



Top: Sam Kennedy, Cowra N.S.W., July 1979.  
Bottom: Frank Simpson, Young N.S.W., May 1979.  
*Photographs by Peter Read.*

# FATHERS AND SONS: A STUDY OF FIVE MEN OF 1900\*

Peter Read

So that's what the young men of today say! They are like that — our successors!

I.S. Turgenev *Fathers and sons*

This paper is concerned with the lives of five men who had a close connection with Erambie Aboriginal Station, West Cowra, New South Wales. In the course of recorded conversations during 1979 they told me of their lives, attitudes and opinions. Their names are Frank Broughton (born at Brungle Aboriginal Station, near Tumut, in 1895), Paul Coe (Senior) (born in Cowra in 1900), Locky Ingram (born at Narrandera in 1903), Sam Kennedy (born at Junee in 1905) and Frank Simpson (born at Narrandera in 1903).

Several interweaving strands in their lives are examined. The first is their part in the industrial or rural workforce. All able-bodied Aborigines living on reserves or stations were required to seek work. At Cowra, since the Erambie reserve was too small for serious cultivation, the men sought employment in the white community. This paper is an attempt to assess the effect of several decades of working in this environment and the extent to which these men, as children, received education in the traditional language and culture of the Wiradjuri people. Since the men spent considerable periods of their lives living on or near managed reserves like Erambie, the effect of institutionalised life on residents is also discussed. A comparison is made between the views and attitudes of the five men and some of the younger people living at Erambie. It is argued that the circumstances and environment into which these men were born and grew to maturity were different to those experienced by other Aboriginal generations, and that these circumstances created attitudes and opinions peculiar to their generation.

Beckett has described a period of respite for north-western Aborigines in the 1880s. For a decade or two there was a period of calm between the violence of the first conquest and the more intensive

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European settlement of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> In the south-eastern portion of Wiradjuri country, an area roughly encircled by Narrandera, Tumut, Yass and Cowra, this period had already ended by 1880. The first pastoral settlement along the Lachlan occurred in the early 1830s; a decade later there were probably Aborigines living around the larger stations. No reliable population estimates are available for the Cowra area, but a comparison may be made with the 1845 Report of the Land Commissioner for the Wellington Valley, some one hundred kilometres north of Cowra. He estimated that half the Aborigines lived on settlers' stations, and the rest visited them occasionally. Nearly all the Aborigines gathered about the stations in winter.<sup>2</sup>

The passing of the Robertson Land Acts in 1861 brought intensive land settlement much earlier to the Lachlan valley than it did to the north-west. The increasing number of small-scale free selectors in the decades following the Land Acts must have intensified the process of forcing those Aborigines living occasionally in the bush away from their traditional hunting and gathering grounds. A selector typically occupied less than six hundred acres and employed few, if any, hired labourers. It is probable that during the 1860s and 1870s the free selectors not only came to occupy land formerly held as leasehold by large estates, but also land which had hitherto been regarded as the preserve of Aborigines.

By 1900 the process of breaking up the large estates in the Lachlan region was far advanced. This contrasts with the north-west, where Beckett traces the dissolution of the old holdings to the period after the First World War.<sup>3</sup> In the Cowra district some of the large holdings which had survived the incursions of the free selectors succumbed to the financiers.<sup>4</sup> Many came under the control of banks or agricultural companies which probably found permanent Aboriginal station communities less acceptable than many paternalist squatter families had done. The pressure to move Aborigines from the stations probably intensified during the depression of the middle 1880s and the drought of the late 1890s and Aboriginal station people were encouraged to leave. Within a couple of decades the process was complete. For instance at one of the oldest stations, North Logan, it is recalled that the last of the Aboriginal community had moved to Cowra by 1910.<sup>5</sup>

Circumstantial evidence also points to a considerable population shift by the Lachlan Aborigines towards towns like Cowra in the 1890s. The 1891 *Annual Report* of the newly formed Aborigines

1 Beckett 1978.

2 Report of the Lachlan Region Land Commissioner, 10 January 1845:1.

3 Beckett 1978:20.

4 Cf. Butlin 1950:95.

5 Recorded conversation Mrs Elizabeth Bennett, Cowra, 5 April 1979. Read Tape T105.

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Protection Board noted that the Aborigines near Cowra were employed only occasionally by selectors and station owners.<sup>6</sup> The local Member of Parliament stated in 1897 that they had no home to go to nor work to do.<sup>7</sup> Complaints by the European residents of Cowra about Aborigines around the town, first mentioned in the Board *Report* of 1894, may be taken as evidence of a fairly sudden and recent influx of Aborigines from the stations.

A further attempt was made by some of the residents of Cowra to have the Aborigines removed from the vicinity of the township, but in the absence of any other suitable site, and in view of the fact that there is a school for Aborigines at Erambie which the children attend regularly, the Board decided not to interfere in the matter.<sup>8</sup> Further complaints were noted in the Board's reports for 1903 and 1904.<sup>9</sup> Finally in 1924 the Erambie Reserve became a supervised Aboriginal station:

As a result of complaints by the townspeople of Cowra regarding the necessity of resident supervision of Aborigines residing on and visiting the local Reserve, the Board decided to establish a regular Station at that place, and a substantial residence was, as a consequence, erected, and a Teacher-Manager appointed.<sup>10</sup>

The economic and social forces which drove station Aborigines into towns were not confined to the Cowra district. A European resident recalled the last of the Aborigines leaving Ironbong station near Cootamundra in about 1910.<sup>11</sup> In the same year a manager was appointed to the reserve at Yass to deal with people whom the Board characterized as 'a source of annoyance' to the townspeople.<sup>12</sup>

No first-hand memories of the depopulation of the stations survive. Yet it is probable that the period 1890-1910 was one of disorientation and confusion for the Aborigines. They left pastoral stations which

6 Aborigines Protection Board. *Report* 1891:11.

7 *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, Series I, Vol. 90:4543, 10 November 1897. See also I/96:3131, 8 December 1898.

8 Aborigines Protection Board. *Report* 1894:8. The population of Erambie, as recorded in the Board's Reports based on the annual police census was:

1894	47	1901	54	1910	64
1895	55	1902	58	1911	67
1896	39	1903	57	1912	73
1897	53	1904	57	1913	48
1898	47	1905	not recorded	1914	73
1899	47	1906	not recorded	1915	73
1900	51	1909	58		

After 1915 the populations of individual reserves and stations were not included in the Reports.

9 Aborigines Protection Board. *Report* 1903:6; 1904:5.

10 *Report* 1924:1.

11 Personal communication, Mrs Jennifer Baldry, Cootamundra, 12 February 1980.

12 Aborigines Protection Board. *Report* 1910:10.

had been their home for many years and children born after 1900 in the Cowra district were the first generation to know only the government reserve as a home.

To the disorientation which must have accompanied the drift to the towns was added the confusing and at times contradictory legislation concerning Aborigines. As the five men reached maturity the inconsistencies must have become fully apparent. Although the section of the 1924 *Report* referring to the installation of a manager at Cowra implied that Aborigines were unwelcome about the towns, the policy regarding employment remained unchanged.

No one is allowed to remain in idleness on a Reserve, there to get into trouble and raise another generation of illegitimate children who would also become a burden on the State.<sup>13</sup>

Persons who ought to be working, according to the 1909 *Aborigines Act*, were not allowed to remain on a reserve. Regulation 28 required managers to withhold rations from anyone who refused work. These contradictory attempts to fill the stations with Aborigines and simultaneously empty them of able-bodied males may be seen as a legislative response both to white residents in country towns and to financial policies intended to keep station costs as low as possible. Broughton certainly remembered the punitive effect of regulation 28 at Erambie: 'We could have stayed on the mission — and starved!'

Unlike the reserves at Warangesda, on the Murrumbidgee, and Brungle, Erambie was too small a reserve to support itself. Only some five hectares were available for cultivation though this appears to have been rarely used. Thus the five men, in company with most of the other able bodied men at Erambie, were forced by the manager to seek work in the white community.

Simpson as a boy lived near Brungle, occasionally travelling with his white father, an itinerant musician. When he moved to Cowra in the 1920s he became a general farm labourer. Coe and several of his brothers were taken from an unsupervised life at Canowindra to the Mittagong Welfare Home in accordance with a provision of the Act.<sup>14</sup> His father was a drover and therefore away for long periods. Coe recalled that a woman was supposed to look after them, but she was seldom there. He went to Mittagong when he was about ten and two years later was 'apprenticed' as a dairy hand before he returned to his father. In the early 1930s he returned to Erambie which became his base for employment as a drover. Kennedy's father, a white man, was a bootmaker living in Sydney until the 1919 influenza epidemic led

<sup>13</sup> *Report* 1924:2.

<sup>14</sup> The Aborigines Protection Act of 1909 provided in 11(1) that any child of an Aboriginal, or the neglected child of any person 'apparently having an admixture of Aboriginal blood in his veins' might be bound by indenture to a master. The Kinchela Home for Aboriginal boys opened in 1924.

him to set up his business at Woodstock, near Cowra. A relative of his Aboriginal mother, who lived at Erambie, came to visit. Shortly before or after this visit the family split up; Kennedy's father moved away, and Sam saw him only once more. The rest of the family, including Sam, eventually settled on the edge of Erambie. Ingram, like many men whose families had once lived at Warangesda Mission Station near Darlington Point, learned to shear at Kooba Station nearby. Broughton also worked at Kooba. He was permanently employed as a woolshed hand and later, based at Erambie, followed a career in general labouring.

One of the most significant aspects of employment for these Aborigines was that their work-mates were mostly Europeans. All of them stated that at times they were the only Aborigines in their immediate group. The pressure to conform to the predominant white ethos — a pressure not felt so strongly by those working with other Aborigines on the larger reserves — must have been very strong. Beckett noted that '[s]ome Aborigines, particularly half castes, were able to enter the ranks of the drovers and shearers and become "smart men". Nor did this require a drastic change in their identity, for in the fluid conditions of the frontier, work was the primary mode of identification, and the society made few other demands.'<sup>15</sup> Away from the frontier, this generalisation lacks force. Aboriginal identity was required to be suppressed if success or acceptance was to be gained. This seems to have taken the form of an apparent disinterest in the Aboriginal past, which I shall discuss below, and a positive acceptance of certain European values.

The European ethic of diligent work-as-its-own-reward was one aspect of European values which emerged strongly in conversations with the men. Each of them described aspects of their work in detail. Broughton claimed that he could always find work whenever he wanted it; Coe that he had never been sacked in his life; Ingram that he had 'rung' Wanaaring shed, on the Paroo, in 1926. Kennedy summarised his career thus:

I was a linesman, leading hand linesman, on the Central West County Council, electricity. I was there for 37½ years, I think. It was all right, it was a pretty good job. I used to boss the rural crew, all these farmers and all that, and I built all them rural lines out, you know, ninety per cent of them anyway, for thirty miles round the town here.

Q: So you started off as a labourer and then got into the technical side after that?

Yeah, got into the technical side. Yeah, and I was troubleshooter for about thirty odd, thirty-three years I think. Used to do a lot of night work, you know, chasing troubles all over the countryside.

<sup>15</sup> Beckett 1978:27.

Only Simpson was less than proud of his work record: he seemed to have spent his life in casual rural work along the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers. He preferred to talk of his travels and adventures rather than his work. As will be seen below, his knowledge of, and interest in traditional matters was greater than that of the other four. It is possible that a relationship exists between his lack of success in the white world and his Aboriginal interests. Nevertheless the impression gained with the other four men is that they willingly joined the white labour force at a time when skilled labour was highly valued. Their Aboriginality was held to be of less consequence than their competence, not only by their employers, but perhaps by themselves as well. Ingram gave food, but not money, to the Aboriginal community at Wanaaring Station and he lived in the shearers' quarters. Coe once distributed a box of biscuits to Aborigines camped alongside the railway on the Nullarbor. Apparently as they went from job to job, or rose in seniority, they acquired a degree of self-reliance lacking among the permanent residents of Erambie. In conversations they were proud, sometimes fiercely proud, of their work records. Ingram summarised succinctly his estimation of the work ethic: 'I had respect. So long as I did my work I was right.'

Also noticeable in conversations was a lack of knowledge about, and an apparent disinterest in, the traditional Aboriginal past. None of the men knew the Wiradjuri language well. Simpson and Ingram had a vocabulary of about thirty words each, and to the latter such knowledge was only a curiosity. None of them could recall suppression of the language by teachers or managers.<sup>16</sup> Yet neither could they recall any instruction by a grandmother or other relative who might have passed on traditional knowledge. Only Simpson could indicate that he had derived his information from a particular person: his mother. The shift from the stations, the increasing number of 'part-Aboriginal' people compared to those of full descent, the absence of relatives working far away, all seem to have changed Aboriginal family life. By 1900 it appears to have been common for children to grow up separated from relatives who might have been expected to take an interest in their 'education'. Coe and Kennedy spent their youth without direct contact with any older Aboriginal besides a single parent. All the consultants seem to have grown up exposed neither to traditional languages nor to ritual customs. It is likely, in fact, that although the

16 The journal of the Australian Inland Mission, *Our Aim*, contains records of missionary activity at Brungle, Warangesda and occasionally Erambie in the first decades of this century. For instance, the issue of March 1910 (3(7):3) noted that the manager had allowed Alick Russell, A.I.M. Native Helper at Brungle, to hold services in the homes of certain people, and to hold Sunday School for about twenty children.

five men regarded language and ritual as a single entity of 'Aboriginal matters', the performance of traditional rituals had ceased a generation before the Wiradjuri language fell into disuse.

In the absence of evidence that the use of the language was suppressed by whites, two other explanations must be considered: that the knowledge of the language was withheld from the children of 1900 by their parents, or that the children were not interested in learning it. Reay, in the 1940s, noted the reluctance of some of the old people in the rural west of New South Wales to speak their language, and their confusion and shame if one of their number spoke it in front of unsympathetic Europeans.<sup>17</sup>

The five men were unable to provide much information as to why their knowledge of the language was slight. Broughton remarked that he picked up a few words while at Brungle, but that he never used them away from the community: 'I wouldn't have been too flash to use my own language'. One fifty-year-old Cowra woman suggested that the language was deliberately withheld from her mother's generation.

Q: Could your parents speak Wiradjuri?

Not my mum and dad, but my nanna could. She came over at Brungle . . . You weren't allowed to sit down and listen to them talk. Wouldn't talk in front of you.

Q: Why not?

I don't know, that's the thing that's got us puzzled. I mean, that's why none of us know the language . . . They were old when I was young, that's in the thirties, before '37. They were old women, so they'd be born . . . two generations back. See they wouldn't even talk it in front of my mother, and that, very rarely. They were very funny people, the older ones. They had to get in that little group, all that one age group, then they'd talk among themselves. But if you walked up, say you were an Aborigine, you walked up, they'd just close up like a clam.<sup>18</sup>

She did not know whether the old people in question, who comprised the generation of the parents of the five consultants, concealed the language for its own sake, or because they were talking about secret matters. A fifty year old Tumut man told me that the Wiradjuri language disappeared because it involved secret rituals no longer practised.<sup>19</sup> There is certainly evidence of the same pressures being

<sup>17</sup> Reay 1949:91.

<sup>18</sup> Recorded conversation Mrs Valerie Simpson, Cowra, 14 April 1979, T100. One of the few recordings of the Wiradjuri language was made by Luise Hercus of Fred Freeman, Brungle, 23 December 1963. The original is in the possession of Dr Hercus.

<sup>19</sup> Recorded conversation Mr Vince Bolger, Tumut, 8 March 1980, T137.



applied to both ritual and language elsewhere in Australia. Tamsin Donaldson noted a reluctance among some old people at Murrin Bridge to speak of ritual matters in front of younger Aborigines. Strehlow's evidence suggests that some old Aranda men wanted to keep information secret, and also that young men were not always prepared to listen to their elders. The present writer has found some evidence of concealment of ritual knowledge from young boys in the Northern Territory.<sup>20</sup>

The old people may have tried to cling to a last scrap of prestige or they may have thought their children were so dominated by foreign 'civilisation' that they did not deserve to be taught the language. While their children attended the government school at Erarnbie or at other stations there were fewer opportunities for learning to take place. As the five consultants reached maturity and joined the workforce, often in the company of Europeans, there were even fewer opportunities to speak the language.

It is probable that while many of the older generation were still fluent speakers of Wiradjuri in 1900, a decline in ritual practice had already occurred. R.H. Mathews, writing in the 1890s, had to rely on hearsay accounts twenty-five years old to describe a full initiation ceremony among the southern Wiradjuri. He noted that tooth evulsion, a stage of young men's initiation rituals, had fallen into disuse by 1896 owing to the occupation of the country by Europeans.<sup>21</sup> Not unexpectedly, the five consultants were able to tell me little of the ritual traditions. Only Simpson could contribute any information. In this sketchy account he describes an occurrence at Goolagong, forty kilometres west of Cowra:

Me and a mate, a cobber of mine, were camped in one place, and there was an initiation going on. In the middle of the night, Jack wakes me up. He said, "We'd better get out of this." I said, "Why"? He said, "Look at the fire." [We] just walked away about two hundred yards.

Q: Could you hear anything, that time?

Nothing.

Q: How did you know the ceremony was going on then, if you couldn't hear anything?

Oh, tell with the gum trees, all marked. You couldn't read it, I couldn't. All chopped in, in a box tree. But it was dry. All this writing was there. Well there was initiation going on, where we were camped.

Simpson also remembered some advice from his mother:

<sup>20</sup> Tamsin Donaldson, personal communication, October 1979. Strehlow 1947: preface; 1971: XXXV; Read and Read 1978:225-8 (MS. in A.I.A.S. Library).

<sup>21</sup> Mathews 1896; 1897:115. See also Howitt 1904:584-5.

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She said, "and when you're coming into a strange camp, my son, always pluck a gum leaf, a gum leaf, carry it in your hand, walk in," she said. "One fellow," she said, "walked straight in the camp and he never had no gum leaf." She said, "do you know where they found his head? On a stump facing back from where he came. Killed him. Killed him stone dead."

Q: Why?

Didn't belong to the tribe. In them days they were very strict. You couldn't do that, you were breaking the laws, and the laws was their main statutes and judgments. Death was the penalty. Death was the penalty.

On another occasion Simpson told me that plans were made to initiate him. An old man at Moree had suggested it because, Simpson speculated, his friendship with a local girl might have caused trouble. The old man went away and Simpson never saw him again. Like Beckett's consultant, Newton, Simpson was 'never about when the ceremonies were on' even though he recalled in 1979 that he had no objection to undergoing what was required.<sup>22</sup> Ingram remembered that the boys were initiated by tooth evulsion and were taken out to be 'shown the country'. The other three consultants remembered, or appeared to remember, nothing. Commenting on Simpson's 'initiation ceremony' Broughton remarked pointedly, 'I never saw any initiations, and I reckon Simpson didn't either'. Both were reared in the same general area. From the evidence of the five men it appears that in the southern and eastern portions of Wiradjuri country most of the ritual culture had been abandoned shortly after they were born.

Simpson's accounts of ritual life appear to be all that have survived in the memories of the five men. What remained of the old ways and the language may have been concealed from them, though fear of ridicule may have discouraged them from speaking about what they really knew. It may be that such knowledge, suppressed for so long, is now difficult for them to recover. It is also possible that knowledge has been concealed from the present writer. Yet there was nothing to suggest the conscious or unconscious dissembling experienced by Hausfeld at Woodenbong.<sup>23</sup> In the course of some fifty conversations with older people along the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers I have met no one who could remember more than thirty or forty Wiradjuri words, or knew more than Simpson about the traditional culture. One seventy year old man born at Brungle, Fred Collins, actually asked me why the Aborigines of the North Coast knew so much about their traditional culture, and his own people so little. He too had spent a good deal of his life away from other Aborigines. No suggestions

<sup>22</sup> Beckett 1958:104.

<sup>23</sup> Hausfeld 1963.

survive either in the Aborigines Protection Board records or in other sources, such as newspapers, that ritual was practised in the region after about 1900. The men seemed so willing to talk about themselves, and I can think of no good reason why *all* of them should conceal information at a time when a considerable *kudos* would attach to the recounting of traditional stories to younger people. Yet no one at Erambje was able to tell me stories which *they* had learned from the older people. Their knowledge about traditional matters, they said, had come from books.

While it seems apparent that among the survivors of this generation little knowledge of the language or the traditional culture has survived, we should also consider whether the *survivors* are in fact typical of their generation. The five men were subjected to government assimilation policies which demanded acceptance of certain working- and middle-class ethics of European culture. Yet there were the alternatives of alcohol, life on the river bank, and the violence typified by Jimmy Governor. Several of the consultants' relatives died many years ago from cirrhosis of the liver, exposure or violence. Yet the diligent, the fearful, the humble and the pragmatic perhaps form the majority in any repressed society. Most institutionalised Aborigines accepted the rules (and a good part of the beliefs, folklore and prejudice) of European supervisors and workmates. It may be that some of those Aborigines who died younger were more at odds with the system: they risked death by exposure or alcoholism on the river bank rather than live on a reserve and be forced into the European workforce. It is possible that they knew more of the language and traditional culture. Yet all the evidence, both written and oral, points to the conclusion that by 1920 the ritual traditions were abandoned and the language was in decline in the Cowra and Brungle regions of Wiradjuri territory. Whatever knowledge the five men possessed they were under pressure to repress it as they worked in the European community.

A picture emerges of the kind of life these men lived in the first three decades of this century. They had been reared on or close to European institutions. They had not been exposed to much of the traditional culture. They worked at employment which they had to find themselves, and upon which they were expected to support themselves and their families. Away from the reserves their life was comparatively free of repressive legislation. For instance, they were for the most part left alone by the police. Coe stated that out bush he could drink in any hotel he pleased. Broughton, working at Parkes, was granted an exemption certificate in 1951 which enabled him to drink legally in a hotel. A shearer like Ingram was treated (he stated) much the same as a white man. From the outline I have drawn one might have expected the self-confidence of these men to have been the equal of any European of the same age. Yet in all our conversations I was

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aware of an underlying insecurity. There were cracks in their apparent self-confidence. It was as if a desire to show whites that Aborigines were as good as anyone had been an important motivation in their lives. In unsolicited remarks like 'I never had the sack in my life' there was a plea for recognition. An awareness that in the end Europeans did not accept them as social equals, despite their best efforts in a free enterprise market, was never far away in our conversations.

Practically all Aborigines in New South Wales stood in the shadow of the *Aborigines Act*, the managed institution, the police. The end of seasonal work, the closing down of projects and the desire of the men to rejoin their families ensured a period of at least several months' residence on Erambie every year. After the depression the *Aborigines Act* was amended (8A(1), No.32 of 1936) so that any Aboriginal 'living in insanitary or undesirable conditions' might be removed to a reserve on the order of a magistrate. Work was never so easy to find again. The drover Coe and the shearer Ingram, because of their skills, continued to be employed; Broughton and Kennedy (they stated) because they were hard workers. Yet all of them after the depression were periodically unemployed and in those periods lived on or near Erambie.<sup>24</sup> As residents of the town or station they were now subject to the repressive legislation embodied in the *Aborigines Act*.

Life on a station like Erambie was governed by restrictions. Permission had to be sought to enter a station or reserve; the brother or spouse of a station resident might be denied permission to visit. Gambling, unseemly words, violence and the consumption of alcohol were prohibited. Houses were inspected regularly for cleanliness. Numerous Erambie residents have stated that it was commonplace for the police to enter houses without a search warrant and to arrest an occupant.<sup>25</sup> Humiliations, at least in European terms, were common. Simpson was dragged by the heels by a manager at Brungle for being an illegal entrant. Ingram spent several periods in jail for consuming alcohol on the station. In addition to the often arbitrary exercise of the manager's very wide powers, many people told me of personal grievances over illegal actions by managers. Coe, for instance, though in his thirties, was given a thrashing by the manager without explanation. Broughton was told to move to Yass to collect his old age pension, though he was legally entitled to receive it at Erambie.

Some of the resentment at these incidents can be traced to the fact that the managers treated the men as though they were of little account; as though they had not made their way in the world independently. Another former Erambie resident, born in 1920, expressed the same feeling:

<sup>24</sup>As a boy Kennedy spent some time at Erambie school, and lived near the Station. Since then he has lived in Cowra and has had little to do with Erambie.

<sup>25</sup>Much of the evidence in this paragraph is drawn from Read 1980: ch. 5.

One of me best mates, he wanted to come in. This is only in recent years. The manager wanted to know, "Where'd you get permission from to come onto here?" "Oh, just come in to see me mate. I've known him for years."

"Well didn't you know you had to come over here first to the manager's residence and report first?"

And I thought I was pretty much up in the world and above that sort of thing! <sup>26</sup>

Yet the speaker then went on to defend the entry-permit system for keeping out undesirable visitors. He shared the ambiguous attitude towards some of the injustices of the past which was noticeable amongst the five principal consultants. Perhaps as a consequence of the periods spent under managerial control, this generation apparently has a basic respect for lawful authority, even when it acted unlawfully. This is not to deny that there may have been periods of benevolent rule by certain managers, yet it was obvious that younger people at Erambie are far less tolerant at the injustices of the past than the five principal consultants. The self-reliance learned in bush-work did not necessarily imply a disrespect for authority. For instance, Simpson related how he had once found some dead sheep carcasses in a paddock after a bushfire. Unlike the bushman of the Australian legend he did not help himself; he asked permission to take one. (He was refused, though he was offered some other food.) Early education about the place of an Aboriginal in the European world and the authoritarian rule prevailing on government reserves, created attitudes rather different from white men of the same generation. Amongst them, Gammage suggests that self-reliance and a contempt for constituted authority went hand in hand.<sup>27</sup>

Aborigines on Erambie lived under an imposed authority and on the periphery of European social and economic life. On pastoral stations or in industrial workplaces they were men of more consequence. Skilled workers like Kennedy, Ingram and Coe must have been of considerable value to their employers. Younger people at Erambie today find it hard to understand the attitudes and values of these five men. They were assimilated more successfully into the dominant culture than any other generation, including that which grew to maturity in the 1950s and 1960s when the official assimilation policy was at its height. In the terms of this dominant culture one might have expected a wide gap to have existed between the parents of these men, who held the last of the secrets, and the men themselves, who were told nothing. Yet a wider gap appears to exist today between this generation and their grandchildren. The young people declaim against

<sup>26</sup> Recorded conversation Mr Gordon Simpson, Cowra, 14 August 1979, T125.

<sup>27</sup> Gammage 1974: ch. 4.

managers whom they scarcely remember, while the old people, admitting they suffered under the Act, recall the past with affection.

Current attitudes are framed by group pressures and by personal experience. We cannot be sure that the comparative disharmony between the five consultants and their parents actually existed in the way it was described in 1979. Fifty years may have sharpened – or blunted – the animosity between generations. Old people may seek refuge in memories of the past in the face of hostility or lack of understanding by the young. Similarly the experiences of the consultants and their own young people have been different. Conversations with people under thirty at Erambie suggest that police harassment of Aborigines at Cowra and elsewhere worsened in the mid-1950s, reached a peak in the mid-1960s, and is now in decline. This story by a twenty nine year old man is typical of such incidents.

I know when I worked at Wee Waa, in the cotton up there, – first day I walked into town, I had a place to stay, and money in my pocket, and I got vagged. I got ten days for it . . . See I'd come from Moree and Wee Waa, and I was going down. I'd seen the cotton manager . . . and I was ready to start the next morning. They lived down at the cotton gin, see, all the blacks. Some lived in bloody caravans, the others in tents, you know, and I was staying with them, see. With people down there. And I was walking down toward the cotton gin, I got lumbered. Copper pulled up and asked me my name, and where I was going. I told him how much I had [about twenty-five dollars] and I was to start the next day. Took me to the cop shop and I got ten days out of it for vag . . . [I worked round] the cop shop, washed their cars and mowed the lawn and that, and after I come out of there I was told to piss off out of town.<sup>28</sup>

Both the substance and tone of this account are in sharp contrast to the work memories of the old men. Harsh, unjust or illegal acts by authorities may have been less frequent up to 1930 because most Aboriginal males were in the workforce, and were not seen as a threat to order, as they were in the 1960s. Therefore they did not experience directly the change in police and local European attitudes. The relaxation of restrictions regarding citizenship, voting and drinking rights created the atmosphere of the freedom rides, the radical black movement and the Tent Embassy. In Cowra events were quieter, yet several young people have told me that their awareness of an Aboriginal identity of which they could be proud began by hearing about more radical events in other towns.<sup>29</sup> With this awareness has come a

<sup>28</sup> Recorded conversation Mr Richard Murray, Erambie, 5 April 1979, T95.

<sup>29</sup> For example, recorded conversation Mr Michael Williams, Erambie, 15 April 1979, T104.

loss of sympathy for older Aborigines who are unenthusiastic about the radical black movement. One of my consultants was referred to derisively by a man in his twenties as 'The white blackfeller. He'd never been to jail in his life!'

In country towns like Cowra, freedom had a price unperceived by older Aborigines because they were not asked to pay it. Black militancy, even a black presence in town, stirred the old fears of European residents. One Aboriginal witness stated that it was not unknown in the 1960s for an arrest to be made as a man stepped over the Erambie boundary.<sup>30</sup> Freedom within the law coupled with repressive actions by Europeans have caused a resentment and a hostility in the young which the old men cannot understand:

Paul Coe Sr.:

Well they want anything, they can go there [to the Aboriginal Legal Service] and get it. Now what are they doing if there's a court case, any Aborigine to be tried. Get a lawyer, take a lawyer, get a special lawyer. Put the file in on him I suppose and all that sort of business. Years and years ago they had to battle for themselves. No help like that. There's two or three young fellers been working in this legal service. They've had cars and all to run around in, run round for pubs and one thing and another. They've got them in the country, they've got them all over the place. Years ago Aborigines wasn't treated like that. And they were better off. And respected better. Some of the young generation now, they're not worth two bob. They're . . . they're . . . I don't know.

Q: It certainly sounds as though you've been respected all your life. My word I was. I lived up to it. I tried to do it. You know what I mean. I done my best for everybody. Lived with them and done the rights things.

Q: I suppose young people might say, 'the coppers have got bad, so that's why we *need* the legal service'.

They've made it that way themselves. The young generation have made it that way themselves.

A second reason for the widening gap between the old and the young lies in the sense of *temps perdu* common among many old people, and strongest among those who have lost a controlling authority. A similar phenomenon, though in a different context, was noted by Barwick among old people regarding their time at Coranderk and Cumerogunga. There the early farming period was looked back to as a 'golden age of prosperity and security'.<sup>31</sup> Life probably was never so

30 Recorded conversation Mr Neville Williams, Erambie, 16 May 1979, T106.

31 Barwick 1972:14.

harmonious at Erambie. Concerts, games and religious revival meetings are remembered nostalgically and cited as evidence of a more stable past. Though numerous instances are recounted of a manager's irrationality or violence, European control is conceded to have had some advantages. Parental control is recalled to have been more effective. The old people, it is said, were shown some respect. Alcohol, controlled, was much less disruptive a force than it is now, and Broughton and Coe could see some advantages in the old drinking restrictions.

Young people are aware of these reflections on the changing pattern of life, and they too look back to a more stable past. Their quest for identity and stability has arched back, not to the youth of their grandparents, but beyond them to the time of the high culture. Accounts by historians and anthropologists, artefacts and maps of tribal divisions are seized upon with the greatest interest. My five principal consultants, however, showed very little enthusiasm for earlier accounts, such as those by Howitt and Mathews. One lady of sixty-six years, tears on her cheeks, lamented the passing of the post-Second World War Christian revival meetings. In contrast her twenty-nine year old relative who related the story of his arrest at Wee Waa, sadly remarked towards the end of our conversation, 'I'd give anything to know my own language.'<sup>32</sup>

If the young people have found a clue to consciousness-raising in a renewed interest in the old ways, it is more difficult to trace the world-view of the five consultants. Beckett suggested that people of the generation of George Dutton rejected the industry, thrift, regard for property and comfort of middle class Europeans, and emulated the model of the white nineteenth century pastoral worker.<sup>33</sup> Yet at Cowra some of the men of 1900 did seem to have accepted the ethics of industry and diligence. Rowley though has suggested that the more closely Aboriginal culture in New South Wales is examined 'the more closely do Aboriginal cultures conform to those of rejected racial minorities in other Western countries'. Later he notes that Aborigines, when denied a common identity with European Australians, have sought a distinctive 'Aboriginal' identity.<sup>34</sup>

Doubtless there are many features common to the culture of the five men which may be identified as similar to other minority groups. A lack of interest in the pre-conquest past may be related to an apparent lack of interest in the facts of the European invasion which the writer has noted in the Northern Territory. For instance one man whose father was shot dead by a policeman at the time of the Coniston massacre in the Northern Territory described the murder (in the

<sup>32</sup> Richard Murray, *ibid.*, recorded conversation Mrs Ethel Wedge, Erambie, 8 April 1979, T95.

<sup>33</sup> Beckett 1965:8.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Rowley 1971:163, 183.



same conversation) as when 'my father met with an accident'.<sup>35</sup> Several times while in Wiradjuri country I was told by older Aborigines that the settlement of the country by Europeans occurred with little violence or bloodshed. Yet the scanty written records of this period suggest the contrary. We could account for this lack of knowledge by a breakdown in communications between several generations, but there is also the possibility that Aboriginal people who have desired to succeed in a European world have unconsciously repressed speculation about, or even knowledge of, the past as the price that must be paid for white acceptance.

It could be argued therefore, that at the time the five men reached maturity in the 1920s there were powerful pressures acting upon those who desired to succeed and to conform to the dominant ethos in thought as well as in action. And in their search for a stable identity the men perhaps fell victim to a widely held, and still prevalent, conviction in both black and white society that Aboriginal culture was dead in New South Wales. A popularised notion of culture involving ritual, dance, language and material artefacts has frequently been invoked to conclude that where these are absent, there can be no true Aboriginal culture. For example, consider this exchange during the 1967 Joint Parliamentary Inquiry into Aboriginal Welfare:

981. (Chairman) When you refer to a race with culture, our information is that there are only 177 full-bloods living in New South Wales. As there are so few full-bloods left, how can you possibly have a culture?

Witness. Well, there is a carryover from the tribal days that you will find around La Perouse and at various other places. Many Aborigines are very skilled in their own particular cultural arts . . .

982. (Chairman) That is arts and crafts, but by "culture" we mean folk lore, songs, or customs. Would that not be almost non-existent among the Aboriginal community?<sup>36</sup>

That the Aboriginal witness did not challenge the Chairman's definition of 'culture' indicates that he, perhaps like my five consultants, had come to believe that his *culture* was dead: yet the five men, though they did not always work with, or even associate with Aborigines, readily acknowledged their Aboriginal *identity*. Nor did they appear to be ashamed of this. Barwick concluded that only half a dozen elementary families in Victoria were so completely assimilated that their earlier identification or association with Aborigines was no longer meaningful to them.<sup>37</sup> In the same way the five consultants at Cowra have clung to the ties of kinship obligations and responsibilities.

35 Recorded conversation Mr Tim Japangardi, Yuendumu, 18 August 1977, T56.

36 Parliament of New South Wales: *Report of the Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines Welfare II*:83.

37 Barwick 1963:28.

While acknowledging their identity they have shown less interest than the young in the revival of black consciousness. The managerial system deprived them of the leadership which might ordinarily have been theirs, and there is no evidence that any of the five men were involved in leadership evolved in opposition to European rule. Perhaps as a consequence they partially came to believe that the management of stations like Erambie was executed better by Europeans than by their own people. In 1979 they had respect, but little authority. Rejected partly by their parents, the men of 1900 have found a *modus vivendi* within an ethical framework which found a partial favour by Europeans, yet was little understood by their own grandchildren.

A further clue to the continuing divisions between Aboriginal generations at Erambie lies in the constant shift in attitude towards them by European people. In the 1880s and during the depression of the 1930s government authorities wanted Aborigines to live on stations and reserves. In the 1920s and 1950s they wanted them to assimilate into the general community. Since the 1960s the assimilation policy has been abandoned by some officials, and adhered to by others. In a country town like Condobolin integration may be encouraged by a teacher, while the town magistrate may proceed as if there were no alternative to the assimilation of the Aboriginal community.<sup>38</sup> Visiting activists and welfare agencies may encourage Aborigines to help themselves, yet in certain towns like Moree white antipathy may be as intense as ever. The immense change in attitude by Europeans has helped to alter Aboriginal self-perceptions, and ensure that no generalisations can be made on the basis of Aboriginal — or white — testimony unless the age and circumstances of each consultant are taken into account. For the young people have suffered as much as the old from the peculiar behaviour of Europeans, but that behaviour has produced not acquiescence but resentment.

The following extracts from conversations indicate how wide the gulf has become:

Locky Ingram (b. 1903):

I was at Nowra, and a lot of dark people up there, see, and they used to be bean picking. And one chap, he had one of them [exemption] cards . . . I walked in the pub, and the barmaid said to me, "what do you want?" I said, "Give us a middy of beer." "Have you got a card?" she said. I said, "What's the card for?" "You've got to have your name on it, and picture on it, on the card." I said, "Excuse me, I'm a Maori." She said, "You're a Maori, are you?" Called the boss. "Are you a Maori?" "Yes," I said. "I was born in Willeroo in New Zealand." So he passed me, see, he served me. So I

<sup>38</sup> Recorded conversation Mr Neil Andrews, Cowra Aboriginal Legal Service, 16 May 1979, T110.

started talking in the "Maori" language: "Abi yu sheebang dabuggee eh". And he started serving me.

Milly Butt (b. 1940):

I think this is one of the things that used to cheese me off. We went, my girlfriend and I, this is about 1960, we went into a hotel, and there were still those laws about Aborigines not being allowed to go into the hotels. So we used to drink at this one regular like, say every Friday night'd be a night out. And one night he says, "The police are coming in, so if they come, youse just tell them that youse are Maoris." I said, "No thanks, I'm Aboriginal. I'm not going to say I'm Maori just to get a drink," so we walked out. There's no way I would deny my identity for anything. It's never entered my mind to say it, to say that I was something else, a Maori or Fijian, or Islander, or what. I believe some of them have done this — maybe they just want to be accepted into white society, . . . but really I feel sorry for these people.<sup>39</sup>

Have the old men erected barriers between themselves and their children and grandchildren in just the same way as their own parents may have done seventy years ago? If so the causes are much the same. Each generation has been subjected to different pressures, by the black community as well as by the white, which have altered attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. Each generation has been only dimly aware of the new pressures which succeeding generations have had to face. Certainly the five consultants would be embarrassed at the force of the words of the last speaker. They were born into a world of European domination. In it they attained, mainly through their own efforts, the status of men of worth in their own eyes, and they hoped, in a wider world. They did not understand the world of their fathers, and they do not understand the world of their grandchildren. Despite the still very strong ties of kinship and sentiment, it is in the values and attitudes of the European world between the wars in which they feel most at home.

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