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given of the complicated verbal morphology. Murrinh-Patha is an example of a *lingua franca* which has spread at the expense of other languages in the Wadeye-Daly River area. Nouns have classes or genders and Michael Walsh has given the class markers in the word list. Gender differences are also reflected in the pronouns.

The selected Queensland languages are very diverse — Meryam Mir, a Papuan language spoken in Eastern Torres Strait; Wik-Mungkan, the common language at Aurukun on Western Cape York; and Torres Strait Creole, used as an identity marker, particularly by young Torres Strait Islanders.

The people of Mer speak both Meryam and Creole. The chapter on Meryam Mir by Gamalai Ken Passi and Nick Piper gives interesting insights into the mythology and the idiom of the language. A textual example is given of the use of the special style *nasnas mir* 'sad talk'. In the Wik-Mungkan language, stress distinguishes differences in grammatical features, such as tenses or negative verbs. Words occur singly or in groups, with the compound form having extended meanings. many compound words are used in Barbara Savers' word list.

Torres Strait Creole has developed this century from Pacific Pidgin English, and about 85 per cent of the vocabulary is borrowed from English but with changed meanings, particularly kin terms.

The influence of indigenous languages is reflected in the difference between Eastern and Western creoles. Anna Shnukal describes the taboos associated with the names of those related by marriage. Unlike the Australian languages, creoles are not agglutinating languages and have few affixes.

The languages in this book show great variation in linguistic history, sociolinguistic use, grammatical features and depth of vocabulary which provide an insight into the richness of Australian indigenous languages. It is likely that the book will be used more by the general reader than by Aboriginal people trying to learn their language.

This is an important book. The danger is that the general public will only consult the indexes to appropriate Aboriginal words to name their houses, belongings or businesses. This will be a sad misuse of the book.

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Outback Ghettos: A History of Aboriginal Institutionalisation and Survival

P. Brock

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, x + 180 pp.

Reviewed by Andrew Markus

This is an important book. It represents a detailed enquiry into issues of major significance, draws on a wide range of sources including oral testimony, and affords ample evidence of a resolute, open-minded approach, free of

ideological blinkers. Ten years ago, historians in this country lacked the capacity to approach contact history with such sensitivity. This is not to say, however, that the book is free from problems.

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Although the book boasts a general title (perhaps the publisher's decision), it is limited to three South Australian institutions, chosen from distinct but overlapping historical periods: Poonindie, sited on the southern Eyre Peninsula north of Port Lincoln, established by the Anglican Matthew Hale in 1850 and closed in 1894 when the local Europeans convinced the government that the land occupied was too good for Aborigines; Koonibba, a Lutheran mission on the west coast, established in 1899 and returned to the government in 1963; and Nepabunna in the Flinders Ranges, where the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) maintained a presence from 1931 to 1973.

The case studies cover people with differing contact experiences, ranging from situations of total to partial disruption of traditional life. Of the three groups, the Adnyamathanha of the Flinders Ranges retained greatest independence: the UAM missionaries did not form the community, rather the missionaries attached themselves to a strongly self-identified group who used the mission as a means of survival. The greatest disruption was suffered by those who became residents of Poonindie, while the Koonibba people occupied the intermediate position.

Brock's aim is to consider institutional experiences and their impact on Aboriginal people. She seeks to determine which constraints were most important in inhibiting Aboriginal action, and which struggles were most effective in ensuring survival, self-respect, community cohesion and economic well-being.

The approach involves the writing of institutional histories, supplemented by biographical sketches to explore Aboriginal responses at greater depth. It is argued that an unplanned effect of protective government policies and institutionalisation was the creation of strong, close-knit, sedentary Aboriginal communities, where new identities based on shared experiences, intermarriage and association with land were fostered.

Institutions took on the characteristics of 'ghettos' as understood within the European historical context. Brock quotes Louis Wirth's description (1928, 26):

The world at large was cold and strange...but within the ghetto he felt free. Within the circle of his own tribal group he received that appreciation, sympathy and understanding which the larger world could not offer. In his own community, which was based upon the solidarity of the families that composed it, he was a person with status [p 2].

A central concern is to establish the extent to which Aboriginal people were able to maintain control of their lives. In this study, they are presented making choices, navigating their life course. The conclusion is situated in opposition to Bain Attwood's argument (1988: 148-50) that Aborigines 'in colonial society were "made" more than they "made" themselves'; Brock writes that 'we should see Aborigines making themselves rather than being made' (p 156). Aboriginal people were adapting to changing circumstances as they happened — they understood that they had to redefine themselves if they were to survive; but this understanding was not imposed on them, they chose it over other options. Thus, for example, Brock states that there is evidence from many parts of Australia that Aboriginal people successfully resisted attempts to move them to places to which they did not want to go, and to make them associate with people with whom they did not want to associate.

In my judgment, such a conceptualisation of Aboriginal contact history is questionable. It is hardly surprising that a diligent, sensitive historian will find much evidence of people making choices; this will be the feature of any situation in which human beings find themselves, including the most dictatorial and brutal of total institutions. The significant aspect is not the act of choice

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itself, but the scope for choice, the range of options available to individuals. There is much evidence in Brock's book that choice was narrowly circumscribed, most clearly in areas of the continent deemed valuable by the Europeans.

It is noted that those who chose not to redefine themselves may well have been those who did not survive, and members of today's Adnyamathanha community trace their ancestry to just a few families; the argument is held not to apply to those who were rounded up and forced on to distant institutions, without indication of how many people fall within this category in the wider Australian context. In another passage, Brock discusses the paternalism of missionaries, which confined Aboriginal people to the status of permanent inferiority; further, as the missions claimed control of the young, it is likely that there were no new initiates to maintain ceremony and ritual. Revealing insights are afforded into the extent of discrimination and violence: the killings in the period of pastoral incursion; seizure of land reserved for Aboriginal use; refusal of admittance to hospitals; exclusion of children from schools; exclusion from residence in some towns.

Back Trackers

R. Hurley, M. Langton and L. Griffiths

AIATSIS and Department of Employment, Education and Training, [1992], video, 24 min.

Lookin for Your Mob: A Guide to Tracing Aboriginal Family Trees

D. Smith and B. Halstead

Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, reprinted 1992, xvii + 132 pp.

Telling It Like It Is: A Guide to Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History

P. Taylor

AIATSIS, Canberra, 1992 x + 124 pp.

Reviewed by Sarah Martin

Justice for Aboriginal people and reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal depend largely on members of Aboriginal communities

In the conclusion, Brock observes that 'evaluating Aboriginal agency is controversial and will continue to be so as it relies on a very careful reading of the evidence' (p 162). But as much as we need careful reading of evidence, we also need to weigh the merits of differing conceptual approaches. Although important issues are raised, the full development of argument is not the strong point of the book. This is evident, for example, in the cursory discussion of what constitutes a 'ghetto', as well as in the lack of comparative analysis to enable the placing of the three reserves studied in the wider Australian context.

References

- Attwood, B.M. (1988) *The Making of the Aborigines*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
 Wirth, L. (1928) *The Ghetto*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Editor's Note: This Review originally appeared in *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1994/Number 1:61-63. We thank *Australian Aboriginal Studies* and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for allowing us to reprint it here. □

having full control over their lives, including the means to document, present and teach their history and culture from an Aboriginal perspective. The