WHITE MAN GOT NO DREAMING

Essays 1938-1973

W. E. H. STANNER

This book looks at 'the Aboriginal problem' from an unusual viewpoint — that of the Aborigines themselves, for whom 'the Aboriginal problem is the white Australian'.

The essays deal with all those features of traditional Aboriginal life that made it so deeply satisfying to the original Australians: religion, attachment to land, imaginative culture, and the whole ethos on which the impact of Europeans and their way of life has been destructive. The Aborigines have been dispossessed, exploited, rejected and on occasions reviled. What we now offer them is, from an Aboriginal point of view, neither true recompense nor equality.

The author argues that race relations will deteriorate even farther than the neuralgic point to which our ethnocentric insensibility has already brought them unless white Australians make an effort to comprehend the Aboriginal truths of life.

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Stanner has had a richly varied and distinguished career, which has left a mark on these essays. He graduated from Sydney University with honours in anthropology and economics while still working full-time as a reporter and sub-editor of Sydney newspapers. In 1932 and 1934-5 he made expeditions to the Northern Territory for the Australian National Research Council. In between he lectured in the Department of Anthropology, and also became a member of the personal staff of the then Premier of New South Wales (Mr B. S. B., later Sir Bertram Stevens) for whom he wrote speeches and made economic and financial inquiries. In 1936 he went to the London School of Economics to study for his doctorate, which he obtained in 1938. In 1937 he attended the Imperial Conference as Private Secretary to the Commonwealth Treasurer, and in the same year was an Australian Collaborateur at the climactic session of the League of Nations in Geneva. He left for

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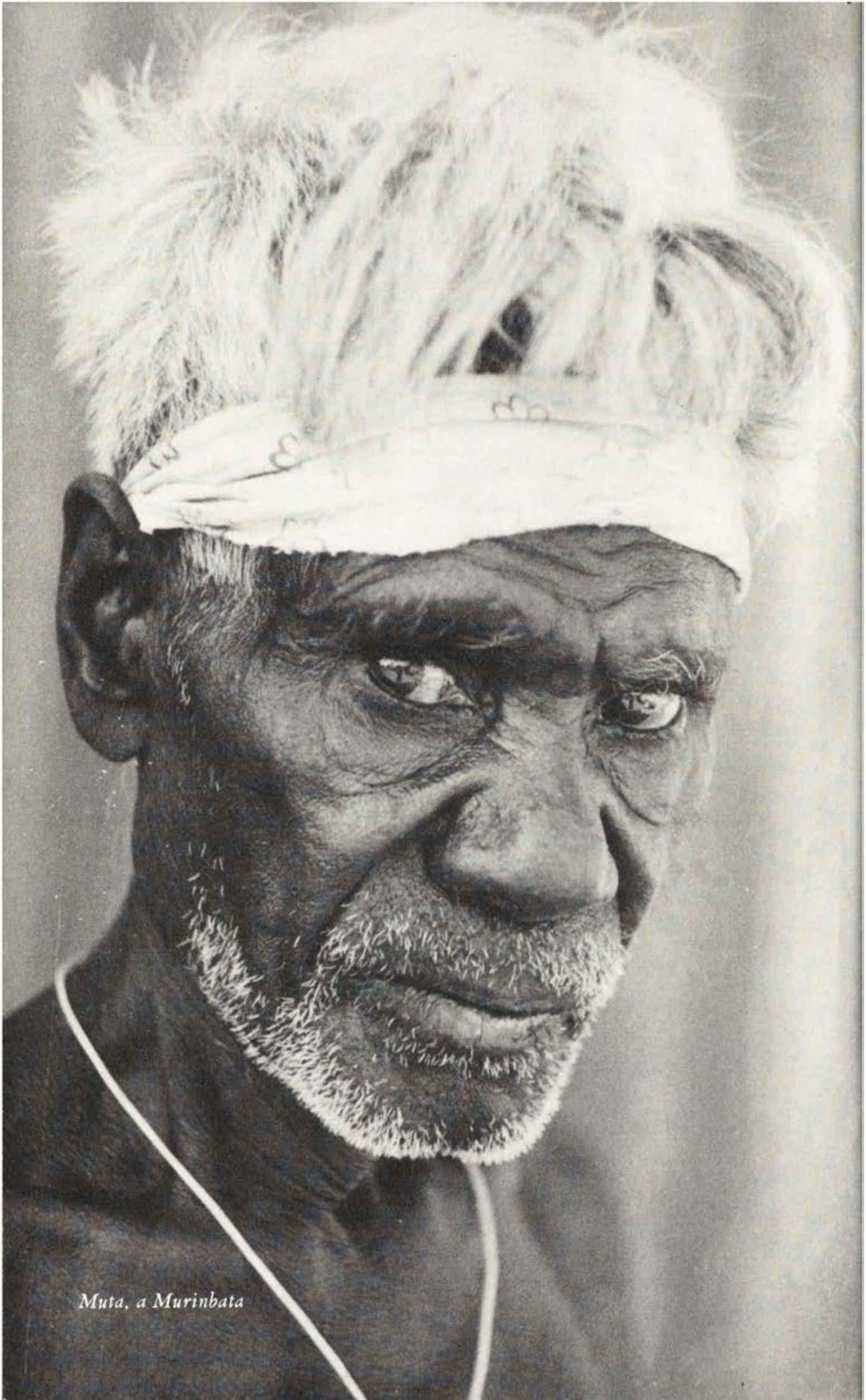

Muta, a Murinbata

White man got no dreaming,
Him go 'nother way.
White man, him go different.
Him got road belong himself.

—Muta, a Murinbata

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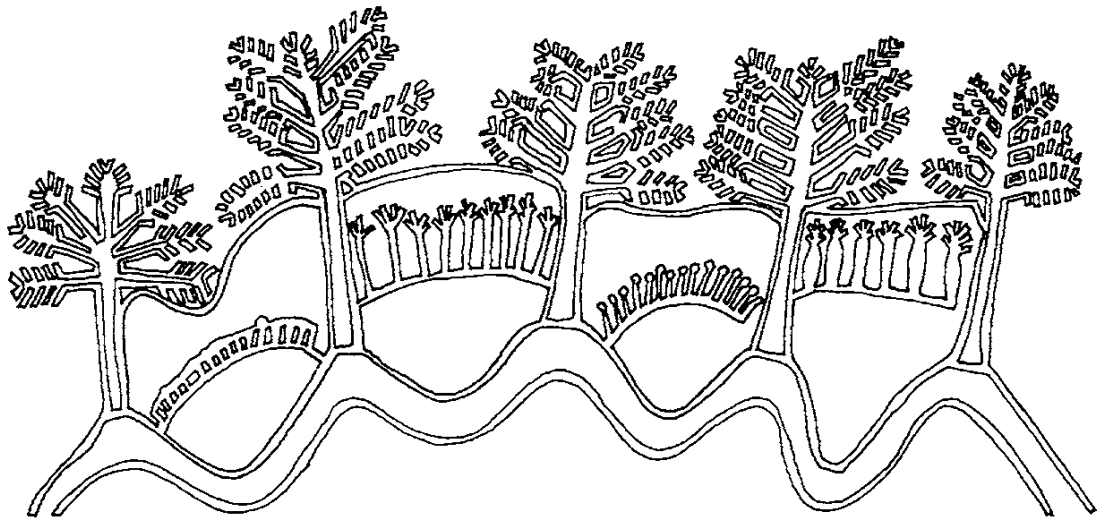


Continuity and Change among the Aborigines (1958)*

I

Some time ago I thought that a suitable topic for my Presidential Address would be 'The Future and the Aborigines'. A great many people seem to have had the same idea for other addresses about the same time. I did not know this because I was still in a remote corner of the continent studying the Aborigines' past. I then learned that their future was to be discussed by a special symposium of this Section. The title of my address thus had to become 'Continuity and Change in Aboriginal Life'. The topic remains much the same. This is a good illustration of continuity and change.

It is not my wish to cross the wind or steal the thunder of others who are to speak later. I shall therefore limit myself to some very general observations on things which, being continuous from the past of Aboriginal life, and still of influence in the present, are likely to have force in the future, until the Aborigines cease to be themselves, which seems to be what we are about to insist upon their doing.

* Presidential Address to Section F (Anthropology) ANZAAS, Adelaide, 1958.

The abiding sameness and variations of Aboriginal life were much in my mind over the last year. While I was excavating a rock-shelter, which contained horizons of culture going back a long way in time, I found many human artifacts which my Aboriginal friends could not believe had been made by man. They insisted that some must have been made by Blue Tongue, the Lizard Man of The Dream Time. Judging by the depth at which I had found the implements some must have been made less than a century ago. Here a technical continuity had not only been broken but, so to speak, had been 'thought away'.

At places where The Rainbow Serpent had worked certain marvels which by tradition give life its continuity, the Aborigines looked quite unemotionally on The Serpent's marks, though they would not once have done so. They knew what many of the marks and paintings signified, but no longer cared. Modern life in certain ways has become actually discontinuous with tradition. Part of the universe of discourse in which The Rainbow Serpent was the chief symbol has receded. The rocks of this region are still bright with a mural art which has about it something timeless and tranquil. Only the old Aborigines know its significance. The younger ones have different interests and are bent on other things. But their activities and interests are in many ways still recognisably Aboriginal. How does one deal with what changes and yet stays itself?

There is a vast area of Australia where Aboriginal life is not what it was and never will be again. Many anthropologists have wrestled with the task of trying to bring into focus the structure and quality of the life thus going on between two worlds. We are dealing with what Malinowski would have called a *tertium quid*, something with its own character. Wherever any considerable body of Aborigines are left, and live together, they are living a life of their own. I cannot claim to know the whole of the continent and would like to be understood as speaking only of places and peoples I know well. None of the many hundreds of Aborigines I have studied at first hand impress me as already or as likely to be 'incorporated', or 'absorbed', or 'assimilated' into the surrounding system of Europeanism. The very contrary is true. Various European things—our authority, our customs, our ideas and goods—are data, facts of life, which the Aborigines take into account in working out their altered system. But I have seen little sign of its going much beyond that. Those Aborigines I know seem to me to be still fundamentally in struggle with us. The struggle is for a different

set of things, differently arranged, from those which most European interests want them to receive. Neither side has clearly grasped what the other seeks. All this issues in a dusty encounter in which nothing is yet particularly clear.

I desire to bring the fact of struggle to the fore because it seems to me the primary reality. Not that the struggle is now one of violence. This at least we can say of the Australian scene. One does not move in an atmosphere of stern repression and angry resistance. It is rather an encounter of two peoples who in general have failed to comprehend the ethos and structure of each other's lives. The atmosphere is one of anarchy and purposes obscurely crossed. We picture ourselves as trying to bridge the gap by goodwill, material help and general solicitude, and as rather baffled by the fact that there seems no firm place for the other pylon of the bridge, only ground which is shifting and uncertain.

This self-image is wrong, not in the sense that it misrepresents our best wishes, but in that our wishes are unreasonably based on a poor half of the facts. Let me try to show why this is so.

There are some thousands of Aborigines in one area I know living in varying conditions of life but now all lumped together into the category of 'wards of State'. They will not cease to be wards until they can prove to authority that they do not need 'special care and assistance'. They are listed in a census which I have compared with places and persons I know well. This document seems to give the Administration some pride, but it seems to me an inadequate piece of work. I condemn it on a number of grounds, not the least of which is its barbarous spelling of Aboriginal names in a kind of pidgin-phonetic. But, more importantly, it shows no understanding of the Aboriginal name-systems, of the facts of local organisation, of the structural divisions of groups, and of the language differences. These things would be taken as matters of vital consequence by any modern administration. They are of course of primary importance to the Aborigines themselves.

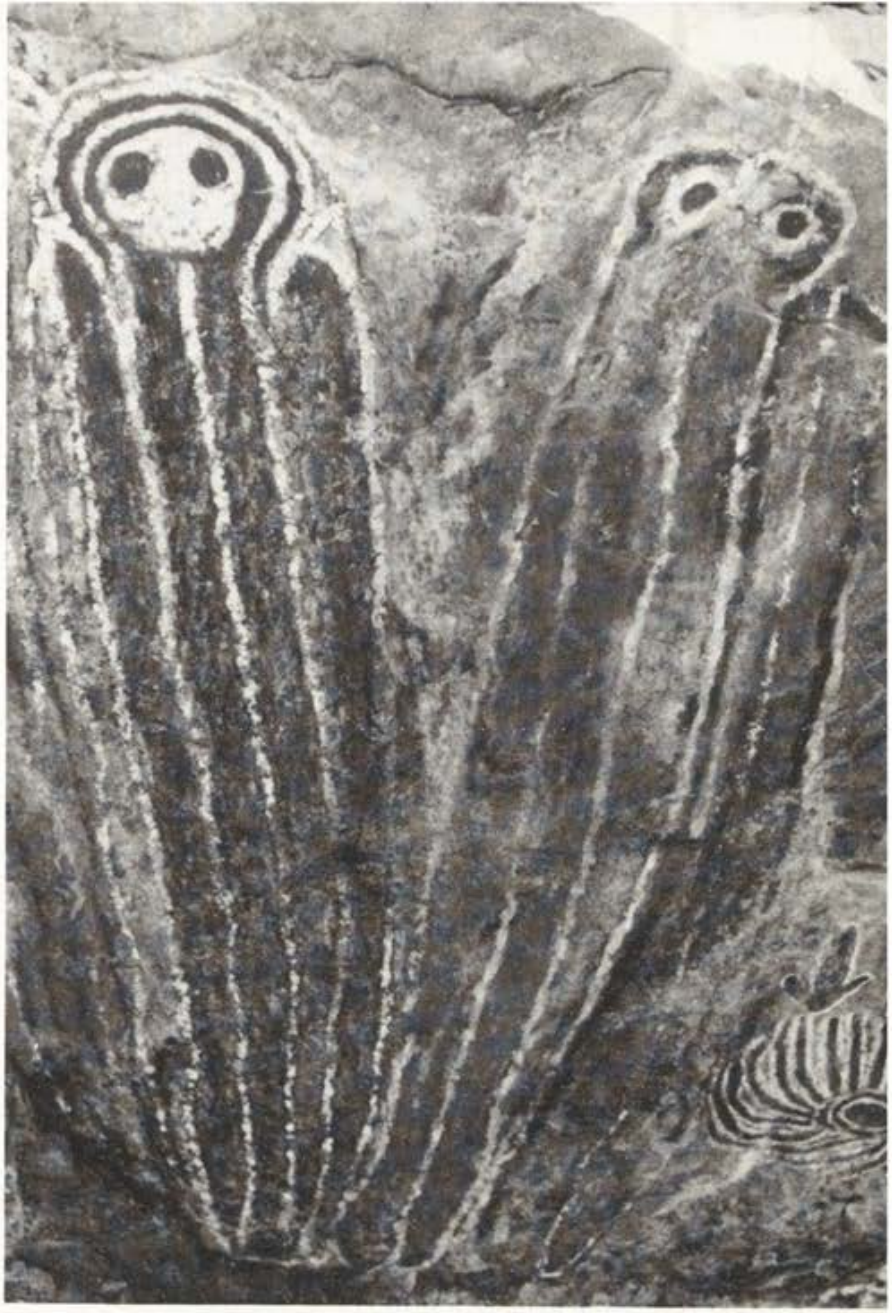
The reason why they seem to be dismissed as of no consequence is not known to me. It may have to do with the insistent official view that henceforth the Aborigines must be treated as 'individuals' and not as 'groups'. I am afraid this shows that authority does not know what it is doing. No policy or law can transform the Aboriginal from what he is in this region—a social person, tied to others by a dozen ties which

are his life—into an abstract 'individual' in order to make the facts fit a policy. It is the policy which is wrong. An official view of this kind, arbitrarily imposed, shows only too plainly that we still have a long way to go to gain an understanding of how policy should be made and applied.

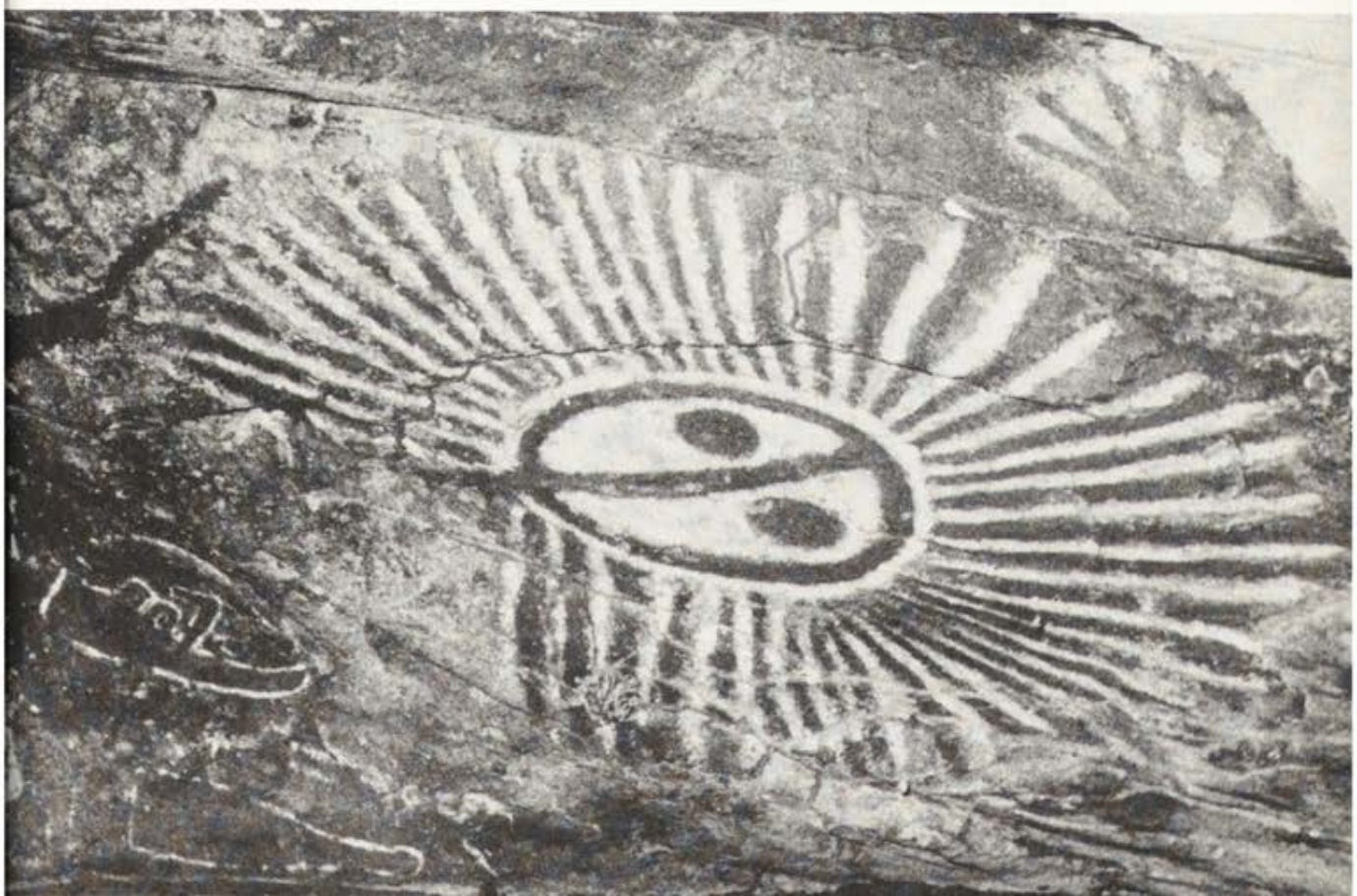
We keep on confounding our perceptual routines of mind with some sort of absolute social reality. We keep on with a presupposition that our styles of life have a natural virtue; and with the folly that an exact knowledge of the facts is a luxury and not a necessity of policy and administration. We add to these delusive slogans—such as the policy of 'assimilation through individualism'—and then wonder why we get into increasing administrative difficulty.

I have said that Aboriginal life is not what it was. That is true, but in several senses. We are widely told that the Aboriginal tradition is 'collapsing' or already 'collapsed'. It is a picturesque way of putting things, but it is misleading. It suggests that what follows is a void or a fortuitous jumble. This is not the case. In a number of groups I know the tradition has 'collapsed' into something of a very different kind, a restless activism and opportunism. We should not think this strange. We are very familiar with this process in our own life. An idealism turns—'collapses'—into romanticism, a realism into cynicism, a liberty into licence. The activism and opportunism are very visible among the younger Aborigines. There are many growing points here. They are all indicative of much racial unrest to come. Very little inquiry—competent scientific inquiry—is being made into the states of mind, the grievances and aspirations of these young men and women. I have not made them my special province, but I know enough of the facts to make me feel sure that any official or public assumption that such people can be effortlessly 'assimilated', on other than their own terms, is not well based.

We have almost no experience so far of how Aborigines respond to present conditions, which are very novel. There is ample work, a high inflation coming from large expenditures, a softening of restraints and disciplines, a marked desire to go to the towns, a pressure for amenities and comforts, and a great deal more gambling and drinking. Anthropologists have seen this kind of syndrome very widely, in many countries, and know how it comes about and develops into more acute forms. Their fact-finding methods and reasoned counsel have often been of use to authorities elsewhere. Our own authorities do not seem



Above, two totemic ancestors, identified by Walanj as Nunakangal and his son Ngari Ngari, from Paijinimbi. Below, a stylised version of the rainbow serpent, Kunmunggur, from Purmi.



persuaded that fact-finding is really necessary, or, at all events, that the established techniques of modern anthropology have any relevance. At times I wonder if there may not be a large file marked 'facts we would rather not know about.'

Some of the conditions among the modern Aborigines impel me also to wonder if anthropology itself should not reconsider some of its favourite ideas. Have we truly understood the process by which the modern Aborigines are, to some extent at least, transforming themselves as well as being transformed by things beyond their control?

II

I have come not long since from a part of Australia, the Fitzmaurice River in the Northern Territory, which is entirely empty of its former inhabitants. To the best of my belief, the Aborigines began to drift away from it as recently as the turn of the century, perhaps a little earlier. Some went east, south and south-west to cattle stations or to Wyndham, others north and east to stations, settlements or towns on the north-south road, even as far afield as Darwin itself. The original population must have been very substantial. The life-supporting power of the country is high by Aboriginal standards, although I found it somewhat inhospitable, and topographically too broken to have much attraction from a European's point of view. There is no evidence of any kind that the exodus was other than entirely voluntary. Expropriation or foreclosure of land did not occur. There was no forced labour. Conflict with settlers and police took place some distance away, but did not directly concern the riverine clans. The whole tract was—and still is—beyond the margin of European settlement and development. Now and then, one or two restricted localities on the southern bank may be visited by stock parties for the few days needed to round up wandering cattle. More rarely still, a prospector, dingo-scalper or crocodile hunter may go there briefly. At longer intervals again a police party may pass through one of the few routes by which the river may be forded. Otherwise it is quite deserted. Had it not been for the shelters I found, each with many splendid paintings testifying to the fact that men had been there who lived a life of high imagination, I should have no physical proof that it had ever been anything but the wilderness it is now.

The evidence, and discussions with natives who had lived there as children, satisfied me that the Aboriginal explanation is correct. They say that their appetites for tobacco and, to a lesser extent, for tea became so intense that neither man nor woman could bear to be without. Jealousy, ill will and violence arose over the division of the small amounts which came by gift and trade. The stimulants, if I may call them such, were of course not the only, or the first, European goods to reach them: probably iron goods were the first, but it was the stimulants that precipitated the exodus. Individuals, families and parties of friends simply went away to places where the avidly desired things could be obtained. The movement had phases and fluctuations, but it was always a one-way movement.

Now I think voluntary movements of this kind occurred widely in Australia. I will not say universally, but I have seen the process in several regions. There is a task here for historical anthropology. But even if our information is imperfect we must look all over again at what we *suppose* to have been the conditions of collapse of Aboriginal life. If we make a full allowance for what Andrew Lang called 'the ferocity and almost equally fatal goodwill' of Europeans, and for the spread of disease, the range and rapidity of collapse seem far too great for the known causes. We have been prone to argue, too directly, and probably far too simply, from half-known cases to unknown cases. Our models of explanation have been based either on the dramatic secondary causes—violence, disease, neglect, prejudice—or on the structure of Aboriginal society, or both. The structure has been depicted as so rigid and delicate, with everything so interdependent, that to interfere with any part of it—say by fencing off the hunting territories, or by prohibiting ceremonies—is to topple the whole, in rationale, design and structure. But there is at least some evidence which allows one to say that here were a people exploring a potential of their structure, a people taking advantage of its flexibility. For one of the enabling causes of the exodus I have described was a circumstance which certainly existed over all Australia. The so-called tribes were not self-sufficing entities but were interdependent in many important ways. Interconnexions by marriage, economy, trade, friendship, ceremonial intercourse and patterned conflict were fundamental features of life. It has often been convenient, when dealing with a particular set of problems, or a particular group of people, to reduce the emphasis on the interconnexions, as a matter of convenience. But there are problems

of study in which we must increase the emphasis. We then have to use the idea of an external social structure as well as an internal social structure. By 'external social structure' I mean the necessary relations of association with other collectivities.

The arrival of Europeans here and there in the region of which I speak—a vast region, never fully explored or occupied by the newcomers—was sufficient to unsettle Aborigines still long distances away. The repercussions spread, evidently with great rapidity, along the network of structural interconnexions. Eventually, for every Aboriginal who, so to speak, had Europeans thrust upon him, at least one other had sought them out. More would have gone to European centres sooner had it not been that their way was often barred by hostile Aborigines. As late as the early 1930s I was able to see for myself the battles between the encroaching myalls and weakening, now-sedentary groups who had monopolised European sources of supply and work.

The encroachers used every claim of right they had—kinship, affinity, friendship, namesake-relationship, trade partnership—to get and keep a toehold.

I will say something later of how this compares with the present time but, fundamentally, little has changed. The drive and vitality are still there. So is the external structure of the somewhat different groups into which the Aborigines have re-sorted themselves. And so, too, are many of the internal structures of thought and activity, or others derived from them.

A disintegration following on a voluntary and banded migration is a very different kind of problem from the kind we usually picture—that of the ruin of a helpless people, overwhelmed by circumstances, and by something like the mechanical collapse of their social structure. Whatever the secondary causes of the subsequent disintegration in this region, it was a voluntary movement which began it.

The primacy of that fact is important. It continues in the self-will and vitality of the Aborigines. These things are still very visible to those observers who are not blinded either by interest or preconception. They underlie what I represent as the modern struggle in parts where any considerable numbers remain.

The search for stimulants by these particular people must have been to them something like the spice-trade to the medievals. The new things gave a tang and zest to life which their own dietary lacked. In becoming their own voyagers, the Aborigines claimed, coaxed and

fought an opening into an incomprehensible new world. Many died, and many others were ruined; those who survived found they could not go back; and it does not seem that many even wanted to. Nowhere, as far as I am aware, does one encounter Aborigines who want to return to the bush, even if their new circumstances are very miserable. They went because they wanted to, and stay because they want to.

The pathetic fallacy has much corrupted our understanding of this process. Our thinking is far too affected by the cases where violent secondary causes—gross neglect, epidemic disease, extreme malnutrition, punitive expeditions, and the like—in some mixture, wiped out whole peoples or left wretched groups of survivors. So strong are these paradigms of sentiment that we project them even onto large surviving groups of Aborigines not now meeting those extremes. We fail to grasp the zest for life which animates them because we did not see it in those who died so miserably.

Some of our general ideas may thus need drastic revision. A view which has had considerable influence in the past is that to part an Aboriginal from his clan country is to wrest his soul from his body. There is a real, and an intense, bond between an Aboriginal and the ancestral estate he shares with other clansmen. I have seen a man, revisiting his homeland after an absence, fall on the ground, dig his fingers in the soil, and say: 'O, my country.' But he *had* been away, voluntarily; and he was soon to go away *again* voluntarily. Country is a high interest with a high value; rich sentiments cluster around it; but there are other interests; all are relative, and any can be displaced. If the bond between person and clan-estate were always in all circumstances of the all-absorbing kind it has sometimes been represented to be, then migrations of the kind I have described simply could not have occurred.

III

Over recent years there have been many signs of heightened interest in the Aborigines. I think there has been some growth of public sensibility. We now celebrate an Aboriginal Sunday. An optimistic philosophy of racial relations is expressed in Commonwealth policy. Legislation has become more imaginative. Some administrative organisations and services have been set up at a cost which would have

been beyond our wilder thoughts in the 1930s. But the movement is wider still. One does not have to make a special search to discover the increased extent to which serious publications deal with all things Aboriginal. Some quality of Aboriginal art, or at least of what is being put forward as Aboriginal art, has caught the public's imagination. There is even a strong market for all kinds of works dealing with the Aborigines. Perhaps we have crossed a kind of watershed, almost without noticing the fact, as one often does on slowly rising country.

Less than a generation ago it did not seem at all likely that anything like this would happen. But wherever we put the crest of the watershed, we would certainly be ungenerous, and probably wrong, to put its rise in the post-war period. In the middle and late 1930s there was a stir of reform in several States. In 1937 a conference was convened at Canberra of Protectors of Aborigines from all the States, except, of course, Tasmania. As far as I am aware, there had never been any other such meeting in our history. I do not know to what extent the recommendations of this conference helped to shape what was to come, but they may well have done so. One recommendation called for a declaration about what it termed 'the destiny of the race', and another recommended the 'absorption' of the mixed-bloods. It was a limited vision, but the protectors were criticised by some for going too far and by others for not going far enough. How far we have all now outrun that vision! We have not settled much about the 'destiny' of the race—and how could we?—but we have determined their 'future', and by law at that.

One could wish that the authors of the policy of assimilation had found for it a happier name. The crunch with which the lion begins to assimilate the lamb, and what follows are images best dismissed from the mind. Yet the physiological metaphor brings us uncomfortably near the truth. Assimilation means that the Aborigines must lose their identity, cease to be themselves, become as we are. Let us leave aside the question that they may not want to, and the possibility—I would myself put it far higher than a possibility—that very determined forces of opposition will appear. Suppose they do not know how to cease to be themselves?

People who brush such a question aside can know very little about what it is to be an Aboriginal. Not that we have ever been a people remarkable for an intelligent appraisal of other races and cultures.

At the end of the eighteenth and for some time into the nineteenth

century, when very little of a factual kind was known of the Aborigines, they were widely seen as 'children of nature' or as 'noble savages'. The extent to which this stereotype influenced early observations is now coming under study. Mr Bernard Smith, an historian of art, and Mr Mulvaney, an archaeologist, have done much to advance our knowledge of the matter.[1] Some of the least amiable stereotypes were induced by evangelical Christianity and social Darwinism in and over the course of the nineteenth century. They brought paganism into religious and philosophical contempt. The currency of their criticism cheapened as it became popularised. As late as 1894, Calvert still found it necessary to protest against the idea of Aborigines as 'mere baboons, possessing an innate and incurable deficiency of intellect rendering them incapable of instruction or civilisation'. It was probably to such sources that we owe as well the gloom and despondency which hung like a murk over all discussions and writings about Aboriginal affairs for a long time. At the turn of the century we find Andrew Lang and a great many others still intellectually convinced that they must die out. Others keep on to this day confounding an insolvency of imagination with the laws of nature.

I shall leave to others the study of the succession of such ideas, the kind of ignorance and philosophical prejudice in which they were grounded, how they overlapped, what influence they had, over whom, for how long, and the ways in which they issued in the actual treatment of the Aborigines. Some of the younger historians, such as Russel Ward and the late Margaret Kiddle, whose death broke a partnership I had hoped to make with her in this field, have shown how much might be done. There are some large tasks of scholarship awaiting attention in this field. Few historians have found our relations with the Aborigines of interest, and historical anthropology has not developed here to any extent. As I have already said, we deal with the present and future on the basis of what we believe the past to have been. And from the first days of settlement, right down to the present time, our understanding of the Aborigines has been blinkered as well as spectacled. The blinkers have been emotional general ideas formed by some kind of social philosophy. The spectacles have been the facts we had in our possession and the interpretations we placed on them.

The blinkers and the spectacles often fitted together uncomfortably. There often were odd men out in their day, men whom something had made aware of a lack of fit between what the Aborigines seemed to be

and the way they were made to seem by styles of vision then in vogue. Phillip and Macquarie were men of this kind; Grey the explorer was another; so, too, was Sir Baldwin Spencer. The visions they rebelled against were different, and the facts they could draw upon unequal, but they were singularly free, for Australians, from either sentiment or prejudice on matters of race, society and culture.

Are things in this respect any better than they were? I have just been studying a document, a Commonwealth document, which explains and defends the modern policy of assimilation. I cannot quote it in full, but I shall try to give a fair rendering of what it says, using its own words and phrases where possible.

The document sets out to persuade by building up some powerful general images of a kind which affect both the mind and the feelings. The first is one which I shall call the image of The Noble Friend of Aborigines. He is every good Australian. He is a man of sympathy, readily moved by Aboriginal sufferings. He seeks to keep a steadfast alliance between a warm heart, a cool head and steady hands. He is a man who always asks: 'What are the facts?' When the facts inevitably prove complex, he always says: 'Let us understand this question, wisely, clearly, exactly.' Then, having attained understanding, he settles down to do what is needed. The task is slow and painful, but he never allows the goal to fade. Difficulties keep on arising. He notes, with an unfailing intelligence, exactly what is happening, so that the warm heart, cool head and steady hands can do again exactly what is needed. The image is one of modern Everyman. Idealist, yet practical; rational, but warm-hearted; with an ear to the ground but with an inner vision able to see three generations ahead. And what is the vision? The former Aborigines distinguishable from us only by skin colour, if that.

The second image is that of The Flesh Creeper. This is not my choice of name. It is the way the document describes its own creation. The Flesh Creeper is explicitly likened to The Fat Boy in Pickwick. He is a type of man who seeks out the unusual and distressful to find something to which he may give an unnatural emphasis. He wishes to prick the conscience, to arouse feelings of horror which, the document says, are his reward. What does he desire? To make people hold out the open hands of help and friendship? No: to shut their fists in enmity.

A third image is then created. The name presents me with a difficulty. The document treats as a class all those who professionally, so to speak, 'deal in' Aborigines. The journalist, the cartoonist, the promoter of

tourist attractions, and the anthropologist are mentioned. On the principle that men who deal in iron are ironmongers, or in fish fishmongers, I can see no objection to naming this image that of the Monger of Aborigines. This image is carefully drawn so as to include the anthropologist. Words like 'anthropology' and 'science' and phrases like 'looking through a microscope' are placed against other words and phrases, such as 'pet animal', 'oddity', 'tourist attraction' and, *per contra*, 'human being', so as to convey an impression that 'anthropology' and 'human being' are somehow contradictory or incompatible.

I have time only to mention a fourth image, which I may call that of The Wistful Aboriginal. This is splendidly drawn to suggest a human being set against the idea of 'a social problem' or 'a political puppet'. It is done by the use and placement of such words as 'hope', 'fear', 'ambition', 'despair' and so on. One thus learns that in the heart of The Wistful Aboriginal is a hope that he may 'live his life to the full as a full member of the Australian community'. It turns out that The Noble Friend of Aborigines is offering The Wistful Aboriginal exactly what The Wistful Aboriginal is yearning after—assimilation. It follows, logically enough, that any Aborigines who are conscious of their race and separateness, and stress such facts, are acting unworthily. And, if there are others, not Aborigines, who promote such racial consciousness and separateness, they, too, probably have unworthy motive, and wish to keep controversy going for their own ends. The only people who want to advance the welfare of the individual Aborigines are therefore those who favour assimilation.

I do not particularly want to spend much time on this document. Its heart is in the right place if its head is not. In many ways it is *argumentum ad populum* at its worst. It excites feeling and trades on ignorance. Few people in Australia know anything of the Aborigines at first hand. They therefore cannot judge arguments which seem to rest on good knowledge. Its stereotypes are about as sensible and as true as their nineteenth-century counterparts. The one which I find particularly interesting is that of the Aboriginal knocking at a door which selfish interests are trying to close against him. It does not agree with the facts as I understand them. There is a door, if you like, and the Aborigines are knocking at it: but in the regions of which I speak it is not the door of Australianism. It would be more accurate, using this image, to say that there are a number of doors through none of which the Aborigines seem to want to go, but through which different European interests are

trying to pull them. And each door is marked: 'This way to our version of a full life.'

I do not know every Aboriginal in Australia, but those I do know show plainly that they want to combine Aboriginal and European things in a manner of their own choice. It is this strong preference which underlies the struggle I have referred to. Out of many hundreds, apart from those in areas where settlement is now a century or more old, I have met four Aborigines who wanted, as far as I could tell, to be fully Europeanised. Each was a woman and each went into a religious order. I have known several men who, having a good opportunity to live in a European fashion, preferred not to. I have never known any who seemed, as far as I could tell, to envy Europeans for much more than their skills and possessions. I have known many who, intuiting something of the pressures behind the mask over our way of life, were repelled, especially by the disciplines of regular work and fixed hours, and by the social costs we bear. I doubt very much if my experience differs greatly from that of others who spend much time with Aborigines.

There is no reason to believe that many Aborigines want the kind of future which is predetermined by assimilation. If there is evidence that many do not and if, further, we meet the position by making their decision for them, the issue takes itself to a plane where expediency has to look for ethical justifications. That there are immense pressures of expediency we all understand. But they do not answer the ethical questions. The principles are clear. Is this use of power arbitrary? Is the decision just? And is it goodneighbourly? Rigorously asked, and candidly answered, they will leave many people feeling uncomfortable. The policy does not envisage the Aborigines as having any right of option. To do so would challenge the assumption that assimilation is what they need and want. There are positive requirements which compel an Aboriginal to give up his own choice of life in order to gain things otherwise conceded to be his of right. The ethics of the policy thus seem very dubious.

The trouble is that our motives are mixed. We are concerned with our own reputation as much as, if not a little more than, the Aborigines' position. Such a policy makes us stand rather better with ourselves than we once stood, but it comforts us rather more than we have any reason to suppose it will comfort the Aborigines. It helps to expiate the past by a moral gesture to the future. The trouble with mixed motives is

that they lead to crossed purposes. I think that much of the difficulty centres in the fact that we have persuaded ourselves we have only two options—the methods of the past and assimilation. The either-or approach scarcely seems necessary. There is a third possibility. And that is to found a policy on a real knowledge of what is taking place among the modern Aborigines, not on a *mystique* about their imaginary future. This leads me to a most difficult set of problems. Part of what the Aborigines are becoming is made up of obscure effects of what they were. Some of these effects are in radical conflict with the European *mystique* about the future.

IV

In a certain region of north Australia a myth which is still told tells of events at a remote time in human history, The Dream Time. A great man, Angamunggi, was treacherously killed by his son, who had committed incest with his two sisters, Angamunggi's daughters. The girls were trusting and, we may presume, innocent. The son, Tjinimin, was filled with guile, malice and lust. Having seduced his sisters, he next speared his father, while Angamunggi sat unsuspectingly, surrounded by his many children, at song and music during a festive gathering of all the clans. The father, in agony and about to die, lingered on to perform a series of marvels. He moved from place to place, and in doing so formed a track or path which is now sacred. At each resting place he tried unavailingly to staunch the flow of blood from the spear wound in his side. In some mysterious way his blood produced perennial pools and springs of water, which remain as his marks or signs. After a long wandering he took all the fire then in the world, tied it on his head with his own hair, and waded into the sea. Another man daringly snatched a brand just as Angamunggi was about to disappear under the waters. In this way fire was saved for men, who would otherwise have had to eat raw food, like animals. And, in his death agonies, Angamunggi gave men perennial waters. They were life-giving waters, for it was in them that, somehow, he also placed the spirits of all children who have been born since then.

A book could be written—indeed, I cannot promise not to write it—about the symbolisms of the myth. All I wish to do now is to resolve what is secondary and incidental into what is primary, and then

rearrange the primary elements another way. What emerges is a story which suddenly becomes strangely familiar to us. A benign father is killed by his evil son. The son goes off among men. The father, by his death, gives men the fire and water which are their means of perennial life. Let us put this alongside another story: that of a benign father who sends his well-beloved son to redeem men by dying for them. By his death the son gives men a prospect of eternal life with the father. Here are two remarkably parallel intuitions about man and his whole situation. There is of course no historical connexion whatever.

Now, Angamunggi was not any kind of god. He made no covenant with men; he gave no moral instructions; he did not demand righteousness or supplication. Nor was he saint or sage. He is conceived of as man, an immense man of great powers, including the power to work marvels. His name is revered, after a fashion, but not in any way worshipped, though he 'looked after' people. One patrilineal moiety called him 'father's father', the other moiety called him 'mother's father'. Sometimes he was called by both moieties *Yila Neki*, the Father of Us All. He was a benign image, personifying the good. His lot somehow typifies for the Aborigines the lot of men, which is both good and bad. His 'death' at Tjinimin's hands was metaphorical, or at least inconclusive, in that he is still somehow able to manifest himself: in the fertilising power of water; in the sacramental power of blood; in the manifold powers of fire; and in the vital principle which is in seasons, rain, tides, and the begetting of children by spiritual agency. All these, so to speak, are continuous functions of his powers in 'life' and 'death'. He is also manifested objectively: physically, as an immense snake supposed to inhabit deep waters; and by signs: the rainbow, which is taken to be his tongue or spit; by marks or paintings on rocks; or through things which men make, e.g. bullroarers, on which they incise or paint signs which are his marks and, being his marks, somehow have his efficacy.

This myth reveals a very characteristic structure of Aboriginal outlook, half implicit, half explicit. In the language of an older time, it is a 'type'. The word 'type' here means an original form or figure or model after which later things are made. What is modelled on or after the type is its 'antitype'. The Angamunggi-Tjinimin story is a collective representation, a 'type', of something about the whole human situation, an ultimate social reality, as the blacks understand it. Both the Old and the New Testaments make use of the idea of a type. The scriptural

types are foreshadowing or prophetic models or figures of what is to come. St Paul tells us that Adam was 'a figure of him that was to come'. The prophetic element is not present in Aboriginal thought. Consequently, the actual or supposedly 'antitypical' life of men is not conceived of as moving to any kind of consummation. But the prefigurative element is there, with an eschatalogical quality. End and beginning are here at one, or supposed to be at one. This is the reason why the more reflective Aborigines, to a question 'why do you do this?' will often say: 'We follow up The Dreaming.' I have elsewhere said that they see life as a one-possibility thing with a once-for-all character. It is thus perfectly consistent that the myths should depict men as they do—always in a 'human, all-too-human' fashion, good and bad, cowardly and brave, open and deceitful, filial and unfilial. As though to say 'this is how men *are*, this *is* reality'. It is also consistent that in actual life they should lack what we recognise as moral zeal or earnestness. And it is just as consistent that they should show a disinterest in 'development' as we understand it, and thus be thoroughly at cross-purposes with much that we want them to do.

A proper understanding of the structure of life and thought which produces such a myth helps to explain much that is otherwise baffling. So long as the image with that structure has force, it makes the Aborigines genuinely unable to comprehend many things. One of them is the central theme of Christian teaching, let alone its mystery. That is, the theme and mystery of sacrifice. It should be obvious why. God's sacrifice of his son is almost, though perhaps not quite, the *contra*-type of Angamunggi's murder by his son. The one was an unmerited grace coming from perfect goodness, the other a gratuitous crime coming from unmitigated evil. In the Aboriginal myth we are dealing with the explicit, that is, the verbal expression of an intuition which is only in part conscious. Externally, so to speak, it issues in a story; the story states a mystery; the mystery seems to summate an intuition of the essential nature of social life; the intuition is framed on the model of the human family; and the mythological drama of the family is almost the reverse of the idea of sacrifice. No true juncture of the Christian and the Aboriginal mind can thus be possible. They face each other at a frontier of the mind and, as far as my experience runs, they go on without a true meeting. This is but one of several divisions of Aboriginal life in which, in my understanding, the same thing occurs. The contrasts are not absolute, but very radical. If they

were absolute, not even a dusty encounter would be possible. When we finally isolate and study these fundamental structures we may find that we have much of the explanation of the quite marked disinterest the Aborigines have shown and still show in so many kinds of European activity.

Consider a few of the contrasts. We are deeply interested in futurity. We try to foresee, forestall and control it by every means from astrology and saving to investment and insurance: the Aborigines are scarcely concerned with it at all; it is not a problem for them. Their 'future' differentiates itself only as a kind of extended present, whose principle is to be continuously at one with the past. This is the essence of the set of doctrines I have called The Dreaming. Our society is organised by specialised functions which cut across groups; theirs on a basis of segmentary groups, often arranged with a geometric symmetry into twos, fours and eights, each having comparable sets of functions. Theirs is a self-regulating society, knowing nothing of our vast apparatus of state instrumentalities for authority, leadership or justice. Ours is a market-civilisation, theirs not. Indeed, there is a sense in which The Dreaming and The Market are mutually exclusive. What is The Market? In its most general sense it is a variable locus in space and time at which values—the values of anything—are redetermined as human needs make themselves felt from time to time. The Dreaming is a set of doctrines about values—the values of everything—which were determined once-for-all in the past. The things of The Market—money, prices, exchange values, saving, the maintenance and building of capital—which so sharply characterise our civilisation, are precisely those which the Aborigines are least able to grasp and handle. They remain incomprehensible for a long time. And they are among the foremost means of social disintegration and personal demoralisation.

Some of the differences which come from all this are best shown negatively, some positively. As a positive example, take the segmentary principle, which among us is so buried by functional specialisations that we almost forget its existence. A segmentary society is one built up from unit-parts or series of parts having a like structure. Aboriginal society is built up from types of clans, moieties and the like, which must remain separate but only in such a way that their separateness does not lessen the unity of the whole system or organisation. The separateness becomes an interdependent separateness. A man in one segment,

wishing to take part in a religious ceremony, necessarily depends upon a man from another segment to put the proper signs on his body. Or, wishing to have his son initiated, must look to men from other segments to perform the crucial parts of the rite. The fact of other segments is a condition of his own fullness of life, not a competitor with its fullness. The fact of other functions is a condition of fullness of life with us too: but it is also the death of a certain kind of fullness.

The kind of fundamental differences I have mentioned—the attitude to futurity, the segmentary principle, the self-regulating system, the disbursive sumptuary plan of economy—and many others issue in a general design or plan of life at the opposite pole of our own. Indeed if one tried to invent two styles of life, as unlike each other as could be, while still following the rules which are necessary if people are to live together at all, one might well end up with something like the Aboriginal and the European traditions.

Where we have gone most seriously wrong is in two things. We imagine that when these Aboriginal traditions break down, as they widely have, only scraps survive and survive fortuitously. The other mistake is to imagine that the way to change this kind of continuity is by the rational demonstrations.

It would be helpful to stop thinking of the Aborigines as a 'primitive' people. They are a highly specialised people and a contemporary people. Their modes of life and thought have been elaborated over at least as long a period of time as we ordinarily think of as comprising European 'history'. Unless we see both their contemporaneity and their specialisation, we set up a false model, a kind of 'genetic' model in which they are depicted as 'simple' or 'earlier' or 'more primitive' than ourselves. The image is of people lying somewhere along a uniform linear serial sequence with us. According to this model, we thus have only to 'teach' or 'show' Aborigines where they made their mistakes and they will quickly become Europeans in outlook, organisation and custom. All we have to do is instruct them in the manifest virtues of our style of life and, without undue strain, they will follow. This is a fantasy. It perishes on a single fact of life. They have to 'unlearn' being Aborigines, in mind, body and estate. The problems of 'unlearning' are visible in a thousand miserable encampments around the continent. These camps in part mirror our self-centredness. In part they mirror also the Aborigines' inability to work miracles. Consider the outcome if we were to try to convert the modern price economy to the medieval

principle of the 'just price'. Yet this principle is closer to modern principle than any of our cultural principles are to those of the Aborigines. Their rapid assimilation to European culture will be possible only by a kind of brain-washing.

Yet I am not arguing that their life and thought have never changed, or cannot change. It would be unwise to make such statements even if there were no evidence to turn to. Actually, there is a good deal of evidence. For example, the kinship structures show much evidence that in the past there were changes of the kind one calls 'development'. When the morphological study of kinship is complete, we may be able to deduce a lot of things about the speciation and variegation of these, their most resistant and continuous modes of organising social life. Then there are all the evidences of mural art. Compare the extreme realism of the so-called X-ray art and the extreme abstraction through which a vital human image is depicted by three lines. Here is another kind of change, not development, but 'alteration'. We cannot really suppose these styles altered autonomously. There must have been many psychic and social concomitants. There is, of course, abundant evidence of change in contemporary times. Anthropologists have studied scores of instances in which the Aborigines, by compulsion or choice, have abandoned places, things, customs, even languages and possibly ideas (though of this it is naturally hard to be sure). They have also resisted many attempts to make them accept developments, alterations and substitutions, or have turned away from many opportunities open to them to do so. I cannot describe even in summary how it has worked out. My 'dusty encounter' must do for the moment. I think it is more important to consider the bearing on my two main statements: that the Aborigines are widely in an obscure struggle with us, and that the essence of the struggle is their wish to go their own way.

For what fundamental reasons do they resist? Is there a perceptual block of such a kind that capital-building and other such type-conceptions of our culture just do not make sense, since the form-ideas either do not exist or, if they do, are hooked up with contrary conceptions? Or shall we accept the easier hypothesis: that it is because they resent our denial to them of decent opportunities of education and participation in our life? I do not believe we shall get anywhere with questions of this kind until we revalue a good deal of our knowledge of both past and present.

V

I have shown how a search for stimulants, and for new kinds of wealth, led certain natives to their ruin. Voluntarily, by compulsion, or simply because a particular rationale vanished, they abandoned or modified one kind of activity after another. Eventually they came to things they would not, or did not know how to, abandon or modify. They reached a kind of residuum: the conventional practices of life, the due forms of marriage, the initiations of youths, the machinery of grievance settlement, and mundane institutions of this order. What was left was a sort of Low Culture as distinct from the High Culture of tradition. When this truncated life came under pressure—from failing numbers and the ageing of leaders—and when the objective circumstances of life were at about their worst (during the post-World War I period)—an effort was made to reconstitute the High Culture. In one place, after fifty years of Europeanism, another religious cult started. I think I was perhaps the first to see this cult in operation since it had been reported by Sir Baldwin Spencer. It replaced The All-Father by The All-Mother, Karwadi, who is The Old Woman of the Kunapipi cult studied by Dr Berndt. This was probably as close as the Aborigines could come to the type of religious cult familiar from Melanesian, Polynesian and other regions. Here it used a complementary idea which was beautifully appropriate, logically and psychologically—the idea of The All-Mother—to continue where The All-Father had failed. The theme was reconstitutive, not revolutionary or millenarian. Still no prophetic element! Still the guiding conception of continuity with The Dream Time! The bullroarer was swung to summon a new life-principle to a dwindling and needy people. And then The All-Mother in turn began to fail.

All this was twenty-five years ago. I was in the same place not long ago. The rites of The All-Mother had not been held for some time. The old were in conflict with the young, the men with the women. It would be only a little fanciful to say that the spirit of Tjinimin was abroad. An old man, once the most feared and influential in the region, was being derided. His wife had run away, taking his son—not her own child—as her lover, and his son had helped in the abduction of a sister. And all, old, young, and women, were in a conflict with Europeanism as marked as it had ever been. The war, with its upsets, and the post-war inflation, had drawn a boundary and had stretched to breaking-point what was

left of a tradition. One could find without difficulty what the situation was. It can be put simply. The Aborigines were still not interested in anything but the externals and material possessions of Europeanism. They were as far as ever from grasping its rationale, its forms, or its values. They still wanted to go their own way. I could not but notice the extent to which opportunism, activism, fecklessness and light-headedness existed among the younger people. There was something like a mania for gambling. Theft and general dishonesty were more common than I had ever known before. There was also rather more antagonism towards Europeans, and a trickier, less naïve manipulation. Here is one of the worst difficulties. An Aboriginal who is 'unlearning' his traditional code does not end the process as a *tabula rasa*: he has been learning something else at the same time.

I had this kind of thing in mind when I spoke of the 'dusty encounter'. It is as good a phrase as any, though I might well have said, in Tönnies's words, that European and Aboriginal were 'associated in spite of separation' and 'separated in spite of association'. That is what it means. It is what one expects when *Gemeinschaft* meets *Gesellschaft*, when segment meets function, in such conditions of collision.

In my studies of this region the facts of struggle have kept on filling my eye. I doubt if it is a bias of observation. The region and the people are not so unlike others. The one thing that seems to continue is the effort of the restless, if baffled, Aborigines to work out terms of life they know how to handle. This is why they develop rather than alter, substitute rather than forgo, and give in only to try to outwit. Plainly visible through the process is the fact that it has a system, as every process must. It is as plain as daylight that this system is still fundamentally Aboriginal in type.

Here the former territories have been given up long since, but each adult knows his clan country and that of his mother. They are still indispensable names for use as pointers and reckoners. Each man can give at least part of his patriline. Not one but can say which is his moiety, those timeless divisions which existed even before Angamunggi. Very many have married wrongly, but few fail to express regret at the fact. The old trading system still runs on the same principles, though with many more breaches. The corporate clan estate is only a memory, but some of its signs—totemic markings—are still jealously guarded rights.

My professional audience may wonder why I have not given more

time to such matters which, after all, are the hard stuff of anthropological study. I would simply reply that I prefer on this occasion to try to make a sketch of another kind of reality. There is a wholesome fear in modern anthropology of overloading abstractions with reality. We thus sometimes beg the question whether we have consulted the right reality in the first place. Behind the forms we abstract are men with ideas. The things I have concentrated on are persistent ideas about how life should be. The continuity of social forms rests on idea-continuity, and this in turn on the continuity with which interests are valued. Here there is an implicit as well as an explicit tradition. One of our problems is just the implicitness or wordlessness of some of the conceptions still powerfully affecting the Aborigines. Often one is not too sure even of the questions to ask, or of the right ways to ask them.

Both implicit and explicit traditions are functions of rational intellects. People who suppose the Aborigines to be without intellects of course will not readily credit them with rationality. That mistake is at the bottom of some of our most misguided actions. There is no necessary contradiction in speaking of a tradition which is both 'implicit' and yet 'rational'. The same visual sign, a circle or a set of concentric circles, may be a symbol of, i.e. stand for or 'mean', a waterhole, a camp, a woman's breast, or her womb, according to the context in which the sign is used. What is it about these which has struck a spark from Aboriginal imagination? The idiom of the European mind would allow—though nowadays a little grudgingly—a poet, or an artist, or a religious thinker to find a meaning to unify things so disparate. One of the timeless functions of poetry and art is to reveal, and of religion to sacralise, the gulfs which a mundane life opens between things the 'practical' and 'scientific' minds treat as disparate. Hence the 'divorce' of which we speak between 'life' on the one hand and art, poetry and religion on the other. The Aboriginal mind is free of these tensions. At least it was. Its most fundamental cast seems to be analogical and *a fortiori* metaphorical. The difference between analogy and other kinds of thought is really in the purposes of the thinkers. The Aboriginal analogy-finder sees likeness and similarity in order to construct symbolic unities. We see them in order to construct functional and systemic classifications for wholly different purposes. Reality is cut up, put into different compartments, and related to life in a very idiosyncratic fashion. What makes the Aboriginal idiosyncrasy difficult for us to grasp, or grasp easily, is the force of our Hebraic-Grecian-

Roman tradition of intellectual and spiritual culture, and the modern mutations. But a waterhole, a camp, a breast and a womb really do have something in common: something to do with 'life' or the sustenance of life. This 'something' can be expressed by a sign, and whenever the sign is used it can point beyond itself to the things unified by its meaning. The sign can by use and wont become so much a part of men's concern with 'life' that the arbitrariness of the association, and the first insight by analogy, can fall below the level of the conscious and become part of the presuppositions with which one faces living. Much of Australian anthropology could well be re-examined on its dimension of symbolism. Miss Nancy Munn has recently studied complexes of visual signs among the Walbiri. We await the completion of her work with great interest.* Perhaps anthropology, like history, needs rewriting with each generation.

I am suggesting that the association of European and Aboriginal has been a struggle of partial blindness, often darkened to sightlessness on our part by the continuity of the Aborigines' implicit tradition. Implicitness does not imply lack of power. We are all subtly dominated by tacit presuppositions. What life is, how it should be lived, what it can and cannot become, what things in it are significant, what is their relative place, what their value: all these may be so well known, so unproblematic, that they do not have to be formulated in any clear way. A single idea and word—*God* or *moira*—may summate such ultimate meanings. The Aboriginal concept of The Dreaming is such a summation. The traditional pattern or design of Aboriginal life is grounded in this conception.

When the blacks speak of The Dreaming they offer something between a justification and a rationalisation of their life. It is not 'history' or 'explanation'. It is too mixed up with analogical devices of symbolic imagery to be a true exegesis, too unreflective to be an apologetic. It is part of a moving system, accompanying it like a shadow, in continuous correspondence with it, being modified as life modifies. Its naïveté is touched here and there by more profound reflections: the myth of Angamunggi and Tjinimin shows what a potential was there for inspirational thought. One cannot help but wonder what those elements might have turned into under the touch of an Amos, an Ezekiel or Isaiah, or someone like Jeremiah, who said

* Now published as *Walbiri Iconography* (Cornell University Press, 1973).

of himself that he had 'a burning fire shut up in his bones'. The Aborigines 'made' The Dreaming as they went along, making it from such ingredients as were there. It was the kind of stuff on which prophets might have thrived, but no prophets arose, or none of whom we have heard. Yet they did in comparable conditions in Melanesia and Polynesia. Is there an explanation?

I recall having seen somewhere in the Australian literature, though I cannot remember where, a reference to an old Aboriginal woman who prophesied a time when the whites would be black and the blacks white. This is very reminiscent of things we know of from Melanesia and elsewhere. A search might yield something interesting. But the best results will come from an inquiry guided by theory. The facts we want to know may have to be built up. If I may quote Myrdal: 'Scientific facts do not exist *per se*, waiting for scientists to discover them.' Each such fact is 'a construction abstracted out of a complex and interwoven reality by means of arbitrary definitions and classifications'. The theoretical reworking of a great deal of our knowledge of the past is now very necessary. Incidentally, it does not greatly matter from this viewpoint if the traditional way of life has vanished. If my argument is correct, the fundamental plan will have the strongest continuity of anything in that life, and we shall readily recognise its persistence through all but catastrophic change. Thereafter we shall continue to meet with it in concealed and cryptic forms.

The works of men like Sir Baldwin Spencer and Dr Roth were written broadly to the model of natural history. The role they gave to the anthropologist was to record and describe the facts. This they did with great ability in a period when scholarship was still suffused by 'philosophical prejudices and an aura of sociological mysticism'. Because of their restraint one does not look to them for imaginative interpretations of what they saw. They are a sharp contrast with a scholar of equal distinction, Professor Radcliffe-Brown, who wrote his indispensable studies most deliberately from a theory of human society in general. His model was that of experimental natural science rather than natural history. A third contrast, and one at least as sharp, is with the work of Dr Roheim, who sought to interpret Aboriginal data in such a way that a bridge would be built between two disciplines, psychology in its psycho-analytical developments, and the comparative sociology of social systems. Each of these men has an unusual observational skill and field ability. But they abstracted differently from the

same or comparable facts; they abstracted to different levels of generality; and they projected their abstractions onto different schematic devices. The consequence is that to relate the work of any one to the work of any other is always difficult and at times impossible. We now need new minds and new points of view, even if only about old ideas.

Designed by Kirsty Morrison

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Africa in the middle of the Munich crisis to study the Kamba tribe in the Kitui area of Kenya as a member of an Oxford team which intended to report on Kenya along lines suggested by Lord Hailey in his classical work *An African Survey*. Stanner was still at work in the wilds of eastern Kenya when war broke out and he was recalled from the field.

After his return to Australia Stanner became Research Officer to two successive Ministers for the Army, Mr P. C. (now Sir Percy) Spender and Mr F. M. Forde. In early 1942 he was directly commissioned to raise and command a regiment-sized unit — the 2/1 NAOU; or North Australia Observer Unit — to keep under military surveillance the vast outlying tract of coast and hinterland between Normanton (Qld.) and Cambridge Gulf (W.A.) then thought to be under threat of Japanese invasion. When the danger receded, Stanner was posted for other duties. In 1944-5 he served on the Australian Army Staff in London, studying post-hostilities planning, military government and civil affairs there and on the continent. In 1945, having been especially trained at the U.S. School of Military Government at Charlottesville, Va., to take part in the occupation of Japan, he was sent — as he says, 'in the fashion of all armies' — to an area of which he knew nothing except its ethnography, British North Borneo, where he served as Senior Civil Affairs Officer until the war ended.

After the war Stanner studied reconstruction problems in Papua and New Guinea, Fiji and Western Samoa, and in 1947 went back to East Africa as foundation Director of the Makerere Institute of Social and Economic Research. In 1950 he returned to Australia as Reader in Comparative Social Institutions at The Australian National University. He resumed his researches in the Northern Territory. They still continue.

From 1953 to 1955 Stanner was Australian Commisioner on the South Pacific Commission. In 1964 he became Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, a position from which he retired in 1970. He served as a member of the Commonwealth Council for Aboriginal Affairs (1967-77). In 1971 he was awarded the Mueller and Cilento Medals for distinguished researches, and in 1972 the C.M.G. for services to Government and the Aborigines. The Australian National University in 1972 conferred on him an honorary doctorate.