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STRUGGLE FOR TRUTH :

ABORIGINAL REVIEWERS CONTEST DISABLING PREJUDICE IN PRINT

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the discourse of Aboriginal reviewers to discover what they regard as important ideas to be resisted and contested. By means of documentary analysis of their book reviews this paper brings into focus the language which legitimises action against Aborigines. It is argued that disabling prejudice in print serves broader social functions, particularly the justification for the status devaluation of Aboriginal Australians. However, there is room for optimism in the realisation that Aborigines are gaining the skill to engage in ideology critique, and the emergence of socially critical literature. Throughout this paper teachers and librarians will find criteria for selecting books for (rather than against) Aborigines, while the appendices list resources according to the recommendations of Aboriginal reviewers.

.....

Kaiyu's teacher was there carrying a flag
and calling out, "What do we want?"
And so was the new boy, Tim. Fancy that.
"Land rights. When do we want it? Now!"

(Watson, 1984:12)

Authority: Maureen Watson (1984), an Aborigine and recognised storyteller, is well qualified to author *Kaiyu's Waiting*. An inspirational story to be sure, (but what is the force at work in Aboriginal resistance?) ... *Treatment:* insights into contemporary urban Aboriginality and kinship, (but what gives these people, like many others, the civic courage or democratic spirit to stand up and fight?) ... *Scope:* The contentious questions of Aboriginal land ownership and just compensation serve as underlying themes, (but what sustains their struggles?) ... *Potential use:* helping Aboriginal children and those in solidarity with their cause to appreciate the struggles of which they are the inheritors, (but from where do they get their energy and tenacity?) ... *Special features:* Does not

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flinch from being critical of the status devaluation of Aborigines, (but, what gives Aborigines the courage to maintain their resistance to irrationality, injustice and social divisiveness?)

Aborigines continue their resistance on many fronts. The reality of the multiple forms and sites for constructive Aboriginal resistance, and the circumstances in which they resist need to be addressed. This article seeks to investigate those interpretations and explanations of Aboriginal Australians which are being resisted and contested by Aborigines. An analysis of book reviews written by Aborigines makes it possible to identify those socially constructed and historically generated definitions, expectations and values which provide questionable justification for, and legitimation of, Aboriginal status devaluation. In this way knowledge is stripped of its illusory 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' and made problematic. Knowledge claims, which are fought over in social sites such as the book trade, are part of the struggle for social justice, of the tension within a larger legacy of inequality (Kretovics, 1985:55).

GENERAL IDEA

According to Kemmis and his associates (1983:62-85) 'contestation' should not be regarded as a mere technical problem: rather it should be seen as an integral aspect of the process of social change. Without such contestation, change is likely to be deflected to a simple process of accretion. Any initiatives which propose the modification of the status quo, for example, combatting class, racial, gender and ethnic distortions and biases, imply the existence of conflicting viewpoints. There will be those who defend the approach taken and the ideas purveyed in publications, such as the Duracks (1979, Rev. 10:16) *The Way of the Whirlwind*. There will also be critics. As a European-style fantasy dressed up as an Aboriginal story, *The Way of the Whirlwind* might easily be dismissed for its completely incorrect information about Aboriginal lifestyle and its use of Anglo-Celtic terms to describe supposedly Aboriginal mythical beings. Contestation among various interests should not be seen as surprising or even unusual, for it is the normal and fundamental process by which these competing viewpoints are worked through, frequently in the wilderness of conversation. It is a dialectical process in which social change is achieved through a spiralling tug-of-war between opposing views, thereby moving forward in an attempt to resolve the present discontent.

Sites of contestation between the powerful, militant and resurgent anti-Aboriginal interests and those working for enlightened, emancipatory interests continue to occur in the dimensions of power, language, and practice. In the dimension of language (for example, books, films and television) there are contests of

legitimacy: the terms used to explain Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interactions establish both our understanding of, and our relationship with Aborigines. Aboriginal participation in the book trade is expanding to include authors, reviewers, and distributors. This is an important step towards increasing Aboriginal power and control in this field of contemporary Australian culture.

Recently a means for marketing Aboriginal books has come under control of Aborigines through the Centre for Black Books, Glebe, New South Wales. The Centre's policy for stocking resources is guided less by the profit motive than by its social conscience. Excluded from their stock are publications which are blatantly racist, inaccurate, offensive, or seeking to sensationalise the 'exotic'. For instance, fiction which misappropriates and trivialises Aboriginal cultures, works which merely exploit and misrepresent Aboriginal cultures, and those books using either crude evolutionary theory or religious bigotry are not stocked (Centre for Black Books, 1985:3-4). Oppositional cultural agencies such as the Aboriginal, human rights, feminist, labour, nuclear disarmament and environmental movements, all of which share the same emancipatory interests have, through their bookshops, a basis for solidarity.

The language of books is an important register of changes in the stance taken towards the legitimacy of Aboriginal perspectives. By examining the discourse of Aboriginal reviewers, we can discover what is regarded as important by them. By regarding books about Aborigines as problematic there emerge new priorities and criteria for the reviewer's judgments. Legitimation and acceptance of Aboriginal perspectives is being realised through publications adopting a socially critical rather than a neo-nationalistic perspective. The creative role of conflict in society is typically understated. This is most notable in the denial of various forms of Aboriginal resistance to British colonisation. The strong anti-Aboriginal sentiments prevalent in Australian society which serve to legitimise their status devaluation continue to be contested by Aborigines. Some insight into the truth of this idea may be gained by analysing book reviews by Aborigines. It could similarly be found in the work of Aboriginal authors and book distributors. If this is true, then Aboriginal reviewers must have taken authors to task over questions of 'authority', 'reliability' and 'treatment' (Cook, 1981:51-89). The book trade is the site of significant contests which Aboriginal reviewers can advance by adopting a socially critical perspective in their challenge to distorted communications.

METHODOLOGY

The method employed to investigate this general idea involved a documentary analysis of reviews of books about Aborigines, by Aborigines. This analysis provides a retrospective account of the issues indigenous reviewers have contested and commended. It is necessary to come to understand the felt needs and sufferings of Aborigines from their own point of view, at least as a first step. By a process of 'tracking' (Caulley, 1983:67-77) it was possible to work through reviews searching for evidence which either supported or disproved the above idea.

In order to test this idea it was decided that those reviews by Aborigines and Islanders featured in *Reviewpoint* (herein *Rev.*) would be the focus for analysis. During the period 1980-85, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee (QATSICC) to the Director General of Queensland Education contributed sixty-eight reviews to that Journal. The books reviewed by QATSICC are likely to be a major source of information concerning Aborigines for many Queensland students. It is for this reason that QATSICC constitutes a 'community of interest' engaged in a contest to shape publications for (rather than against) Aborigines. Library and Resource Services Branch, Queensland Department of Education retains the only Australian systems level initiative to have Aboriginal and Islander participation in reviewing curriculum resources. In November 1980, the Branch made the following policy decision which hints at cognizance of the contestation in this field:

Because of the difficulties encountered in assessing resources relating to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, and the inaccuracies and bias displayed so frequently in existing publications, the expertise of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee (QATSICC) has been sought in evaluating material which deals with areas of their interest and concern. (QATSICC Reviews, 1980:6).

The following sections examine the social issues which Aborigines have found disconcerting. By analysing QATSICC reviews, books which were either contested or commended have been identified. Issues relating to origins, geographical placement, dignity, terms, alienation and change were used to organise this evidence.

ORIGINS

The origins of Aborigines has been tentatively canvassed in several competing archaeological theories which uniformly assume overseas immigration. The uncritical acceptance of these inadequately substantiated theories has been challenged by Aborigines on, at

least, two accounts. Firstly, these theories tend to ignore Aboriginal creation beliefs associated with the "Dreaming". The belief held by Aborigines that they were created in Australia is an important, though frequently unrecognised, feature of Aboriginal religious beliefs. Secondly, Aborigines suspect that the current policy of 'multiculturalism' is being used to redefine them as 'migrants' in the same sense as those recent arrivals of the past two centuries. Aborigines, like some non-English speaking, working class migrants, are wary of the ideological use of multiculturalism. It seems to deny Aboriginal uniqueness, to trivialise the usurpation of their lands and to repudiate their claims for social justice (Sherwood, 1984:95-102; 1981:37-50). There is a need to critically rethink multicultural practices derived from social psychological theory which assumes deprivation, such as low self-esteem, to be the cause of their lowly status.

In the books by Coupe (1984, *Rev.*32:14), Flood (1983, *Rev.* 28:6) Luling (1979, *Rev.*9:8), Moore (1983, *Rev.*30:6) and Parker (1983, *Rev.*30:6) the migration theories of Aboriginal origins are unquestioningly accepted. Similarly the major flaw in Bosworth's (1983, *Rev.*31:6) booklet, entitled *Migration*, is the statement: "In one way or another everyone who lives in Australia today (including the Aborigines) is a migrant." Here, the idea of Aboriginal migration is given *prima facie* legitimacy by its inclusion. Aboriginal creation beliefs are denied legitimacy by either omission or by outright denigration. The social function of these books is not the development of critical thinking about Aboriginal origins, but to foster an acceptance of the view that Aborigines should be treated in the same way as post-1788 Australians.

GEOGRAPHICAL PLACEMENT

The correct geographical placement of Aborigines and their cultures is significant for the recognition of ownership, Aboriginality and the diversity of Aboriginal life styles. It is the sense of place, the sense of belonging to a place that is important. Having been born into relationships which are typically in a settled place, this form of 'placeable bonding' (Williams, 1983:166-170) is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. The transition from that to the modern Australian nation-state is entirely artificial. Aborigines do not want to allow this new nationalism to slide into bland or obscuring generalities of identity. The strongest forms of 'placeable bonding' are always much more local, a particular site or region. Aboriginal people still say from where they come, where they were formed or belong, in these insistently local ways. Before the 1788 invasion of the Australian continent there existed a heterogeneity of Aboriginal cultures. This diversity

survives to varying degrees throughout contemporary Australian society. The identification of people and stories from specific groups and areas ensures that they are located as part of Aboriginal life and history and not left as fringe dwellers floating in a non-Aboriginal wasteland.

QATSICC reviewers are deeply concerned about this lack of geographical placement, for instance as happened in *Kwork Kwork* (1977, Rev.9:7):

Certain stories from particular regions have more meaningful relevance in the area they are from. Recognition of the geographical placement of the story is essential to ensure that an accurate and meaningful account is presented. Perhaps the editors felt they had achieved a degree of geographical placement when they listed the places where the story-tellers live. Sometimes this is relevant, e.g., Mary Agnes Timaepatua of Bathurst Island relates a story, *Kwork Kwork*...which is a Tiwi myth from Bathurst Island. But Sammy Assan from Mt Isa (traditional Kalkadoon territory) has told the *Water Rat and Squid* myth which is from Mornington Island (the land of the Lardil community) - a fact which is only picked up in the reading of the myth. Of the fifteen stories recounted, only six can be related to a definite geographical place. Others give an inkling of the country they relate to, but this is not definite enough.

Commenting on Nevin's (1977, Rev.9:8) tale, QATSICC reviewers said:

The only hints of geographical placement of the legend are the reference to "Australia's far outback country", and the metaphorical comparison of Nona's marriage cloak to the Sturt Desert pea, the floral emblem of South Australia.

Pamela Loft (1984, Rev.34:11) correctly located the tale of *The Echidna and the Shade Tree* with the Kjaru community, and the artwork is by children from Hall's Creek, both in Western Australia. A well-researched account of the people and history of the Torres Strait Islanders by Singe (1979, Rev.9:9) is commended for not falling:

into the trap of treating the Torres Strait Islanders as a distinct, isolated geographical location. He examines interaction with mainland Australia - policies, issues (e.g. the border issue) and contact with Aboriginal groups.

He also investigates contact with New Guinea, Irian Jaya, Indonesia, Melanesia and the South Sea Islands and European groups.

On the question of Aboriginal diversity Nevin (1977, *Rev.*9:8) misleadingly "gives the impression that all Aboriginal groups in the 'outback' have in common various aspects of traditional life depicted" in her book. Similarly, Ellis (1982?, *Rev.*19:5) "demonstrates the lack of understanding that Aborigines were diversified in life-style and in their oral traditions." While the author of *The Aboriginal Australian Series* (1982?, *Rev.*19:5) claims to have spent many years among Aborigines, his books fail to acknowledge the regional diversity of their life-styles. Both Le Guay (1980, *Rev.*19:6) and Moore (1983, *Rev.*30:6) were complimented by QATSICC for recognising and covering a wide range of Aboriginal life-styles, from tradition-oriented to urban.

The image of the role and power of women in Aboriginal communities, popularly portrayed as menial and subservient to men, has been challenged. This assumption of a patriarchal society served the interests of a predominantly male frontier colonial society, as the status of Aboriginal women was downgraded and their bodies bartered. Through the actions of Maureen Watson, Elsie Labumore Roughsey, Margaret Tucker, Ella Simon, Eliza Kennedy, Monica Clare, Bobbie Sykes, Leslie Van Mullenbrook, Colleen Perry, Marcia Langton and Kath Walker, there is emerging a renewed sense of dignity for Aboriginal women. The injustices done to Aboriginal people, and the women in particular, are yet to be fully appreciated by non-Aborigines. In a recent Boyer Lecture, Bernard Smith (1980:31) reminded us that:

...at the heart of the Australian experience lay a sexual tragedy of enormous historical dimension in which love, mockery and hatred battled for the mastery, and that tragedy was performed across the bodies of Aboriginal women.

The scripts from the award winning television documentary drama *Women of the Sun* (Maris & Borg, 1983, *Rev.*28:6), portray segments of Aboriginal history through leading female characters.

Diane Bell (1983, *Rev.*28:7) who was taught by the Warrabri women in the central Northern Territory, has been lauded by QATSICC for her book. Her ability to analyse and express understanding of these women - their separate, independent and highly important role as "boss for themselves", as nurturers of the people, land and relationships within traditional concepts - received QATSICC acclaim. The women's land-derived ceremonies and their health, curing and

love rituals have the twin themes of 'growing up' of people and land, and the maintenance of harmonious relations between people and country. QATSICC observed that

too often a misconception is promoted, however unintentionally, that men are responsible for upholding the important religious and ritual fabrics of Aboriginal lifestyles.

This has been due in large proportion to the fact that most anthropologists have been males. However, Bell's book does much to explode this misconception by explaining the far-reaching implications of women's ritual role in the maintenance of economic, social and religious values in contemporary, tradition-oriented, central Australian Aboriginal communities.

Moore's (1983, *Rev.*30:6) credibility collapses when he makes statements such as: "only a few have succeeded in the white people's world, "ignoring notable people such as Sir Douglas Nichols, Senator Neville Bonner, Margaret Tucker, O.B.E., Mum Shirl, O.B.E., David Gulpilil, Lionel Rose and Evonne Goolagong-Cawley, to mention very few indeed. Jennifer Isaacs (1982, *Rev.*26:9) wrote about Thancoupie, Australia's first Aboriginal potter, whose exhibitions are well known throughout Australia, Japan, Africa, Mexico, and the Philippines. In her autobiography, Elsie Labumore Roughsey (1984, *Rev.*35:5), a Lardil from Mornington Island, affirms the fact that some Aborigines who still maintain traditional practices can become successful in non-Aboriginal terms. Similarly, Pepper (1980, *Rev.*12) provides a much needed Aboriginal viewpoint on the history of Aboriginal and British relations in Gippsland. This is one of the few books where there is mention of Aborigines who participated in Australia's imperial wars, and of Aborigines who were killed in various campaigns.

TERMS

Aborigines have challenged the scaffolding of racist and offensive terms frequently erected to debase them and their lifestyles. The terms 'aborigines', 'nomads' and 'tribe' are particularly objectionable when used in conjunction with indigenous Australians because of their historical associations. The British colonists did not even have enough respect for the indigenous population to give them a misnomer. As with the term 'catholic' meaning 'universal' which is a proper noun when referring specifically to Papist Catholicism, so too the term 'aborigine' meaning 'indigenous people' should be capitalised when referring specifically to Aboriginal Australians. 'Koori' (New South Wales) and 'Murri' (Queensland) are self-descriptive terms preferred instead of 'Aboriginal'.

The word Aboriginal is a Latin-derived English word which was originally used to refer to any native people of any part of the world. The term Aboriginal did not give my people a separate identity. Furthermore, Aboriginal always has derogatory connotations. Nineteenth-century racial thinking portrayed my people as primitive, simple, savage and barbaric. The word Aboriginal came to be associated with these perjorative terms. Twentieth-century racist school textbooks portrayed Aborigines as poor simple-minded creatures who did not meet the standards of British civilisation. Thus white propaganda caused many Anglo-Australians to associate Aborigine with inferiority.

(Miller, 1985:vii)

Traditional Aboriginal communities own specific territories. However, for the purposes of colonisation the British defined them as landless nomads. This effectively legitimised the seizure of Aboriginal lands. The degradation and mocking of traditional Aboriginal social organisation found a most cynical expression in select Aborigines being given breast-plates proclaiming them 'chief', and 'king'. Further, the socio-biological connotations of 'tribe' encompass perjorative social Darwinist notions of evolutionary primitivism and animalism which are used to legitimise the extermination of Aborigines. Antipathy towards such ideas has been expressed by a number of Aborigines, for example:

Just about every hour of the day one is confronted with terminology that degrades black people...He [the white man] has hated us, he has taught us to hate ourselves. He has taught us to hate each other. He has told us we must be like him. He has told us to despise our blackness and aspire to his whiteness.

(Bruce McGuinness, cited in
Lippman, 1981:213)

Bosworth's (1983, *Rev.*31:6) booklet, *Shelter*, reads in part, "They were nomadic, moving on when food became scarce or the climate too harsh." QATSICC reviewers regard the suggestion that Aborigines are aimless wanderers as

inappropriate, because traditional Aboriginal movements occur within each group's own territory, often following the circuit of Dreaming Ancestors in accordance with the need to perform certain religious ceremonies at a certain place and time.

Similarly, QATSICC suggests that Peasley (1983, *Rev.*33:12), as an Aborigine, could have chosen a less objectionable title than *The Last of the Nomads*. In an attempt to explain the reasons for a

semi-nomadic life-style, Peasley unfortunately omits reasons of hygiene and, more importantly, religion, the need for spiritual replenishment and the care and maintenance of sacred sites. Traditionally, travel by Aborigines is within set boundaries and usually along set routes, and therefore traditional Aboriginal life-style is better described as 'migratory' rather than 'nomadic'. Intercultural understanding is difficult for an anthropocentric culture:

Aborigines suffer most from our illiteracy. Not only do we not attend to their languages but we impose our concepts on their most crucial beliefs. The terms 'Dreaming' and 'the Dreamtime' contain almost nothing of the Aboriginal experience. Rather, they express our borrowing from Freud, plus our inability to comprehend the intimacy of the Aborigines' connections with the natural world. 'Dream' is what Europeans do when we are asleep. 'Dreaming' is our wholly misleading attempt to convey what Aborigines do when they are most alert. Moreover, the term 'Aborigines' is a simplification. If ever there was a polycultural world, it was that of the tribal (sic) Aborigines.

(McQueen, 1986:17)

Hall, (1984, *Rev.*32:13), Keneally (1983, *Rev.*32:15), Parker (1983, *Rev.*30:6) and Walsh and Morrison (1984, *Rev.*32:14) fell into a few significant semantic pitfalls in their books. They use the term 'tribe' which, together with its derivatives, is an inappropriate concept because it suggests only a single community leader. Traditional Aboriginal communities, such as the Bidjara, are governed by councils of Elders. This kind of social system is better described as 'language group', 'community', 'totemic unit', 'skin group', 'kinship', 'moieties', 'sib', or 'clan', depending on circumstances. Similarly, the term 'prehistory' brings foreboding to QATSICC reviewers, though they are aware of its archaeological definition as 'pre-literate, and therefore human history before writing'. 'Aboriginal prehistory', therefore, refers to time before Aborigines wrote their own histories, normally taken as 1788, and not the pre-historic era of the dinosaurs. The term 'pre-contact history' is more frequently used, and has parallels with the Jewish terms 'Before the Common Era' and the 'Common Era'. Proper nouns such as Dreaming Ancestors, the Rainbow Serpent and Australian Aborigines should all be capitalised as is customary for standard English (Hall, 1984, *Rev.*32:13; Keneally, 1983, *Rev.*32:15; Moore, 1983, *Rev.*30:6). This both recognises the importance of and shows respect for traditional Aboriginal religions. This vocabulary tends to sanction and justify the prevailing institutional arrangements, for instance their supposed landlessness.

ALIENATION

By a process of alienation Aborigines have been denied a socio-cultural identity, becoming invisible men, women and children in Australian society. Aborigines are struggling against attempts to suppress or override their surviving and remade Aboriginal identity. They spurn those who would dismiss and victimise them by the use of stereotype, who would 'nationalise' them, and who patronise them. Building a sense of 'Aboriginality', as we approach the bicentenary of attempts to destroy them and their cultures, is asserted as being crucial by Aboriginal people. The misappropriation and trivialisation of Aboriginal cultures by authors who seize elements of Aboriginal law, religion or customs to construct pseudo-Aboriginal tales are doing a double injustice. First, they are exploiting the cultural heritage of Aboriginal peoples, and secondly, readers are being cheated into believing that these travesties are genuine Aboriginal tales.

QATSICC was most trenchant in its criticism of the *Australian Legend Series* (Adams & Adams, 1979, Rev.11:9) because

this series achieves the ultimate in
alienation of cultural myths from
their background.

Aboriginal people if, as is implied, they are the supposed owners of these stories,

do not appreciate having their legends
twisted and moulded into a Europeanised
fanciful account as these blatantly
ethnocentric authors have done.

Such writers, unfamiliar with Aboriginal Australian cultures, have exploited Aboriginal mythology for highly questionable purposes. Books characterised by these attributes are, rather than being socially dysfunctional, a means for fostering the ongoing acceptance of the legitimacy of Aboriginal exploitation. The view that Aborigines did not and do not own their culture, that it is open to plundering, predisposes the reader to accept and support coercions and constraints imposed on Aboriginal rights to land ownership. QATSICC sounded a caveat against this status devaluation:

the school that buys these, the teacher that reads them,
the publishers that produced them, and above all, the
people who wrote are doing their best to promote the
ethnocentrism that abounds in literature, and to decry
the respect for the religious significance which
Aboriginal legends deserve. [Certainly the] work of
Aboriginal authors is more entertaining and informative
than any derivative works such as this series.

Parker's (1983, *Rev.*30:6) book could not be recommended by QATSICC because of its reliance on old exotic stereotypes, inaccuracies and misrepresentations. Similarly Ellis' (1982?. *Rev.*19:5) *The Aboriginal Australian Series* was summarily dismissed because of the macabre unreason of its patronising, racist and ethnocentric tone. By the selective use of vocabulary, ideological support is given to the activities of powerful economic and political interest groups. The social 'explanations' in these books are neither socially neutral nor apolitical. Rather, the contents express and reinforce a viewpoint that may unwittingly favour anti-Aboriginal influence and hinder the interests of those seeking social justice, rationality and solidarity. That such omissions, stereotypes and distortions remain in books published since 1967, emphasises the powerlessness of Aboriginal Australians. The overriding concern remains focused on the pastoral and mining interests in preference to the Aboriginal agenda. Not only do such books express the prevailing ideology, but they help the mass media to shape attitudes in support of Aboriginal status devaluation.

Regarding the *Mindi Series* (Simpson & Simpson, 1984, *Rev.*30:7) QATSICC commented that the book *Daydreaming* should be treated with caution owing to the rather negative manner in which the Aboriginal boy who daydreams is treated. According to QATSICC, Keneally (1983, *Rev.*32:15) "sensibly argues that a true Australian identity is one which integrates Aboriginal experience and beliefs." However, Keneally, along with other writers, needs to avoid stereotyping such as: "his rectangular and firm features are characteristic of the coastal tribes (sic) of the northwest" (p.188).

There have been some notable books which QATSICC has found praiseworthy. For instance, the Berndts' (1979, *Rev.*9:6) volume is said to underline

the persistence of Aboriginality, the significance of Aboriginal identity, and the need for these if Aboriginal survival is to be ensured.

Groome's (1981, *Rev.*20:5) *The Aborigines* received QATSICC endorsement because it explains

many realities often glossed over or dealt with patronizingly in other books. He provides a commendable description of the richness of life, tools for survival; and comparisons between cultures and lifestyles.

Keith Cole (1979, *Rev.*9:6), in giving a general overview of the Aborigines of Arnhem Land quotes frequently from both Aboriginal and

non-Aboriginal people. Reverend Lazarus Lamilami, an Aboriginal pastor, provided extensive research assistance to Cole in the preparation of this book. In *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Bardon (1979, *Rev.*13:4)

has very effectively presented the reader with a cultural background linking people, land, lifestyles and art.

QUATSICC continued their commendation of Bardon for seeing "the need to link the art with the painter and his background" and for choosing "to probe the complexity of the meaning of Aboriginal art styles."

A number of fictional works have brought extended credit from QATSICC. Scott's (1980, *Rev.*13:4) use of elements of Aboriginal folklore to create a powerful, compelling heroic fantasy is credited with revealing 'the intrinsic sense of dignity of the Aboriginal people.' In Thiel's (1979, *Rev.*9:10) important fictionalised social commentary, it was noted that the Aboriginal people "are characterised positively. All are portrayed as being comfortable in, and highly knowledgeable of the environment in which they live." It is QATSICC's observation that

respect, and the point that Aboriginal people have much knowledge and many abilities that everyone can learn from, are the key elements of the story.

For an understanding and non-paternalistic explanation of Aboriginal beliefs, *The Vengeance of the Dolphin*, by Roy (1980, *Rev.*9:9) is most noteworthy. A most sensitive and skilful author whose use of the dialect, Aboriginal English, could have led him "into the paternalism and ethnocentrism trap, but through Jimmy and his mother's use of the [dialect] Roy has avoided this." QATSICC also regarded *Tulpi* (1980?, *Rev.*20:5) as a book likely to "induce an excellent response with Aboriginal and Islander communities."

CHANGE AND STABILITY

The view that traditional, pre-contact Aboriginal communities were static has been widely contested. In the past two centuries relations between Aborigines and the British provided a major focus for conflict, resistance and change. Aborigines have challenged the assumption that Australian history has been 'objective', that people have access to unbiased information. Rather they suggest that history reflects the interests of certain powerful and continually militant social groups. The glorification of colonialism at their expense serves to mask the violent occupation of Aboriginal lands and the restructuring of Aborigines as an oppressed minority.

Dugan (1978, *Rev.*9:7) and Parker (1983, *Rev.*30:6) both suggest that Aboriginal life was static and unchanging, that even today they live just like their ancestors. This ignores the many changes that have occurred since European intervention, which means that there can be no return to pre-contact life-styles. Flood (1983, *Rev.*28:6) provided a picture of pre-contact Aboriginal life-styles as highly adaptable and dynamic. The variety and change in Aboriginal religion indicated by Charlesworth and his colleagues (1984, *Rev.*35:5) serves to

rebut the charge that Aboriginal religions were static and conservative with no place for initiative and creativity at either the doctrinal or practical level.

Aborigines continue, even in the most scholarly and authoritative histories such as volume five of Frank Crowley's *A Documentary History of Australia* (1980, *Rev.*9:7), to receive scant treatment. The implication of such omission is to suggest that what happened to Aborigines during the past two centuries has had no effect on the history of this country. It would suggest that, from an Anglo-Australian perspective, Aboriginal and British contact history is not regarded as part of Australian history. However, no authentic history of Australia can be written which does not take into account continuing inter-racial conflict on the frontier, in government policy, in the exploitation of Aboriginal pastoral workers and miners, and their pauperisation from urban to remote localities. These are not simply side issues for the making of Australian history. For, in the treatment of Aborigines there lies an explanation and demonstration of the materialism and authoritarianism which insinuates much of the power base of Australian society. Such historical interpretations as these provide ideological justification for the activities and prerogatives of anti-Aboriginal groups. Conversely, they do not legitimise the viewpoints and priorities of Aborigines who are competing with these established interests for social acceptance and support.

Colin Johnson's (1983, *Rev.*31:7) first Aboriginal historical novel is an antidote to

the history of European settlement in Australia, as taught in schools and reflected in literature, is usually presented from a European perspective. It is, at the same time, refreshing and painful to witness this period of Aboriginal and British contact from the Aboriginal perspective.

Similarly, Pepper (1980, *Rev.*12:6) provides

a much needed Aboriginal viewpoint on the history of Aboriginal and European relations. In the past much of Aboriginal history has not been recorded and is therefore rather fragmented. This book serves as a model for those seeking to research their own family history.

Faith Bandler (1980, *Rev.*19:6) intermingles "poignantly sharp feelings of hardship, fellowship, illness, brutality, escape, laughter, happiness and quiet dignity" in her autobiographical novel of the Pacific Islander slave trade.

The economic historian, Noel Butlin (1983, *Rev.*31:7) has undertaken a speculative revision of the pre-1788 Aboriginal population and suggests that the impact of British colonisation on the number and distribution of Aborigines was catastrophic. Reynolds, (1981, *Rev.*19:6) "places major emphasis on the dislocation of traditional Aboriginal lifestyles and economies." His book's emphasis on the need for acknowledging the Aboriginal part in Australian history, particularly since 1788; the scholarly nature of the work, and its use of oral history make it an important historical milestone. It should also rectify the widely held belief that the British colonisation of Australia faced no resistance by Aborigines to the confiscation of their lands. Because of the superior weaponry of the invading squatters, a takeover of Aboriginal lands was inevitable. In part, McKeller (1984, *Rev.*33:12) provides a "detailed look at nine Aboriginal groups who lived in south-west Queensland before the incoming of squatters destroyed their traditional lifestyles." *Generations of Resistance*, by Lorna Lippman, (1981, *Rev.*18:6) furthers this theme with reference to the history of oppression, policy changes, legal constraints, and struggles for land, health, employment, housing, education and political influence which continue into the 1980s.

Other writers have similarly been commended. Willis and his colleagues (1982, *Rev.*31:7) "earnest attempt to portray Aboriginal history from 1788 to the present day is successful. Issues (Land Rights, contact with European society, missions, etc.) have been handled judiciously." Ronald and Catherine Berndt (1979, *Rev.*9:6) edited a 'remembrance' rather than a 'celebration' of the past 150 years of Aboriginal history in Western Australia. The theme of the volume is broad as it underlines the persistence of Aboriginality, the significance of Aboriginal identity, and the need for these if Aboriginal survival is to be ensured. Toyne and Vachon (1984: *Rev.* 33:11) "give in-depth information on the threat to the Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and the Ngaayattjara land owners and how they derived their solutions from Anglo-Australian law." The work of these

writers represents a contestation of Anglo-centric Australian history through their research into areas of the invasion of Aboriginal lands and their resistance to it.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the work of QATSICC reviewers, fellow critics and resource evaluators have been provided with space in which to ask:

- Whose knowledge is this?
- Whose interest is served by this knowledge?
- Who decides what knowledge is important?
- Who has access to the powerful forms of knowledge?

We must learn how to use these materials critically in our work as teachers or librarians. However, we are also part of the struggles for rationality, solidarity and social justice being waged in Australia against class exploitation, racial and sexual oppression, environmental destruction and MAD wars. Among these emancipatory interests, and certainly not the least, are the struggles of the Aboriginal people. QATSICC reviewers are active agents contesting and rejecting the distorted language in which they and their cultures are portrayed. They are part of a much larger struggle which is the legacy of socially constructed and historically generated inequality and thus are making the knowledge in books about Aborigines problematic. Here they have created their own arena which they use to defend Aborigines from racist impositions. Fortunately, this oppositional work has provided these reviewers with the very skills needed for their own liberation (critical literacy being among them), so that they are not condemned to a life on the margin. In their work they have located a strategy which uses their oppositional power for democracy.

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APPENDIX 1

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APPENDIX 2

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