Foreword

LESTER-IRABINNA RIGNEY

Na marni purrutye marni 'Alas For The Pelicans' pepe. Welcome to this book 'Alas For The Pelicans'.

Ngai narri Lester-Irabinna Kudnuitya Rigney.

My name is Lester-Irabinna (Warrior), Kudnuitya (name of third child if son) Rigney.

Ngai yaitya meyu Narungga, Kaurna, Ngarrindjeri, Buhhiyanaunungho.

I am a man from the Nations of the Narungga, Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri.’ Ngai Taihurtinna Nellie Raminymemmerin Yakkana Ivaritjiburha.

I am a descendant of Nellie Raminymemmerin who is the sister of Ivaritji. Pangkarra ia, Kaurnako yerta warrabutto pepe.

This is Kaurna country (Adelaide Plains) where I write this paper.
As is my cultural custom before speaking, it is important to locate myself in Kaurna language protocol that respects the laws of my Narungga, Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri cultures. Speaking in Kaurna language (in this case writing) before entering into English dialogue acknowledges Kaurna land on which this foreword was written. As I write here for audiences both in and outside the academy, I seek the patience of both as I examine the contents of this book. Moving in and out of cultural and academic conventions is vital to my writing. I do so as I seek to tell my story of `contact' to both academic and public audiences to reach the ignorance of the educated and the consciousness of the non-academic.

It is indeed an honour as an Aboriginal Australian to write the foreword for this book. Inside its pages are stories of two colonial journeys, those of Matthew Flinders (English) and Nicolas Baudin (French), whose paths crossed in Ngarrindjeri waters in full view of my ancestors. I welcome the contributions this book makes to the political and social struggles of my peoples. Moreover, I acknowledge the intellectual contribution of these essays toward the disciplines of Indigenous Studies and History. A critical text that assists in educating majority Australians about their own contact history has a truly honourable intention. This text joins a growing list of works, including those of prominent historian Henry Reynolds, in answering the public's questions: 'Why didn't we know?' 'Why weren't we told?' Readers of Australian history will welcome the answers this text brings to such questions. The story told in these pages begins with the journey of Flinders and Baudin. Unlike the authors in this book, I choose not to start this foreword at the beginning of 'white' contact with 'blacks'. This is a luxury only afforded to the non-Aboriginal writer/historian. The strength of Aboriginal knowledge is its pluralism. Aboriginal peoples can operate in the Western knowledge systems of history as well as draw on a rich source of oral traditions and the arts passed down from generations. It would be culturally unethical for me to tell half the story, drawing only from sources of the written word. Therefore the act of writing this foreword to a book that is authored entirely by non-Aboriginal historians about events that include First Australians, must locate itself within dual contexts. On one hand the Foreword must seek to privilege Aboriginal histories and experiences, while on the other, introduce the reader to the contents of the text. As an Aboriginal man I could write in no other way. Similarly, I do not wish to speak for non-Aboriginal peoples or interpret their voice, as so many have done for us. Therefore, I leave Flinders and Baudin to be critiqued and judged by their own via the authors' essays within. However, I do intend to chart the Aboriginal oral records of `contact' history in South Australia.

My understanding of early colonial expeditions begins well before European arrival or even `contact'. My understanding of `contact' begins through the fires and stories of my Narungga past. Before I was born, the old people around ancient fires told many Narungga stories. These fires are sites of knowledge, knowledge production and transmission. The fires of knowledge warmed Narungga identities and cultures. These stories were generated by the wisdom of Narungga before me who witnessed contact with other first peoples and later Europeans.

I was fortunate to be born at a time when the sacred fires of Narungga knowledge were still alight. Some of them had already gone out and others remained in a perilous state. The task of my generation is to maintain the strong fires whilst urgent attention is focused on the weaker ones to rekindle their embers to find warmth in their glow.

I remember vividly as a child being fascinated by the stories of the *First fires* of knowledge. *First fires* were burning non-stop before invasion and were meticulously attended to maintain their warmth and glow. Many of the stories from the *First fires* continue today but are seldom spoken in public. Echoes of the ancestors through narrative accompanied by food and fire explained the cultural wealth I and others like me have inherited. It also explained what we have lost through European early `contact'. Dreaming and *First fires* played a central role in the social and political structure of my peoples. The legacy left by our ancestral giants yesterday teaches children today the lessons from the Dreaming. Among others, these great spirits were:

- **Ngarrindjeri Dreaming** (The great spirit of Ngurunderi)
- **Kaurna Dreaming** (The great spirit of Tjilbruke)
- **Narungga Dreaming** (Gooreta, the spirit giants of Buthera, Madjitju and Ngarna)
Today this transmission draws on various media including both literary and oral discourse using technology, digital data storage and extensive texts. With the history of 'contact' now being made easily accessible to Narungga peoples, Elders have judged the time now to be culturally safe to share the Gooreta dreaming narrative. The story told here is a shortened version.

The Narungga First fire narrative of the Gooreta (Shark) dreaming is unique as it tells of the foreigners' arrival and subsequent 'contact'. The story talks of a meeting that was to be held by all the states of the Narungga Nation (Yorke Peninsula) at the head of Gulf St Vincent. A group of Narungga peoples caught a small fish and wrapped it in bark with its fins exposed. The fish was released in order that other groups around the Peninsula would catch the fish, indicating a grand meeting after the full moon of all Narungga. Several weeks later the fish returned swimming in and around a giant school. The children rushed into the water with screams of joy to catch the abundant fish. Soon mothers and fathers waded in knee deep to join the welcoming party. Screams of joy turned to screams of terror when the little fish was no longer small but huge. The fish had changed colour from brown to white with razor sharp teeth. The small fish had turned into a large white pointer shark. The shark roared the Narungga word 'Bucha' (deadly/lethal). This story is a harrowing First fire prophecy that told our people to expect white danger from the sea. The genesis for this story could have been in response to any of a number of 'contact' observations and/or collisions, including sealers or subsequent expeditions by Colonel Light (aboard Rapid), Flinders (aboard Investigator), Baudin (aboard Le Geographe) or the crew of HMS Buffalo. My mother has shared this story with many children.

My mother is a Narungga, Kaurna and Adnymathanha woman who was raised on the Aboriginal Mission of Point Pearce (Bukkiyana). She told me like her grandmother told her that my Kaurna lineages was directly affected during European 'contact'. As a descendant of Nellie Raminyemmerin (a Kaurna Woman), I am required to pass on the story told to me. During First fires and before the official founding of the colony of South Australia, Nellie Raminyemmerin (I choose to use her Kaurna name) was kidnapped from Kaurna country and taken to Kangaroo Island. First fires told of pirates, whalers and others who on Kangaroo Island sustained the unsustainable in terms of cruelty of our people. There she had numerous children to a European sailor by the name of Wilkins. It was clearly stated to my mother from Elder Aunty Doris Graham (one of the oldest living Kaurna women today) that Raminyemmerin was a sister of Invaritji from the missions of Point Pearce and Point McLeay. Ivaritji, whom many of my elders knew, was the daughter of Ityamaitpinna (King Rodney) from the Aldinga region.

My father is a Ngarrindjeri man who transferred to Point Pearce from the mission of Point McLeay (now known as Raukkan). Like my grandparents, my mother and father sang and told many stories of the First fires of knowledge that transmitted culture before the establishment of the missions of Point McLeay and Point Pearce.

I can recall several First fire 'contact' oral stories that can only be described as collisions rather than encounters. First fires, stories of the disreputable behaviour and aggression of whalers and others, led to organised resistance. First fires of the Ngarrindjeri told of Charles Sturt's expedition down the rivers Murrumbidgee and Murray, well before he arrived in Ngarrindjeri country (Encounter Bay) in 1830. Oral history abounds today about how the Ngarrindjeri observed Sturt's expedition to gather intelligence through surveillance of European fighting capacity and weaponry. This intelligence was passed up and down the length of the river Murray among other Aboriginal Nations via message stick carriers and signal fires. Similar, oral testimony exists about the Rufus River/Lake Victoria conflict. This is described by some Ngarrindjeri Elders as organised resistance. Signal fires by Aboriginal Nations along the river Murray told of the tremendous bravery of the Maraura peoples. The pain and suffering of official punitive expeditions that followed were described with harrowing accuracy. I remember clearly being told of the infamous 96th Regiment and accompanying mounted troopers stationed at Moorundie.

The intricate oral detail of the wreck of the Maria and subsequent conflict with the Tanganekald of the Ngarrindjeri continues to be passed down to younger generations. The survivors were rescued and
given food and shelter. However, days later a dispute occurred that saw all the survivors killed. The Ngarrindjeri also possess the in-depth story of Captain Collet Barker's death at Lake Alexandrina. Clearly, oral histories still provide Aboriginal peoples with a rich comprehension of 'contact' encounters.

However, the period of Australian history from the 1800s to 1880s is a major site of contention between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. This site of history is not one of a shared collective space either historically, philosophically or intellectually. There has been a broad spectrum of debate by political commentators and interest groups about whether we should celebrate this history and glorify its achievements, or reconcile the dispossession, genocide and neglect. Prime Minister John Howard accuses those who label Australian history as unsavoury of promoting a 'Black Arm Band View of history'. On the other hand the works of Henry Reynolds refers to this accusation as the Blind-Folded View of history. These categories of history are both problematic intellectually and polemically. Such categories are not new. This type of polemic debate raged in Adelaide with the publishing of Alan Pope's 1989 work Resistance and Retaliation: Aboriginal-European Relations in Early Colonial South Australia. Thirteen years on, similar debates re-occur as the state of South Australia celebrates the bicentenary of Matthew Flinders' meeting with Nicolas Baudin at Encounter Bay. The festival titled 'Encounter 2002' included a series of events, public speeches and exhibitions that very rarely interrogated Aboriginal presence or the concept of terra nullius. Governments funded many historical re-enactments without Aboriginal participation. Several social and political commentators in Adelaide during 'Encounter 2002' were not willing to subject Flinders or Baudin, the objects of their devotion, to robust criticism. Yet Flinders and Baudin were critical themselves toward those who blindly follow inept 'leadership'. Commemorative events such as 'Encounter 2002' are the barometer of the popularity of the colonial position. Facts are passed over as the romantics gorge themselves on a feast of glorification. As the year 2002 draws to a close I am honoured to write a foreword to a text that unlike such mischievous re-enactments moves beyond the politics of such an uncritical position.

The twelve essayists in this book re-encounter the encounter and examine the conduct of those who policed the conduct. The book seeks to inform the reader of new emerging nuances, values and critiques now that the Flinders and Baudin encounter has become prominent in the celebration of colonial history. Documented in the pages of this book are real lives that have affected other real lives. The richness of Alas, for the Pelicans! lies in that it covers not only those who were intimately involved in both expeditions, but also those on the fringes who were directly affected. Gertsakis' essay introduces the reader to Flinders' wife Ann and the love and torment of a distance marriage. Dooley's writings focus on the time Flinders was held captive on the island of Mauritius. Dooley asks the question, 'For whom was Flinders writing? The answer invariably explores the nature of audience and the inner ambitions of a prominent seaman. In terms of philanthropy the book seeks common ground in the humanitarianism of both captains. Yet the points of tension about difference and 'otherness' evident in the work of Francois Peron (aboard Le Geographe) are negotiated cleverly by Fornasiero/West-Sooby. Peron's scientific orders were to extend the intellectual boundaries of French knowledge about man (Aboriginal peoples). Yet the data collected from a distance was more about reinforcing nineteenth-century anthropological trends in Europe than anything to do with Aboriginal peoples. The book's content has a rich section on Kangaroo Island. Hosking's essay complements Copland's on the early inhabitation of sealers and whalers on Kangaroo Island. For Aboriginal people like me whose family histories intersect at this site, new analysis and interpretation sheds interesting light.

Another particular essay that is sure to attract attention is by Keryn James. In 'Wife or Slave?', James investigates the topic of 'organised' slavery, a subject that has been a site of debate in the Australian context. I welcome this paper.

A final word on how I see this book contributing to the concept of 'belonging' articulated by my good friend and historian Peter Read. Indeed, 'belonging' is the latest ideology being contested in post-colonial non-Aboriginal Australia to examine the parameters of understanding and recognition in a racialised social environment. The encounter between Flinders and Baudin symbolises the problematic issues espoused in Read's concept. What is apparent in decolonising this encounter is that the dominant group decided when, how and who belongs. This is evident in Johnson's essay 'Francois Peron and the Passion for Objects'. A power and belonging nexus co-exists in both expedition journals that highlights the idea that Aboriginal enlightenment only occurs as a result of the generosity, self-interest and
altruism of the powerful. Johnson's essay, like Fornasiero and West-Sooby's, investigates how the colonial expeditioner/tourist imagines 'belonging' to a distant land. Fornasiero and West-Sooby claim that 'making Terra Australis "knowable" was to read the familiar onto what was essentially alien, thereby taming the "other", but at the same time diminishing its otherness'. This is precisely how in history colonisers grafted their concept of 'belonging' onto already occupied countries of First Peoples. If 'belonging' means standing in space that is not yours and calling it your own, then belonging subordinates Aboriginal recognition. This type of 'belonging' is exposed in this book. It derives from the legacy of colonial expeditions like those of Flinders and Baudin, and contributes to current understandings of what it means to be an Australian as evidenced in the celebration of 'Encounter 2002'. The romantic view of colonial conquest of land and First Peoples is as Australian as meat pies and Holden cars. 'Belonging' and its advantages have to be evaluated by comparison with the disadvantages. If non-Aboriginal people want to belong in Australia then there are terms of 'belonging', which have to be met. There must be recognition of Aboriginal peoples as First Peoples in history, as the original custodians of the land, and acknowledgement of the responsibilities that come with such recognition in terms of a treaty. Reconciled belonging relies more on the critical intellectual than it does on the ventriloquists of the colonial position.

In closing, let me be clear that this book is not the definitive word on Flinders and Baudin. It neither desires such accolades nor does it warrant such criticism. History has no conventional climax in which crisis is resolved. History is ongoing and open-ended, inviting participation. I call upon you as the reader to begin your journey.

Notes

1 Narungga, Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri are Aboriginal Nations located in and around the Adelaide region of South Australia.

Acknowledgements

I thank the wisdom of the First fires and those of my family for their guidance. To Kurraki, Tikari and Tarniwarra. I hope the slow drying ink from my pen may mature with you into adulthood. It is for you that my pen is used with precision.

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