



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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as “the only surviving Native Women of the Georges River and Liverpool District” are another part of the historical narrative that shows Aboriginal activism during the nineteenth century. Use of twentieth century newspapers, and government and family sources provide details about King Burruga in the 1930s, grandson of Paddy Burragalung, about to be evicted from Salt Pan Creek and threatening to petition the King, or Charlie Leon on the Aboriginal Welfare Board and the Aborigines Advisory Council in the 1970s. Links to Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative College in Glebe in the 1980s are another insight into how education and politics mixed. Interaction and intermarriage between the Irish settlers and the Indigenous inhabitants are also important features, allowing subtle study of racial interactions. By the 1960s and 1970s, many of the Georges River community had become involved in Aboriginal political activism around Sydney. The study is also a working class history from below, piecing together the lives of families who always lived close to the financial edge. The documentary sources have been supplemented by collaboration with the Aboriginal community of today, which has tapped into current memory and photographs.

*Rivers and Resilience* will become a model for tracing the history of urban Aboriginal communities. Goodall and Cadzow have shown what can be done, using sophisticated intellectual underpinning, a good knowledge of all possible sources, and the cooperation of members of the community. While the Turrbal and Jagera peoples were dislodged from the St Lucia meander of the Brisbane River, they have remained just as much part of Brisbane history as the Gweagal, Cobragal and Bediagal peoples have of the Georges River area and to the history of Sydney.

The book is essential reading for anyone interested in Indigenous Australian and urban history. The techniques used are a model for an approach that could be applied to other Australian urban areas. The technique would be best for experienced historians, but I could envisage a larger team approach involving non-Indigenous documentary historians and Indigenous historians, particularly from the region under study. Another capital city such as Brisbane, which has also generated substantial documentary sources since its creation, would be a suitable candidate.

## THROWING OFF THE CLOAK: RECLAIMING SELF-RELIANCE IN TORRES STRAIT

Elizabeth Osborne

Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2009, xvii-188pp,  
ISBN 9780855756628

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For researchers interested in Indigenous autonomy and Native Title you need to read this book! Using interviews with Torres Strait Islander elders and letters and articles released through the local media, Osborne fills a sizable gap in our documented social history of the Torres Strait Islands (north-eastern Australia). This book approaches Islander responses and strategies to external influences and controls since the 1840's. By doing so it situates seminal Australian political decisions such as Wik, Mabo and the recently awarded Torres Strait Sea-claim. Although documenting Islander communities under a “cloak” of paternalistic government the central message is intrinsically positive: Indigenous communities did not passively accept external controls but initiated and maintained an active struggle towards autonomy.

Elizabeth Osborne has maintained a close interest in Torres Strait education and political development since 1967. For five years she and her husband lived on Thursday Island, during which time she became a foster mother for several local children. Dr Osborne wrote her first book, *Torres Strait Islander Women and the Pacific War*, published in 1997. In many ways *Throwing off the Cloak* represents a natural progression as the author once again examines cultural contact in the Torres Strait using the voices of the Torres Strait Islanders she represents.

The first chapter situates and introduces the early years of cultural “collision” between Europeans and Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders. A vibrant history of culture contact is presented prior to and preceding European arrival (see also Lawrence, 1998). The Torres Strait was visited regularly during the late 19th century by Beche-de-Mer fishers, missionaries, explorers and later Queensland government officials. In many cases these new arrivals were at least partially dependant on the good will and support of local Islanders (Ash & David, 2008). This chapter presents a recurring theme in this book, the difficulty for Islanders to negotiate nested (macro/Pan-Islander to micro/regional) identities (see also Shnukal, 2004, p. 105). To advocate for autonomy over country it was first necessary to

resolve the problematic question, what did “self” mean for communities with such wide ranging socio-political and ceremonial relationships.

Chapter 2, “Paternalism Challenged” presents historical and ethnographic evidence for growing community dissatisfaction and frustration at external controls. Indigenous histories are used to great effect in this chapter, providing a disarmingly frank, often amusing and occasionally devastating overview of Islanders involvement in the early strikes and World War II.

After World War II political momentum grew in the Torres Strait (Chapters 3 and 4). Between the 1940s and 1970s strong political leadership and a refusal to bow under pressure led to ground-breaking shifts in policy, education and public opinion. The 1980s are presented as a political coming of age for Torres Strait Islanders who show increasing unity and skill negotiating self determination. From the 1990s through Wik, Mabo and Native Title legislation, Osborne explores the debates centring on native title claims over land, sea and marine resources (Chapters 5 and 6). The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) is examined from its inception in 1994 through to current-day negotiations between traditional owners and non-Islanders (Chapters 6 and 7).

The conclusion is self-reflexive and passionate (if rather brief) and provides a chronological review of 130 years of Torres Strait Islander struggle. Considering the significant material component and important implications of this book to both academic and Indigenous communities around the world it is perhaps disappointing that the author restricts herself in this way. That said, the point is well made, Torres Strait Islanders have shown remarkable strength and resilience fighting for autonomy.

The publication of this book is topical. On Friday July 3rd 2010 Torres Strait Islanders won a remarkable nine year battle for Native Title over the seas between Cape York and Papua New Guinea. With a track record which boasts both the first Native Title land claim and largest sea claim in Australia it is surely not going to be long before a second edition of this book will be required.

## ■ References

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