the United Nations in which the 'genocide' of Aboriginal people was presented in terms of both physical and psychological effacement.

VAAL's 1970 petition to the United Nations: articulating the 'psychological dimension' of 'genocide'

Following the 1967 Referendum, some members of the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League started moving towards making VAAL fully controlled by Aboriginal people. In August-September 1968, Davey amended VAAL's election process to give Aboriginal members positive discrimination in voting, before he resigned from both of his directing positions at VAAL and FCAA. 'Davey read the mood of the times', Broome has commented; and after stepping down as director, he remained in contact with these organisations as a field officer in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.¹¹⁶ By September 1969, the League had become controlled by an Aboriginal majority for the first time, with Bob Maza as president.¹¹⁷ Nicholls assumed Davey's position as director, and was joined as co-director by Bruce

¹¹⁵ Clendinnen, 'First Contact', *The Australian's Review of Books*, no. 26, (May, 2001) pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁶ Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 126.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

McGuinness in February 1970.¹¹⁸ Nicholls, Maza and McGuinness would have overseen VAAL's petition to the UN, authored later that year.



Figure 25: Stan Davey with president of the Victorian aborigines Advancement League, Bob Maza, 1970. **Source:** [Victorian] Aborigines Advancement League Newsletter, July 1970.¹¹⁹

On October 15th 1970, Aboriginal representatives of VAAL presented two petitions to the UN Commission on Human Rights, with the intention that they be read in conjunction. An editorial about the petitions was published three months later in the Western Australian periodical *A New Era*. That article tells us that ‘the first

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 142.

¹¹⁹ National Museum of Australia, *Collaborating for Indigenous Rights – Timeline*, <http://indigenoustrights.net.au/timeline/1970-79>, viewed 23 May, 2015.

petition dealt with the alleged genocide of black Australians, the second with land rights.¹²⁰ I have not been able to access the first petition (despite requests to the UN Library in Geneva), only the second. I rely here upon the citation given to it by Richard Broome (2015) and reportage of the petitions in *The Canberra Times* newspaper (October 1970) and *A New Era* magazine (January 1971). The *A New Era* article details the contents of the ‘genocide’ petition with close reference to the document, quoting it extensively. The first petition, dated 26th September 1970, argued that genocide was being practiced on Aboriginal people, and had been, throughout the ‘two centuries in which these invaders have colonized us and in which they have almost succeeded in wiping us off the face of the earth’. ‘We speak here of the literal physical annihilation of our people’, they wrote -

In more recent decades the techniques of the invaders have become more subtle, but we are still experiencing the same genocide because the effect of what they do and what they fail to do is still to exterminate us.

In this ‘subtle’ form of extermination, the petitioners also identified a ‘psychological dimension’ as ‘the most insidious of the weapons of genocide. The report breaks the petition into three sections: ‘health’, ‘on housing’, and ‘on education’. The health and housing sections drew upon statistical evidence to describe the poor conditions faced by many Aboriginal people: infant mortality rate, rates of illness, and inadequate dwellings.

Among our children and infants the diseases of poverty are rife: gastroenteritis, dysentery, and pneumonia, so that even when they survive they are debilitated,

¹²⁰ The report appears in *A New Era*, a quarterly bulletin of a Western Australian organisation called the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship Incorporated, which was established for a short time between 1969-1973¹²⁰. This organisation was a justice committee, comprised of Aboriginal people, lawyers and other interested people, since at that time there were no legal services in Western Australian that met the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

weakened and grossly handicapped in the struggle to survive the conditions in which they live.

Though this description reads bleakly, the authors of the petition insist that the reason those hardships are felt to be unbearable and objectionable is because they result from racial discrimination. The petition appears to frame much of its complaint in comparative terms, highlighting the inequality of experience between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Whereas in N.S.W 67 per cent of the non-Aborigines own the dwellings in which they live, this is true of only nine per cent of the Aborigines; moreover, 37 per cent of the dwellings in which we live are only shacks, and in 51 per cent of the dwellings there are more people than beds.

It was suggested that this ‘feeling’ was embedded in Aboriginal people’s perception that the Australian government or ‘the affluent general society’ did not value their distinct community identity.

If one is poor in the absolute sense, but living in a nation where the bulk of the population are also poor, the physical burden does not have a psychological dimension. But when the affluent general society has relegated one’s people to the rear and consigned it to a status in which there is not rational, serious hope for the future, the consequence is a feeling of personal worthlessness, of hopelessness. *And therein lies the most insidious of the weapons of genocide.*

[...]

The schools we attend offer no Black studies programmes, nor are there any special schools offering Black studies. The textbooks which Australian children use, including our own children, refer to us as barbarians and therefore inferior. In missions our children are segregated and taught by ill-trained and unqualified Aboriginal teachers, thus perpetuating the conditions of inferiority, whereas the

children of the white administration are taught in good surroundings by qualified teachers.

The petition demanded an end to the ‘systematic obliteration of our people’, claiming ‘Hitler’s gas chamber, being quicker, was the more benevolent’. ‘The objective observer can find no more accurate word for what the Australian Government is doing to the Aborigine than the awesome word genocide’, the petition read; and ‘In the name of humanity, this must be stopped.’ It demanded sufficient housing and medical care for survival, and payment of \$6 billion to create economic parity with ‘those who have sought and still seek to wipe us out.’¹²¹

The petitioners alleged that ‘genocide’ had occurred openly by massacre and poisoning, and more recently by subtle means of poor housing and health care, and by creating social conditions that destroyed Aboriginal pride, hope and the will to survive as a people.¹²² The existence of Aborigines as a strong and self-perpetuating people was being compromised, not only by social and economic hardship itself, but also by the subjective experience of inequality. And thus, while the petitioners invoked forms of elimination that were empirical and indeed clear to ‘the objective observer’, they had also referred to an expression of genocide that was ‘psychological’, and inhering in ‘feeling’. In this sense, the petition can be seen as consistent with the way in which Aboriginal people were shaping their social and political demands at this time – to achieve the right of people with Aboriginal descent to determine their own identity, free from both legislation and discriminatory conditions that prohibited or inhibited their pursuit of their Aboriginality.

¹²¹ 1970 Petition, cited in ‘Aborigines Petition U.N’, *New Era*, vol. 1, no. 3, January 1971, p. 8; 1970 ‘UN petitions allege genocide in Australia.’, *The Canberra Times* (ACT : 1926 - 1995), 9 October, p. 8, viewed 12 May, 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article110465128>; Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 150.

¹²² Broome, *Fighting Hard*, p. 150.

The petition can be understood as an early expression of the internationalization of the Aboriginal rights movement, with the escalation of international human rights discourse across the Western developed world and with it, the expansion of ‘genocide’ discourse. Assimilation was not longer viewed as the only source of racial subjugation; persecution in any form was being presented as a form of identity oppression. In making an allegation of ‘genocide’ on behalf of all Australian Aborigines, Nicholls, Maza, and McGuinness were articulating an interpretation of the United Nations’ concept of ‘genocide’ from a subjective a phenomenological perspective of what it meant to them, its victims, in the Australian context.

International human rights discourse in the 1970s: the parallel development of two different notions of Australian ‘genocide’

An international discourse on human rights proliferated in the 1970s; across the decade there was an explosion of NGO’s, and a rapid expansion in using the terms ‘human rights’ and ‘genocide’ in media discourse.¹²³ Whether people understood Aboriginality to be an objective or subjective phenomenon directly informed the way in which ‘genocide’ was used to describe the consequences of implementing a policy of cultural absorption.

In 1971, for example, journalist Cecil Holmes issued his report for the Senate’s Standing Committee on Social Environment, on the ‘environmental conditions of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders’. In Holmes’ opinion, the geographical displacement of Torres Strait Islanders onto Thursday Island was preventing them from practicing their ‘distinct culture’, which he attached to their traditional way of

¹²³ Samuel Moyné gives a detailed exploration of the global development of the human rights discourse, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass: London 2010).

life. 'Thursday Island does not reflect the *true condition* of the indigenous inhabitants any more than Darwin does that of the Aborigines.'¹²⁴

This assessment of the Aboriginal people living in Darwin, as not reflecting the 'true condition' of indigeneity due to their long interaction with outsiders, can be contrasted with A.P Elkin's evaluation of this same community in 1953. Elkin attributed Aboriginal people with a measure of indigenous agency in creating a new cultural blend. In his 1953 proposals for the assimilation of peoples in the Darwin area, Elkin observed that those groups had modified their social structures and created 'a new solidarity of expanded groups'. In his view, this in no way diminished the viability of their cultural traditions, whose benefits he extolled. '[T]he elders hope and plan to cope with the modern process of economic and political assimilation, by strengthening tribal sentiment and loyalty to the secret ceremonial life, with its moral and social implications'. By retaining 'their own scared and secret sanctions', they were 'developing a pride in themselves as Aborigines, and when they become full citizens of Australia, they will do so as Australian Aborigines, who have worked out their new adaptation'.¹²⁵ In contrast to Holmes and similar critics of assimilation, Elkin did not equate the disappearance of Aboriginal practices in their tribal form with cultural loss, and he certainly did not equate it with the erosion of their claims to being Aboriginal. The mixed culture that emerged from an autonomous process of adaptation was critically important for the future of Aboriginal existence in colonized Australia, Elkin thought, for it contributed to their group cohesiveness, thereby assisting them to engage positively with the wider society.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ (my emphasis). Cecil Holmes, 'Report on the Environmental Conditions of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the Preservation of Their Sacred Sites (being a report on progress and on a particular aspect of immediate concern)', *Standing Committee on Social Environment*, (Canberra: Australian Senate, 1972), p. 1.

¹²⁵ A.P Elkin cited in McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p. 102.

¹²⁶ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p. 102.

In defining Aboriginal people objectively, according to their pre-contact form of existence, Holmes did not recognise Aboriginal existence as a self-conscious perpetuation of a ‘cultural’ consciousness, or the adaptation of their substantive cultural attributes according to their collective experience and conscious deliberation. Holmes projected that Torres Strait islander people were at risk of dying out through both biological mixing with European peoples and through the loss of their traditional culture, invoking the idea of ‘genocide’:

It is a quiet kind of genocide. For in the course of time these people must melt away, cease to survive because simply and brutally they are not reproducing and existing as a unit, in their natural and original environment¹²⁷.

Holmes drew upon the idea of ‘genocide’ that was then conventional in international scholarship, not that which had been incubating in Aboriginal discourse.

The idea of ‘genocide’ that had been conceived by Davey and Nicholls, and championed in VAAL’s 1970 petition, had hit home with Aboriginal people; and now, especially in the context of Aborigines’ increasing engagement with international rights community and language, Aboriginal people and their supporters began to invoke the idea of ‘genocide’ as a process of non-physical alienation from their land, their culture, and their selfhood – which could also express itself physically in the form of illness and death resulting from racially discriminatory policy.

In January 1971, just four months after the creation of VAAL’s ‘genocide’ petition and around the same time of Cecil Holmes’ statement, *The Canberra Times* published comments made by Kath Walker in which she used the phrase ‘subtle genocide’ – which the petitioners had used to denote the psychological manifestation of genocide – to condemn the Queensland government in holding onto its paternalistic approach to

¹²⁷ Cecil Holmes, ‘Report on the Environmental Conditions of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders’, pp. 1-4.

Aboriginal welfare. ‘The Federal Government had every opportunity since the 1967 referendum to repeal the state’s discriminatory laws against Aborigines’, the article read, relaying that ‘the poet Kath Walker’ had that day said ‘the Act it administered amounted to “subtle genocide” for the Aborigines.’¹²⁸

In 1972, *The Canberra Times*, published another article in which Pastor Frank Roberts, of Sydney, ‘accused the State and Commonwealth governments of using a policy of assimilation to bring about the genocide of the Aborigines.’ The article explained that ‘Many Australians had been indoctrinated to believe that the Aboriginal people must lose their identity. Aboriginal people were victims of a brutal demoralizing policy perpetuated by governments to destroy the race.’¹²⁹

Sue Chilly, who was, like Kath Walker, a member of the Black Power movement, was quoted in April 1976 as having spoken at the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women. Chilly used the occasion to confront the standard international idea of genocide as inhering in massacre, explaining the meaning that the crime had for Aboriginal people in the Australian historical context. ‘People say that genocide in Australia stopped with the nigger hunts when the first white settlers went out with guns – but it hasn’t’, she repeated later at a conference in Sydney. ‘There are different kinds of genocide. Aborigines suffer from genocide of the mind, the Australian education system does not teach children about the Aboriginal race or give them pride in it.’ She went on to say that ‘Health is another area of genocide. It is incredible that in the 1970s Aborigines suffer from malnutrition and vitamin C deficiency, and that

¹²⁸ Dunstan Mystified By P.M's Statement', *The Canberra Times* (ACT, 20 January, 1971), p. 7, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article110450205>, viewed 13 May, 2015.

¹²⁹ ‘Government Accused’, *The Canberra Times* (ACT, 31 January, 1972), p. 6, , <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article101754989>, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article101754989>, viewed 12 May, 2015.

infant mortality is so high".¹³⁰ In August 1979, *The Canberra Times* reported on comments made by Gary Foley at a press conference in Germany, while he was there touring 'films on black Australia'.¹³¹ In response to the move by international mining firms to take control of certain regions of Australia for uranium, Foley was reported to have 'appealed to the West German people' in order to 'support the efforts of the aborigines for self-determination and economic independence.' He sought the return of those tracts of land to Aboriginal owners and an end to the uranium mining. 'Reading from a declaration, Mr Foley said: "My people have been the target of a deliberate policy of genocide, practiced first by the British colonisers, then by the Australian Government, and today by the international mining companies.'¹³²



Figure 26: 'Black Control of Black Affairs'. Marchers in a land rights demonstration, Gertrude Street, 1973. Left to right: Monica Hoffman, Sue Chilly, Bruce McGuinness, Hilary Saunders. **Source:** Alick Jackomos Collection.

¹³⁰ 'Aboriginal genocide continues', *The Canberra Times* (ACT : 1926 - 1995), 19 April, 1976, p. 6, viewed 12 May, 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article110813745>.

¹³¹ For information about this event see Gary Foley, *The Koori History Website*, http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/whoisgf/who_is_he.html, viewed 23 May 2015.

¹³² 1979 'Genocide' charge by blacks.', *The Canberra Times* (ACT : 1926 - 1995), 30 August, p. 3, viewed 12 May, 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article110578962>

Guiding the way in which ‘genocide’ was used by critics of indigenous policy in the 1970s was the perception that Australian genocide was a force that inhered in any policy that negated Aborigines’ self-respect and will to be Aboriginal. This included various formulations, including ‘genocide of the mind’, ‘cultural genocide’, and ‘subtle genocide’. Thus, by the end of the 1970s, one journalist indicated that it had already become standard to refer to assimilation policy as ‘psychological totalitarianism or cultural genocide.’¹³³

¹³³ ‘Catholic body supports Aboriginal land rights.’, *The Canberra Times* (ACT, 18 September, 1978), p. 1, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article110910028>, viewed 12 May, 2015.

Chapter Three: The idea of ‘genocide’ in Tasmania

Introduction

I have tried to show that the interpretation of ‘genocide’ that emerged in Aboriginal rights discourse during the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was enabled by the idea of ‘Aboriginality’ as a collectivising social and political identity. The basic idea of ‘genocide’, as pertaining to a racial collectivity, helped to consolidate the notion that all of Australia’s Aboriginal people had been, and were being, subjected to a common experience of psychological effacement through policies of protection and assimilation. By 1970, this critique of Australian assimilation policy was being championed as ‘the’ Aboriginal perspective. It is therefore notable that during the same period, the concept of ‘genocide’ was being deliberately avoided and even rejected by the Aboriginal peoples of Tasmania.

The comparative delay with which Tasmanian Aborigines’ chose to incorporate the concept of ‘genocide’ into their own narrativisation of Tasmanian history is indicative of the strong attachments that the word ‘genocide’ had gained to the idea of Tasmanian’s racial *extinction* in international scholarship about Tasmanian history in the postwar period. This chapter begins with my overview of the development of the idea of ‘Tasmanian genocide’ and the parallel development of the Tasmanian Aborigines’ identity consciousness, showing them each to have their roots in the notion of the Tasmanians’ extinction, which was established in the nineteenth century.

When the Australian film *The Last Tasmanian* redeployed this nineteenth-century science of race through the framework of ‘genocide’ in 1978, the ensuing debates

became a theatre in which conflicting notions of Aboriginal ‘existence’ and ‘genocide’ would come into conflict and become redefined.

The persisting idea of Tasmanian Aborigines’ extinction in twentieth-century moral historiography

Until 1981, when Lyndall Ryan published her history of Tasmania, it was widely believed in both popular and scholarly contexts that the death of Truganini in 1876 marked the total extinction of the Tasmanian Aboriginal population. In the 1870s, several contemporary historical accounts chronicled the demise of the Tasmanian Aborigines being ‘protected’ at Oyster Cove between 1848 and 1876. These decades had also established both popular and scientific narratives of this community as ‘the last Tasmanians’. ‘A fatalistic ideology surfaced’, Ryan says, ‘as the Aborigines died one by one; it became allied with an excessive, grim monitoring of the fate of the two remaining “traditional” Aborigines’, William Lanney and Truganini.’¹³⁴ By the end of the 1870s, the deaths at Oyster Cove had come to represent for Europeans a clear, unambiguous, incontrovertible, and well-documented example of the extermination of an entire people.¹³⁵

However, as Ryan has wanted to highlight, these historians differed in their moral inflection towards the decline of Aboriginal life, and in their explanation for their ‘extinction’. The most significant contrast can be drawn between the accounts given by Bonwick in 1870 and Calder in 1875.

While Bonwick explained the imminent disappearance of the Tasmanian population as a consequence of the British and settler appropriations of their land; Calder

¹³⁴ Ryan, Lyndall, *Aboriginal Tasmanians*. Second ed. [1981](Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p. 258.

¹³⁵ Curthoys, ‘Genocide in Tasmania’, p. 234.

contended that they had failed to survive, not from mass killings by the colonists, but from intertribal wars, 'the prevalence of epidemic disorders', and their inability to adapt to European ways of life.¹³⁶ Calder's thesis prevailed in European Australian consciousness until the Second World War: it absolved the colonists from responsibility for the past, and achieved currency in the discourse of scientific racism, which proclaimed that, by virtue of their extreme 'primitivism' and their low estimated population, the Tasmanian Aborigines were already on their way to extinction before the British arrived in Tasmania in 1803.¹³⁷

Until the 1930s, this narrative was sustained by what Ryan has called 'scientific racism', at which point belief in the Tasmanians' extinction was renewed and reinvented to accommodate a growing critique of colonisation and concern for the fate of Aboriginal peoples. In states and territories other than Tasmania, this moral position created the imperative to 'save' the Aborigines by providing for their assimilation. Writing about *Tasmanian* Aborigines, on the other hand, was distinguished by an elegiac note, since it was still perceived that the process of their extinction had long ago been completed. In this new moral landscape, Bonwick's elegiac account of the Tasmanians' extirpation by British settlers was given new life in Clive Turnbull's book, *Black War* (1948) - one of several specialist studies on Australian Aboriginal history to have emerged at this time.¹³⁸ 'Written in the shadow of his experience as a

¹³⁶ Ryan, Lyndall, "'Hard Evidence": The debate about massacres in The Black War in Tasmania', in Ann Curthoys, Frances Peters-Little and John Docker [eds.], *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia* (Aboriginal History Inc. and ANU E press, 2010), p. 43.

¹³⁷ On the impact of scientific racism see Curthoys, 'Genocide in Tasmania: The History of an Idea' in Dirk Moses ed., *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 234, 236-237; also, Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines: A History since 1803*, (Sydney, Melbourne, Auckland, London: Allen and Unwin, 2012), pp. xvii-xviii, xx-xxi.

¹³⁸ Curthoys cites histories by Foxcroft, *Australian Native Policy* (1941) and Hasluck, *Black Australians* (1942), p. 238.

war correspondent in Europe and Asia', Turnbull echoed Bonwick in arguing that massacre played a key role in the extermination of the Aborigines.¹³⁹

Not, perhaps, before has a race of men been destroyed utterly within 75 years. This is the story of a race which was so destroyed, that of the aborigines of Tasmania.¹⁴⁰

Turnbull's book was significant in continuing the Tasmanian extinction thesis by reinstating the nineteenth-century narrative within a contemporary moral and political framework of European sympathy for Aboriginal peoples. His ideas were critically influential in obscuring the reality of Tasmanian Aborigines from the Cape Barren Island community, as they fought against their classification as 'European' during the same period.

The experience of assimilation policy in Tasmania: from Tasmanian 'descendants' to Tasmanian 'Aborigines'

The Cape Barren Islander community's experience of assimilation was comparable to that of many Aboriginal people on the mainland of Australia: In 1944 the Tasmanian government decided to adopt an official policy of assimilation towards the Islanders, whereby they were expected to move to the mainland of Tasmania and become 'absorbed' into the white population.¹⁴¹ In 1945 state ministers declared that the Cape Barren reserve would soon be disbanded (resulting in its closure in 1951); and in 1947, the Commonwealth statistician, in its count of Aboriginal people, decided not to classify people who were less than 'octoroon' as

¹³⁹ Ryan "Hard Evidence", p. 43-44

¹⁴⁰ Clive Turnbull, *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines* (Melbourne, 1965, [1948]), p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 304.

‘Aboriginal’, making the reserve residents officially ‘European’ in the Commonwealth census.¹⁴²

In Tasmania, as in Victoria and other regions of Australia, the experience of assimilation policy fueled a movement for self-determination predicated on subjective Aboriginality. Like Stan Davey and Doug Nicholls, many Tasmanian Aborigines perceived the pathology of assimilation policy to reside in its pretense to control Aboriginal identity. With the inauguration of the policy in 1937, Ryan says: ‘The Islanders were angry. Once again they had not been consulted. Once again they had been defined by others, this time as white people.’¹⁴³

Aboriginal Tasmanians were subject to both objective and subjective pressures to abandon their Aboriginal identity and ‘become white’; while they were grouped with European Australians in official terms, they remained subject to both positive and negative racial discrimination in other contexts of Tasmanian society. The pejorative experience of being perceived as an Aboriginal descendant caused many Aboriginal people to deny their Aboriginal heritage and attempt to ‘pass’ for a person of wholly European descent. Jim Everett, a prominent Aboriginal activist in Tasmania, characterises this as period as ‘a time when our parents were trying to keep our Aboriginality from us’.¹⁴⁴

As the new Aboriginal political consciousness began to unify Aboriginal people across Australia in the 1960s, many of the Tasmanian descendants reasserted their community identity with renewed energy. In the past, Tasmanian Aborigines had presented themselves as ‘descendants’ or ‘mixed-blood’ Aborigines, but by the

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 303-304.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 304

¹⁴⁴ Jim Everett, interviewed in John Moore and Steve Thomas, *Black Man's Houses* [documentary], (Ronin films, March 1993).

beginning of the 1970s this label had consolidated in the ‘Tasmanian Aborigines’.¹⁴⁵

Echoing the sentiments of Kevin Gilbert in *Because a white man will never do it* (1973), one Aboriginal Tasmanian would say: ‘It doesn’t matter how many bloodlines there are in you, subconsciously you will identify with one or the other. And I can’t help but identify with Aborigines because society picks me out as an Aborigine.’¹⁴⁶

For this new generation of Tasmanian descendants, their experience of racism consolidated their sense of cohesion as Aboriginal victims – amongst themselves, and with other Aboriginal people across all regions of Australia. In 1992, Vicki Matson-Green recalled:

My parents were very firmly put in their place – and they stayed in their place!
[Then] there’s a new generation [that has] come along, and [they] have said ‘[if] you’re going to treat us like black people, [if] you’re going to be derogatory towards us because we are black people, then we’re going to identify openly as black people.’¹⁴⁷

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Tasmanian Aborigines thus became politically organised to lead their own campaigns for recognition. As previous chapters have shown, Aboriginal spokespeople such as Doug Nicholls, Kath Walker, Paul Coe, Roberta Sykes and Kevin Gilbert were, in the same period, reframing their collective struggle for equality in terms of a struggle for ‘existence’. Tasmanian Aborigines, having been denied recognition of their existence in literal terms under the Commonwealth’s statistics since 1944, had even more reason to emphasise this encroachment upon their metaphysical existence. Michael (Mike) Mansell, Cape Barren man and descendant of

¹⁴⁵ Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 309.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with ‘P.B’ from *Genocide without Blood and Guts*, mimeograph (Hobart: Tasmanian Aboriginal Information Centre, n.d [1978]), p. 10, cited in Ryan *Aboriginal Tasmanians*, (1996) p. 261.

¹⁴⁷ Vicki Matson-Green, interviewed in John Moore and Steve Thomas, *Black Man’s Houses* [documentary], (Ronin films, March 1993).

Pollereikerner (a woman of the Patricks Head tribe), pronounced to a televised conference room in 1978: ‘We are the only race of people that I know of on earth - the Tasmanian Aborigines – who have to daily justify our existence’.¹⁴⁸ In 1988, Pierre Slicer would comment upon this unique dimension of the Tasmanian Aborigines’ movement for self-determination:

It is not surprising that Australia’s most extreme Aboriginal activist should have emerged from Tasmania, it is history on the rebound. Nowhere in Australia have people who feel themselves to be Aborigines been taken closer to the physical fact of extinction nor to the edge of the ultimate cultural abyss: being told they do not exist.¹⁴⁹

In light of these deep parallels between the mainland and Tasmanian Aborigines’ experiences of assimilation policy and their movements for self-determination, it is significant that during this period the term ‘genocide’ did not enter into the Tasmanian Aborigines’ political discourse as a way to interpret Aboriginal effacement. This absence can be attributed to the independent development of an international discourse about the history of Tasmania in the 1970s, wherein ‘genocide’ became used synonymously with ideas of extinction and total extermination. This rendered the notion of ‘Tasmanian genocide’ antithetical to the Tasmanian Aborigines’ movement for self-determination, which was developing simultaneously.

¹⁴⁸ Transcript. Tom Haydon, ‘The Last Tasmanian: transcript of Monday Conference programme, Hobart: 4 September, 1978’, Robert Moore ed., (Sydney, NSW: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1978), p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Pierre Slicer, *The Age*, 30 April, 1988, cited in Ryan, *Aboriginal Tasmanians*, p. 263

The idea of Tasmanian ‘genocide’ in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Given that Lemkin had published the concept of ‘genocide’ in his *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* in 1944, it is plausible that in his *Black War*, Clive Turnbull would have conceived of Tasmania’s frontier violence in terms of ‘genocide’. Curthoys reasons that Turnbull would probably have used the term ‘genocide’ had he known of it while he was writing his book.¹⁵⁰ In any case, he didn’t use this word, though he did draw an analogy between Tasmanian history and Nazi Germany, which no one had done before. Turnbull argued that the ideas and practices that had led to the ‘extirpation’ of the Tasmanian Aborigines were similar to those held by the Nazis in their attempts to exterminate the Jews in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.

Unbeknownst to Turnbull, Lemkin himself was at the same time making a similar revision of what had happened in Tasmania. Like Turnbull, Lemkin relied on secondary sources, and especially upon Bonwick. The study remained unfinished and unpublished when he died 1959, and did not surface until more recently, when Curthoys, John Docker and Dirk Moses, brought the manuscript to scholars’ attention.¹⁵¹ In it, Lemkin considered Tasmania as the site of one of the world’s clear cases of ‘genocide’, and he would also reach the independent conclusion that the government’s ‘drastic measures’ led to ‘the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines in less than half a century.’¹⁵²

In spite of the unavailability of Lemkin’s manuscript, in the years following the publication of *Black War*, Curthoys has reported that many people in the international

¹⁵⁰ Curthoys, ‘Genocide in Tasmania’, p. 239, n. 51.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 240. Lemkin also consulted other works by Giblin, Backhouse, Calder, Melville, Merivale, and West. See also John Docker, ‘The Challenge of Genocide’ *From Griffith REVIEW Edition 17: Staying Alive* <https://griffithreview.com/articles/the-challenge-of-genocide/>

¹⁵² Lemkin cited in Curthoys, ‘Genocide in Tasmania’, p. 178, 171.

community came to apply Lemkin's theory of 'genocide' to what was then understood to be the exceptional policies of annihilation carried out against Tasmanian Aborigines during settlement. 'While Lemkin's work on Tasmania remained unknown,' she says 'his new word *genocide* did not.' When genocide scholarship proliferated in the 1970s, there was 'some slippage between two distinct ideas, extinction and genocide' in discussions of Tasmanian history. 'Everyone "knew" that Tasmania was a case of colonial *extinction*; therefore it seemed to follow it must be a case of *genocide*'.

Curthoys reasons that,

Where *extermination*, *extirpation* and *extinction* placed the Tasmanian events in a long ago past, out there away from the present, *genocide* connected them to an ongoing present, to legal and political as well as historical considerations. To call something "genocide" rather than "extermination" was somehow seen as far more serious for modern Australians.

Thereafter she says, the idea of Tasmanian genocide became common, 'slipping in almost unnoticed where the former terms used to be', spreading beyond the work of specialist genocide scholars and entering into other scholarly, and popular, discourses.¹⁵³

Curthoys has pointed out that this burgeoning of the idea of Tasmanian genocide as extinction, in the 1970s, took place almost exclusively within international scholarship, while failing to gain any significant traction amongst Australian scholars during the same period. 'Despite the 1950s and 1960s being a period of rapid growth in the writing of Australian history, there were no new specialist monographs on the destruction of Tasmanian society' and 'local historiography went in quite a different

¹⁵³ Curthoys, 'Genocide in Tasmania', p. 240, 241.

direction.¹⁵⁴ A close examination of how the word ‘genocide’ was being used by Tasmanian Aboriginal rights activists and scholars of Tasmanian Aboriginal society during the 1970s helps to illuminate the process whereby the idea of Tasmanian ‘genocide’ was gradually disentangled from its association with Tasmanian extinction.

Tasmanian existence and the idea of ‘genocide’ in the 1970s

Following the publication of Turnbull’s *Black War* in 1948, it was not until the 1970s that Australian scholars would produce any significant new research into Tasmanian Aboriginal society. Developments in the 1960s had brought Tasmanian Aboriginal society to the attention of Australian historians. Tasmania had become the ‘touchstone’ for Australian archeological research, delivering new insights into the Tasmanians’ ancient civilisation, and an important new source was made available for researchers of Tasmania’s settlement, in the form of George Augustus Robinson’s diaries.¹⁵⁵ More significantly, however, was the development of the Tasmanian Aboriginal voice, and Australians’ increasing exposure to the reality of their existence.

In 1968, the Commonwealth adopted a new policy for defining Aboriginal people in legislation that allowed Tasmanian Aborigines to nominate themselves as ‘Aboriginal’, and the application of this definition in the 1971 Census enabled them to be counted as ‘Aboriginal’. In 1973 an Aboriginal Information Centre (later the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, TAC) was established with government funding in Hobart and Launceston, which was seen to mark the end of the assimilation era.¹⁵⁶

The Tasmanian Aborigines remained in pursuit of further signification of their

¹⁵⁴ Curthoys, ‘Genocide in Tasmania’, p. 242

¹⁵⁵ See Jim Allen, ‘Antiquity’, in Murray, *Archeology of Aboriginal Australia: a reader* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998), pp. 9-12; and see Plomley, Norman James Brian (ed), *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of G.A Robinson 1829 – 1834*, (Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Hobart, 1966).

¹⁵⁶ Dexter ‘Stanner: reluctant bureaucrat’, p.79; Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 309.

‘recognition’ in the form of the campaign for land ownership, which had expanded to include other regions of Tasmania, and the more recent campaign to reclaim the remains of their ancestors from where they were being held in museums, in Australia and abroad. The establishment of the Tasmanians’ political office on the mainland of Tasmania ‘increased public awareness about the Tasmanian Aborigines and transformed the ways in which Aboriginal campaigns were conducted.’¹⁵⁷

Australian scholarship was not unaffected by these developments. Throughout the 1970s, the beginnings of a revisionist history of Tasmania began to show itself, particularly in the doctoral theses of a new generation of social scientific students. In 1973, for example, Bill Mollison (1928 -) completed his Masters in Psychology with a thesis titled ‘A Synopsis of Data on Tasmanian Aboriginal People’. Mollison framed his study of the Aboriginal population in direct opposition to the non-recognition of their existence under Tasmanian assimilation policy, which had only then being deconstructed. In a section titled ‘Definition of an Aboriginal person’, Mollison criticised the objective way of identifying Aboriginal people that formed the basis of assimilation policy.

To the bureaucracy, and the population at large, it seems to have been a matter of some concern as to when a person ceases to be aboriginal and becomes white. The policy of “assimilation” is a sort of bureaucratic genocide and unsuccessful attempts have been made to declare people white in Tasmania, despite their black blood. Third and later generation people are still discriminated against, and have many relatives not accepted as white.

¹⁵⁷ Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, p. 309; Ryan [1981] *Aboriginal Tasmanians* p. 263.

In a section titled ‘Discrimination’, Mollison, and in terms that resonate with the critique of assimilation deployed by Stanley Davey ten years earlier, Mollison defended the Tasmanian Aborigines against what he termed ‘bureaucratic genocide’.¹⁵⁸

In 1977, another student of Hobart University, Bronwyn Desailly, confronted the association of ‘genocide’ with the idea of extinction in historicising British and Tasmanian settler violence. Her Masters thesis for the Department of History was called ‘The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines, 1824-1836’. In it, she subtly distinguishes her usage of the word ‘genocide’ to denote Tasmanians’ ‘near complete decimation’ and ‘near extinction’.¹⁵⁹

In 1975, Lyndall Ryan (1943 -) completed her PhD thesis through the School of History at Macquarie University. Her thesis was titled ‘Aborigines in Tasmania, 1800-1974 and their problems with Europeans’, and it became the basis for her first book *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* in 1981.¹⁶⁰ Ryan’s overriding purpose was to demolish ‘the myth of extermination’ and celebrate the Aborigines’ resistance - cultural and military - and their adjustment and adaptation.¹⁶¹

In January 1978, Mike Mansell (1951 -) published an article for *Arena* magazine titled ‘Land Rights for Tasmania’s Aborigines’, where he presented the Tasmanian Aborigines’ political campaign as involving the fundamental revision of conventional Tasmanian historiography.

¹⁵⁸ Bill Mollison, *A Synopsis of Data on Tasmanian Aboriginal People (To December 1972)*, edited by B.C (Bill) Mollison, (Hobart: Psychology Department, University of Tasmania, 1973), (no page number).

¹⁵⁹ Bronwyn Desailly, ‘The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines, 1824-1836’, (M.A. Thesis - University of Tasmania, Hobart) 1977, (no page number).

¹⁶⁰ Lyndall Ryan ‘Aborigines in Tasmania, 1800-1974 and their problems with Europeans’, [PhD thesis], (Macquarie University, Sydney, 1975); Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1981)

¹⁶¹ Ryan’s attention to the social and political history of the Tasmanian Aborigines remains unsurpassed, and her book was reissued in 1996 and 2012. Her work has therefore been useful as both a primary and secondary source in this chapter.

Now, for those who don't understand how Tasmania could possibly have a Land Rights Claim without Aborigines, let's clear up what the history books say ... [They] say that the Tasmanian Aboriginal population was wiped out when Truganini died in the year 1876. What they ignored is that in the period of say, 30 or 40 years before 1876 and in the whole period up till today after 1876, many Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men (with white wives) had children. These children weren't recognised as existing; they hardly even counted in the Aboriginal population. And so, when the population figure was in fact down around 1,000, the history books said that there were no more Tasmanian Aborigines.¹⁶²

The new ideas of Aboriginality, and the development of the Tasmanian Aborigines' movement for self-determination had enabled another view of Tasmanian history to emerge and challenge the old story of 'the last Tasmanians'. Similar affirmations of Tasmanians' survival by Mansell, Ryan, Mollison and Desailly, also constituted the beginnings of Australians' appropriation of the term 'genocide' to accommodate their recognition of the surviving Tasmanian Aborigines as a culturally adaptive community and social consciousness. Australian scholarship was indeed going 'in another direction' from international scholarship in representing the idea of Tasmanian genocide. As interest in both *Tasmanian Aborigines* and 'genocide' began to peak in the 1970s, two perspectives on what constitutes Aboriginality would come together in a period of conflict and exchange over the concept of 'genocide' when a new feature documentary, *The Last Tasmanian* began to receive its publicity.

Tom Haydon, Rhys Jones and *The Last Tasmanian*

The growing perception of Tasmanians' survival amongst some sections of Australian society was directly confronted in 1977 and 1978 when Tom Haydon and

¹⁶² Michael Mansell, 'Land rights for Tasmania's Aborigines', *Arena*, No. 50, 1978, pp. 92.

Rhys Jones produced an historical documentary for Australian and European audiences in which the international perspective on Tasmanian history and racial identity was epitomized. Titled, *The Last Tasmanian (TLT)*, the film argued in unequivocal terms that ‘Tasmanian history constitutes the swiftest and most complete case of genocide on record’.¹⁶³



Figure 27: Photograph of Tom Haydon for the publicity of *The Last Tasmanian*, with a picture of Truganini on the wall behind him, 1978. **Source:** Lewis Morley, *Pol* magazine, August/September 1978.¹⁶⁴

The film was the personal project of Tom Haydon (1938-1991), a filmmaker from Manly, with an Honours degree in Australian History from the University of Sydney (1960). Haydon had worked as a producer for the ABC as an investigative journalist

¹⁶³ *The Last Tasmanian and Aboriginal Descendants in Tasmania* [documentary film], Rhys Jones and Tom Haydon, (Australia North Sydney: Artis Film Productions, 1978).

¹⁶⁴ Tom Haydon interviewed in ‘Tom Haydons Guilt: Edged Investment’, *Pol*, August/September, 1977 pp.91-93.

and documentary maker, before going to work for the BBC in London. As a filmmaker, Haydon was a reputed provocateur, having already made two documentaries that were sensational; in Australia and the UK, he was a television success.¹⁶⁵ In 1969 he made *The Talgai Skull*, for which he won a Logie award; during the production Haydon acquired his interest in the pre-history of Australia, and met his future colleague, Rhys Jones, at the 39th ANZAAS Congress in 1967. In 1975 he was awarded a Creative Fellowship by the Australian Arts Council, and decided to embark on his career as a private film-maker with his own production company, Artis Film Productions. A champion of the documentary form, Hayden said that he found himself ‘only interested in films that must be made’, and dedicated himself to producing ‘the films that really matter’.¹⁶⁶ Just Turnbull had felt impelled to humanize and vindicate the Tasmanians’ from their objectification in Caldor’s history of Tasmanian settlement, Haydon’s also felt deeply about the problems of a British-derived history that was still being imposed upon an indigenous and independent Australian identity. In publicity interviews for the film, he explained those feelings as motivations for making *TLT*:

Here we have in Australia, a total case of genocide - a unique race of mankind wiped out in the most blood-thirsty way. Yet that is not what I was told about at school. I was told about our pioneering fathers and convicts who made good. I feel very strongly that one of the problems in Australian is that we haven’t gotten around to facing up to our past. We keep putting off coming to terms with it.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ These productions were *The Talgai Skull* (1968) and *The British Empire* tv series (1971) – both were controversial. ‘While some reviewers pronounced them stunning – the work of man “who makes history live by moving about its dead bones” – they were responsible for probably more letters to the London Times than any other UK television program ever.’ Rhys Jones, ‘Tom Haydon 1938-1991: Film Interpreter of Australian Archeology’, *Australian Archeology*, v. 35, 1992, pp. 51-64.

¹⁶⁶ Tom Haydon, ‘Tom Haydons Guilt: Edged Investment’, *Pol*, August/September, 1977 p. 93.

¹⁶⁷ Tom Haydon, ‘Tom Haydons Guilt: Edged Investment’, *Pol*, August/September, 1977, p. 92

Haydon exhibited a nostalgic longing to make amends with the prehistoric past. Rhys Jones would fondly quote Haydon as having told him:

Well, you can go out into the desert and look at the fireplaces on the ground where people actually sat 20,000 years ago. The landscape around is virtually unchanged. I can't escape the feeling that gives me. I want to feel I belong to this ... the real history of the continent. ... You can't escape the feeling how ephemeral, how superficial the European presence is, compared with, say a 30,000-year-old skeleton extruding from the sand. The Europeans seem irrelevant to the landscape.¹⁶⁸

In 1976 Haydon began to produce *TLT*, co-writing it with Rhys Jones, a Welsh-born archeologist then working at the Australian National University, who had provided most of the research into the historical and anthropological exposition about the Tasmanian 'race'.

Jones had been an integral part of the archeological 'discovery' of Australia's pre-history, working with John Mulvaney on significant digs in the 1960s. His charisma had a reputation within the academy. In her characterisation of Jones, Rebe Taylor has said:

[His] capacity to translate sophisticated research into evocative ideas was born from a forthright, even Larrikin character. Jones called himself a "cowboy archeologist". His rugged manners and dress were renowned, but the moniker also recalls Jones as a frontiersman on the boundaries of time, extending the depth of Aboriginal occupancy and the science of his discipline.¹⁶⁹

It is no surprise that Jones featured in the documentary as both the expository presenter, as well as archeological expert. Jones shared with Haydon his melancholic disposition towards the history of Aborigines' dispossession in Australia; he too,

¹⁶⁸ Rhys Jones, 'Tom Haydon 1938-1991: Film Interpreter of Australian Archeology', *Australian Archeology*, v. 35, 1992, p. 51.

¹⁶⁹ Rebe Taylor, 'Archeology and Aboriginal Protest: The Influence of Rhys Jones's Tasmanian Work on Australian Historiography', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 45, 2014, pp. 331-349. Published online 19 September 2014. P. 332.

‘found Tasmania’s colonial history poignant’. The film initiates the viewer into Tasmania’s history in broad, somber tones:

Truganini died over one hundred years ago - the last full-blood Aborigine in Tasmania. During her lifetime she saw the whole of her race become extinct.’
[In 1803 when British colonized Tasmania] there were some 4000 Aborigines. By 1876 when Truganini died, Tasmania was empty of Aborigines.¹⁷⁰



Figure 28: Rhys Jones presenting in the 1978 documentary *The Last Tasmanians*. **Source:** Screenshot from *The Last Tasmanians*, [1978] May 2015.

Jones’ doctoral dissertation on the evolutionary history of the Tasmanians’ formed the basis of the film’s overarching argument: that the Tasmanian Aborigines’ long-assumed ‘simple’ culture might have been the result of an isolation-induced regression.¹⁷¹ By presenting this argument, *The Last Tasmanian* served to reiterate the idea put forth by Caldor, but within the moral framework deployed first by Bonwick and then Turnbull: the arrival of the British had been a significant and regrettable

¹⁷⁰ *The Last Tasmanian*

¹⁷¹ Rhys Jones’ doctoral thesis made a significant impact on his field, see ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanian Aborigines (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1971).

factor in hastening the process of the Tasmanians' inevitable demise. Indeed, the writers had drawn upon both sources in developing their exposition.¹⁷² Uniting these respective writers from 1870, 1948, and 1978 was their conception of Aboriginality as an objective category. In interviews surrounding the film's release, Haydon revealed his definition of race, distinguishing between 'historical' and 'tribal' Tasmanians.

Undoubtedly there are people, probably a substantial number in Tasmania, who would now openly identify as "Tasmanian Aborigines", but ... If Truganini's people were alive today, still practicing at least some of their culture, the contrast between them and the present descendants would be dramatically obvious.¹⁷³

Similarly, Jones restated their position in an article published for *Nation Review* following the documentary's premier in Hobart. Despite acknowledging that the Tasmanians' 'genetic inheritance' survived in the 'handful of Tasmanian women' who were removed to the Bass Strait Islands during settlement, like Haydon, he forecloses the possibility of their cultural continuation in the form of an Aboriginal consciousness. With European colonisation, he said, 'a culture which had lived on its own for 500 generations [...] was within two terrifying generations wiped away – destroyed – wiped clean from the human consciousness.'¹⁷⁴ When Haydon and Jones deployed this long standing claim in 1978, it was not only inconsistent with how Aboriginal people had come to be recognised in Australian legislation – the nineteenth-century account of the Tasmanian's racial extinction was now also being deployed through the popular framework of Lemkin's 'genocide', which, as we have seen, had recently become championed by campaigners of Aboriginal self-determination. The public nature of *TLT* was therefore significant in bringing into

¹⁷² Taylor, 'Archeology and Aboriginal Protest', p. 338.

¹⁷³ Tom Hayden, interviewed in 'The Last Tasmanian: a Witness to History', *Australian Anthropological Society newsletter*, n.s 2, 1979, pp. 9-12 – p. 11.

¹⁷⁴ Rhys Jones, 'The First Tasmanians', *Nation Review*, august 25-31, 1978, P. 21.

view two perspectives on what constituted Aboriginality, and what could or should be implied by the idea of Aboriginal 'genocide'.

Appropriations of the word 'genocide' in responses to *The Last Tasmanian*

Prior to the film's premier in Hobart on the 22nd of June 1978, Michael Mansell, Secretary of the TAC, would write to the newsletter for the Colonialism and Indigenous Minorities Research Action group (CIMRA), in response to their recent publicity for the film's release.

Firstly, we are strongly opposed to Tom Haydon's film. The name of the film alone leaves us with a sick taste in our mouths. At a time when Aboriginal people in Tasmania are fighting to maintain their existence in a racist white society, this film really attempts to undermine us.¹⁷⁵

Upon its wide release in the second half of 1978, the film received a vocal response from Tasmanian Aboriginal rights activists and contributors to the emergent scholarship about Tasmanian Aboriginal society such as Ryan and Mollison. The film's claim of Tasmanian 'genocide' clearly cut across present Aboriginal land rights claims in Tasmania, and was therefore given significant media attention. 'GENOCIDE FILM STIRS UP RACE ROW', exclaimed one headline in the *National Times*, 'Tom Haydon's controversial film has caused an international furore,' reported Robert Milliken, 'and in Tasmania it is the centre of one of the most controversial racial arguments in Australia for many years.'¹⁷⁶

Where the specific invocation of 'genocide' was confronted, these commentaries provide a window into the further unfolding of 'Tasmanian genocide' as an idea in

¹⁷⁵ Michael Mansell, *Survival International Review*, Summer 1977, p. 31

¹⁷⁶ Robert Milliken, 'Genocide Film Stirs up Race Row', *National Times*, week ending 22 July, 1978, p. 16-17.

Australian consciousness. In this context, different perspective about Aboriginal identity produced a contest between different 'insider' and 'outsider' interpretations of Aboriginal 'genocide'.

During this period we see critics of the film regard the notion of Tasmanian 'genocide' with dual significance: as the international 'myth of genocide', and as a newly qualified claim about the physical and metaphysical violence suffered by Tasmanian Aborigines, without the complete loss of their life or culture. One of the earliest Australian responses to be published was in the form of an opinion piece by Marcel Veldhoven, who identified himself as a European Australian and resident of Tasmania. In his article, 'Truganini Lives...', Veldhoven said 'It is a somber story but it is only a "story" and to perpetuate the myth of the "genocide" is to go on with the massacre whether we are conscious of it or not'. He continued, 'Most people, aboriginals or others, living in Tasmania, know that there was no genocide. Everybody agrees that a great massacre did happen but a lot of encounters, marriages, and "fucking" took place, too, and the Tasmanian "genes" are still very much in evidence today.'¹⁷⁷

Mike Mansell responded to the film in a profusion of statements. One of the most considered came in 1979, when he issued a pamphlet through the Sydney office of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. The pamphlet was dedicated to the deconstruction of Haydon and Jones' thesis of Aboriginal extinction. Mansell does not invoke the word 'genocide' to denote the film's extinction thesis, showing his regard for them as separate ideas. Instead, included a separate political campaign graphic, side by side with his text, which invoked 'genocide' to denounce the encroachment of uranium miners onto Aboriginal land. The image text read: 'Uranium, the final genocide. Land

¹⁷⁷ Marcel Veldhoven, 'Truganini lives...' *Nation Review*, 1-6 July, 1978, p. 6.

rights, not uranium'. Mansell does not credit the image, and so we are left to assume that it was produced by the TAC.¹⁷⁸ (See figure 15). In doing so, Mansell showed his awareness of 'genocide' having an alternative meaning, and one that resonated with his notion of subjective Aboriginality. New appropriations of the idea of 'genocide' to opened up for Tasmanian Aborigines as they, along with other Aboriginal nations, came closer to understanding themselves as part of a pan-Aboriginal Australian identity.

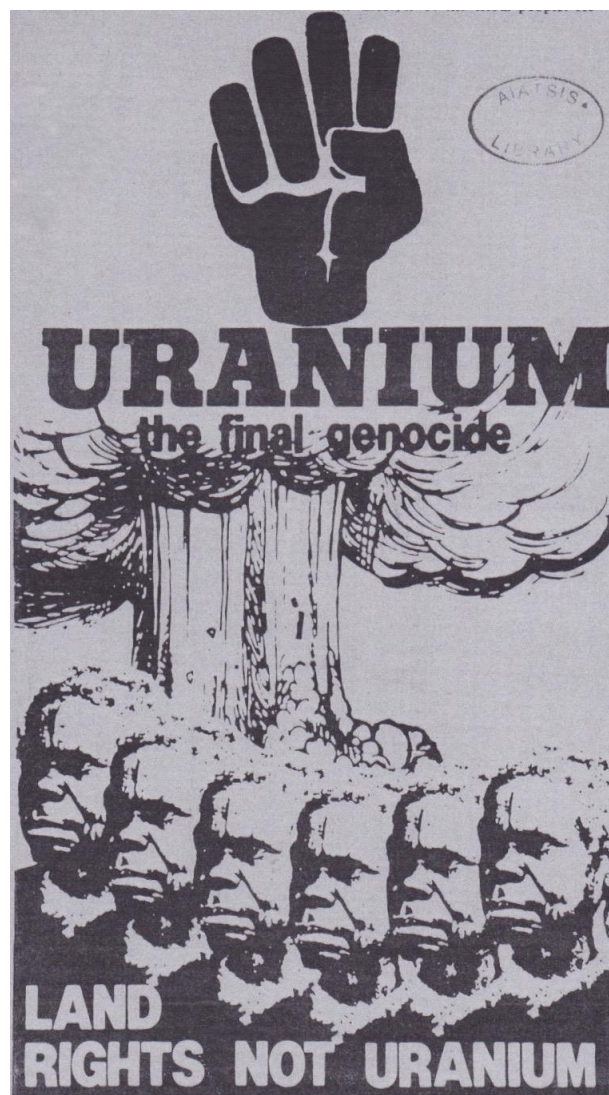


Figure 29: 'Uranium: the final genocide. Land rights, not uranium', poster graphic printed in Mike Mansell's pamphlet critique of *The Last Tasmanian*, 'Racism in Tasmania', 1979.
Source: AIATSIS archival library.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Mansell, *Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Glebe – Racism in Tasmania* (Carlton, Vic, Australian Union of Students, 1979), p. 2.

Months following its screening in Hobart, Bill Mollison gave his criticism of the film on national television, where he completely disregarded the way in which Haydon and Jones had used the term ‘genocide’.

There’s two sorts of genocide in my mind very clearly’, he told national Australian television, ‘There’s no doubt that there was genocide by the gun, but there is also a second sort of genocide [...] the second sort of genocide is to refuse to accept the existence of people with Tasmanian Aboriginal blood [...] Every Tasmanian government has been guilty of it and most Tasmanians have been guilty of it.’¹⁷⁹

A month later, Mollison published an article in which he reiterated this idea of ‘bureaucratic genocide’, which he had first articulated in his 1973 thesis. ‘The Tasmanians are of particular interest, in that they are often instanced as the classical genocide’ he wrote. However, he suggested that:

Pawing [sic] over the past is a sort of scientific way to ensure the genocide myth, as ignoring the people is bureaucratic genocide. If the gun wasn’t sufficiently effective, the ignorance and denial might work? Given land rights, the Aboriginal peoples will survive and thrive. Denied existence, they may well perish.¹⁸⁰

Mollison was directly comparing the idea of ‘genocide’ as the complete extinction of the ‘full-blood’ Tasmanians with new ideas of racial existence, and the emerging idea of ‘genocide’ as a form of psychological alienation. In her opinion piece submitted to *The National Times* in the month the documentary opened in cinemas across Australia, Ryan also commandeered the meaning of ‘genocide’, applying it in a way that preserved the integrity of the present Tasmanians’ claims to Aboriginal identity.

Why must Aborigines be a static people? Why must Aborigines manifest only the traditions, culture and language of the past before they can be considered real? Why

¹⁷⁹ Bill Mollison cited in *The Last Tasmanian: transcript of Monday Conference programme*.

¹⁸⁰ Bill Mollison, ‘Review of Monday Conference (4 Sep. 1978) on *The Last Tasmanian* by R. Jones and T. Haydon’, *Arena*, 1978, no. 51, pp. 8-9.

is it that the modern Tasmanian Aborigines in particular must be denied reality? Is it because we were taught at school that the Tasmanian Aborigines were exterminated, and that to acknowledge survivors would deny that genocide? On the contrary, by acknowledging survivors we are confronted with a community of people whom we have ignored, rejected and oppressed for the last hundred years.¹⁸¹

These reactions to *TLT* suggest that the idea of ‘genocide’ was being cleaved from its association with complete annihilation, and from its predication of an objective racial identity. Mollison used ‘genocide’ to conceptualise the metaphysical obstructions to Tasmanian Aborigines as a social identity; in Ryan’s article, ‘genocide’ referred to the physical killing of ‘first Tasmanians’, but without the implication that this had terminated the existence and survival of Tasmanian *Aboriginality*.

Consistent with Curthoys’ observation about the international understanding of Tasmania as an instance of ‘genocide’, the *The Last Tasmanian* was highly acclaimed by international audiences when it aired on BBC television in 1978. Amongst mainstream Australian audiences, *TLT* also enjoyed remarkable success, being shown on the Ten Network, and in the annual Australian television awards in 1979, the film received the best single documentary award.¹⁸² However, as the critical perspective of Mansell, Mollison and Ryan became better known and accepted in the 1980s, Haydon and Jones’ evocation of the idea of Tasmanian genocide came to be seen as both historically and politically incorrect. In 1984, literary critic Tom O’Regan published an essay reflecting on the political dimensions of the production:

Since *The Last Tasmanian* was made in 1978 there has been an increasing awareness of the politics and the depiction of Aborigines and the politics of that depiction.

Indeed, in a re-release of the film the controversial parts, on which I have focused,

¹⁸¹ Lyndall Ryan, ‘The Last Tasmanian’, *National Times*, 12 August, 1978, p. 5.

¹⁸² O’Regan, Tom, ‘Documentary in Controversy: *The Last Tasmanian*’ [1984], in Sylvia Lawson et. al., *An Australian Film Reader*, (Sydney: currency press, 1985), p. 127.

were deleted. The fact that they were controversial tells us something about the differing and evolving ways in which Australians understood the Aboriginal question.¹⁸³

In the same year, prominent Tasmanian Aboriginal activist and writer, Ida West, published her memoir *Pride Against Prejudice*. She introduces her readers to the history of her people as one of ‘horror’:

From the first contact by white man, Tasmanian Aboriginal people have been systematically, and in a cold blooded manner, culturally savaged. A direct result of this systematic genocide is the present major struggle of our Aboriginality – a legacy of colonial days which is divested on both the descendants of the Empire which dispossessed my people.¹⁸⁴

As Australians became more familiar with ‘the Aboriginal perspective’, and Australian scholarship about the survival of the Tasmanian Aborigines developed in the 1970s and early 1980s, the idea of ‘Tasmanian genocide’, was liberated from its association with Tasmanian extinction and appropriated, in different ways, by scholars of Tasmanian history and Tasmanian Aboriginal activists. Outside of Australia, the ‘genocide myth’ about Tasmania has remained a reputable and commonly referenced idea.¹⁸⁵ Though Curthoys does not explore the reason for this discrepancy, there is a suggestion that both globally and within Australia, historical proximity to Aboriginal peoples’ subjective realities significantly determined how the idea of ‘genocide’ could be appropriately applied to describe their experiences of racial persecution.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁸⁴ West, Ida, *Pride Against Prejudice: Reminiscences of a Tasmanian Aborigine*, (Canberra: Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1984), p. v.

¹⁸⁵ Ann Curthoys presents her recent findings on both popular and scholarly references to this idea that have continued into the present, see ‘Genocide in Tasmania’, p. 241.

Conclusion

The development of the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League under the leadership of Stan Davey and Doug Nicholls in the late 1950s and 1960s illustrates an important development within the Australian understanding of Aboriginal survival, existence, and destruction. The objectification of Aboriginal identity, as an empirically defined 'race', gave rise to a new acceptance of Aboriginal people as an adapting culture, unified by a largely shared experience of social and political persecution. These developments altered how people understood the conditions for Aboriginal 'existence' and 'white violence' against Aborigines. In 1959, a new interpretation of 'genocide' as the effacement of Aboriginal consciousness was first invoked by Davey to critique the psychological effects of assimilation policy upon Aborigines as an emergent social collectivity. Davey's interpretation of 'genocide' in this context can be seen as directly tied to his knowledge of Elkin's anthropology, and his own personal participation in 'the Aboriginal perspective'.

In designating Aboriginal people as the victims of targeted violence, the notion of Aboriginal 'genocide' helped to consolidate the political ethnogenesis of Aboriginal people. The idea that Aboriginal 'existence' pertained to a social or metaphysical realm – in collective consciousness – gave rise to new concepts of racial violence, whereby 'genocide' became descriptive of paternalistic policies and attitudes that compromised Aborigines' self-respect and will to perpetuate their Aboriginality. In chronicling the status of Tasmanian Aborigines and the idea of Tasmanian 'genocide' during this period, I have sought to show how the prevalence of a subjective notion of Aboriginality rendered associations between

'racial extinction' and 'complete genocide' unacceptable. Haydon and Jones' documentary may be viewed as one of the last expressions of the moral historicism deployed by Bonwick (1870) and Turbull (1948) before conceptual paradigms of race shifted to make their thesis politically and intellectually untenable. During this time, Tasmanian Aborigines appropriated the idea of 'genocide' as they came closer to understanding themselves as part of that pan-Aboriginal collective identity, disassociating it from the narrative of their extinction.

The meaning that 'genocide' has had for Aboriginal people in Australia has not only been deployed in the subjective *context* of political activism, it has also referred to a subjective *experience* of psychological effacement. This raises important questions for scholars of 'genocide' in Australia who rely upon the ability to objectively identify 'genocide' in the historical past or present. Davey, Bill Mollison, and others demonstrated where the 'outsider' can gain subjective insights into the experience of Aboriginal identity control, and recognise that process as a version of death or killing. For the historian, the route to understanding or uncovering those feelings and ethnological processes is less clear; how do we, as legal or historical scholars, approach the task of identifying the kind of metaphysical 'genocide' that has been overwhelmingly portrayed by Aboriginal activists since the 1960s? The recognition of genocide in the experience of psychological identity effacement is fundamentally distinct from the working definitions of genocide that are necessary to undertaking histories of 'genocide' as events. In attempting to chronicle the way that Australians have used 'genocide' in different historical contexts, it is hoped that this study comes

some way towards recovering the range of Australian perspectives on 'genocide', and particularly Aboriginal perspectives.

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