



'[The Sydney school] seem[s] to view the Aborigines as forever unchanging':¹ southeastern Australia and Australian anthropology²

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From 1926 onward research into the culture of the Aborigines and into problems of contact was undertaken systematically. The aim was primarily to learn all we could before it was too late, because all this was changing rapidly through contact with settlers, administrations and missions.³

This paper reviews the relationship between anthropology and the Aboriginal people of the southeast of Australia since the creation of the chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney in 1926. I argue that social anthropology as practised in Australia has not recognised the southeast as a legitimate domain of Aboriginal culture and thus of anthropological interest until recently. (Because of a change in the law, brought about by the High Court's 1992 Mabo decision and the Commonwealth's legislative response in developing native title legislation, anthropologists are now re-examining the large body of ethnographic knowledge about the southeast created in the 19th century). One could simply argue the ethnographic history of the southeast is one of erasure and closure. It is not that twentieth century social anthropology ignored the southeast *per se*, but it was not seen as a worthwhile area of anthropological study. Those anthropologists, particularly in the 1950s, who did work in the southeast did so partly as a consequence of limited research funding and partly because they were marginal rather than being orthodox, often not of their explicit choosing. Fieldwork in the southeast was seen as somewhat less important because it was often concerned with assessing the success or otherwise of government policies, especially assimilation.⁴

1. Birdsell 1970: 116.

2. This is a revised version of the paper originally presented to the collegium 'Aboriginality in the Southeast', held at the Humanities Research Centre and the Centre for Cross-cultural Research, Australian National University, 18-19 June 1997. I would like to dedicate the paper to Jeremy Beckett in whose honour the collegium was held. I would like also to thank Jeremy for all those enjoyable conversations some of which were about the southeast; Christine Cheater and Fiona Paisley for their ideas about the problem of history and anthropology, and Ian Keen and Christine Winter, as well as the two unnamed referees, for their editorial advice.

3. Elkin 1963b: 34.

Some anthropological views of the southeast

The southeast of Australia is often defined as being south of a line drawn from north of Sydney to Adelaide and thus includes southern and northwestern New South Wales, Victoria and southeastern South Australia. (Tasmania is treated as a different category).⁵ The primary characteristic of the southeast is the dispossession, death, dislocation and forced removal of Aboriginal people from their country onto mission reserves in the nineteenth century. The Aboriginal people of the southeast were subjected to the full destructive force of colonisation and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century it was generally accepted by the settlers that Aborigines were rapidly disappearing and thus doomed to extinction.⁶ This leads to the main defining characteristic of the southeast for anthropology: it viewed Aborigines in the southeast as not authentic, people who did not live as Aborigines, people who had lost their 'Aboriginal' culture and had only a fragmented memory of their (past) culture.⁷

A consequence of the invasion and settlement of their country is that many Aboriginal people are of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent; the categories of blood and 'race' were expressed by referring to such people as 'mixed-blood', 'half-blood', 'mixed-race', 'half-caste', 'part-Aborigine', 'quadroon' and so on. This 'mixing' further undermined their status as 'real' Aborigines.⁸ This history of dispossession and removal has affected the way in which anthropology has dealt with Aboriginal life in the southeast. Culture and blood were conflated. The historian Charles Rowley argued that Australia could be divided into 'remote' and 'settled' Australia.⁹ 'Remote' Australia contained 'remnants' of traditional Aboriginal people who lived their lives on the margins of European economic and social life; 'settled' Australia included all those areas that had been invaded, pacified and settled, and where Aboriginal people were incorporated economically, socially, politically (and sometimes biologically) into the dominant non-Aboriginal society.¹⁰

In their general work on Aboriginal society *The world of the first Australians*, Ronald and Catherine Berndt said of the southeast:

4. Anthropologists such as AP Elkin and Donald Thomson, who by their membership of their respective states Aborigines' Welfare Board, must have compromised their knowledge through their interventionist role in assessing the success of assimilation as government policy. See Elkin 1957, Cowlishaw 1990, Gray 1998a.
5. The history of Tasmania is usually presented as one in which Aborigines are erased from contemporary life; this of, course, misrepresents histories of survival and continuity. See for example Vivienne Rae-Ellis 1996; also Tindale 1963, 1966.
6. See McGregor 1998.
7. Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who worked with Aboriginal people at Murray Bridge and in Adelaide in the early 1940s, described these as 'memory cultures'; see Introduction, Berndt and Berndt with Stanton 1993; also Chase 1981: 4-8.
8. More work needs to be done on the changing categories of blood and caste and the persistence of race in the ethnographic literature. Anthropologists generally reflected current beliefs and concomitantly developed a lexicon of blood and caste to help identify degrees of Aboriginality based on lifestyles. See, however, Cowlishaw 1986, 1989; also Goodall 1996 and especially 1982.
9. See Rowley 1972a,b.
10. Perhaps a more workable division of anthropological Australia is a tripartite one: the north, the desert and the south. Nevertheless, regional differences are hard to classify. See also Keen 1988.

Not only did the Aboriginal population in the south decline. The survivors were beginning to adopt some European ways ... And a growing number were of mixed descent, offspring of European or other alien fathers and Aboriginal mothers. This dual process has continued all through the southern part of the continent: diminishing 'Aboriginality', in physical as well as in cultural terms; and on both these scores a growing resemblance to Europeans. A decrease in the full-Aboriginal population and the disappearance of most aspects of Aboriginal culture have been paralleled by a rise in the number of 'part-Aborigines', people only partly Aboriginal in descent, and with more complete and more widespread acceptance of Australian-European habits of living.¹¹

'Real' Aborigines therefore were those who lived in remote Australia and thus lived a traditional lifestyle, what Ronald Berndt referred to as 'traditionally-oriented'. 'Traditionally-oriented' was, he stated, a 'convenient shorthand way of alluding to people whose life was still meaningful in traditional Aboriginal terms, and that alien change was part of that picture but not dominantly so'.¹² Aborigines were always in a state of imminent change from 'traditional' (uncivilised) to 'non-traditional' (modern and civilised). To put it another way contact with non-Aborigines, wrote Ronald Berndt, inevitably led to 'Aboriginal elements [being] pushed further and further into the background'.¹³ The possibility of extinction was ever present.

The dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' Aborigines weaves its way through anthropological discourse about Aborigines. Peter Sutton has attempted to remove this clumsy dichotomy of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' by suggesting the use of 'classical' and 'post-classical' but this seemingly places Aboriginal people in a historical dichotomy of before and after colonialism (and denies implicitly the ability of people to adapt and change while retaining the core of the culture).¹⁴ It is the old argument about 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' dressed in new clothes without questioning why these divisions are created.¹⁵ The southeast is not adequately explained by this dichotomy of 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' not least because Aboriginal people live(d) in both rural and urban spaces as Marcia Langton pointed out, 'large numbers of Aboriginal people have migrated towards the cities since the Second World War ... [W]hile urban life has its attractions ... a feeling for the people and country 'back home' is always maintained'.¹⁶ The deeply embedded notion that real Aborigines are those who live a traditional life in remote Australia is difficult to remove from anthropological discourse.

Until the change in definition by the Commonwealth, a consequence of the 1967 referendum, Aboriginality was defined as a biological construct rather than as a relational construct.¹⁷ Aboriginality was defined by combinations of blood, skin colour,

11. RM Berndt and CH Berndt 1988: 506.

12. RM Berndt 1980: 291-2.

13. RM Berndt and CH Berndt 1964: 443-5. See also Elkin 1951.

14. Sutton, nd (c1997).

15. See Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

16. Langton 1981: 16. Largely inspired by native title requirements, there is some interesting work on kinship and how kin relations are maintained even though people are living in urban environments, far removed their country. Sutton 1997.

17. Barrie Dexter, 'The 1967 Referendum - the first ten years', paper presented to AIATSIS, 23 June 1997 (transcript in possession of the author).

physical characteristics and manner of living.¹⁸ Anthropologists were part of this discourse and helped to sustain it. Gillian Cowlishaw has argued that terms such as 'mixed-blood' or 'half-caste' and 'full-blood', 'Aborigines' and 'part-Aborigines', 'lighter coloured people', when used by anthropologists carry information about culture. Simply put, 'full-blood' carries with it the sense that such categories also are 'full-culture'; 'part-Aborigine' is suggestive of a lack, a partial culture. Yet paradoxically Aboriginal culture is caught in time, trapped by blood, and presented as unchanging.

Social anthropologists such as Elkin and WEH Stanner supported and frequently advocated assimilation as government policy from the 1930s until the late 1960s.¹⁹ There is some dispute over the meaning of assimilation and when it was introduced as government (particularly New South Wales and Commonwealth) policy.²⁰ Elkin, for example, saw the need to change the structure of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and he encouraged the appointment of an anthropologist in the workings of the board — thus when the act was changed in 1940 and it became the Aborigines Welfare Board, Elkin was appointed vice-chairman, a position he held until 1969 when it was disbanded.²¹ I have argued elsewhere that Elkin (as did many others) saw the future of 'part-Aborigines' as being assimilated, that is (biologically and culturally) absorbed into the wider white Australian community.²² With regard to 'full-bloods' Elkin is ambiguous, suggesting that this will take time (there is an inference that 'full-bloods' will slowly disappear but it is unclear whether this will occur either biologically and/or culturally).

In response to a query in regard to defining 'Aborigines' from JA Carrodus, Secretary of the Commonwealth department of the Interior, Elkin wrote:

Though the definitions of half-blood and quadroon are not *identical* they do *overlap*; the trouble arises with the person who is three-eighths aboriginal, that is, has three great-grandparents aboriginal. Is such a person to be called quadroon or half-caste? Or are we to invent a new term? ... You will notice that I suggest that in the case of the quadroon, 'such a person would normally have two great-grandparents (sic) who were full-blood aborigines', and in any case such a person would be less than fifty per cent aboriginal. ... Obviously if ever the Act were altered and we wanted precision, we might well include in the definition of quadroon persons who are three-eighths aboriginal. Even then that is not mathematically correct. It would, of course, be ideal but impractical to decide each case on its merits, so that a light three-eighths might be classed as a quadroon, and a dark one as a half-blood. ... As the years [go] by the mathematics will become even more difficult. We will be dealing with sixteenths, but probably by that time we will

18. See McCorquodale 1986: 7-24; also Reay 1964: 169-70; Rowley asks 'Who is an Aboriginal? The answer in 1967', in Rowley 1972b: 341-64; Hollinsworth 1992.

19. See especially Elkin 1957: 27-34, 1962: 147-54, where he places himself at the forefront of what he called a 'positive policy' for Aborigines, and his role in the formulation of McEwen's 'New Deal' for Aborigines in 1939.

20. See Gray 1998a: 73, footnote 75.

21. The board included an 'expert on sociology and/or anthropology'; it was amended in 1943 — membership was increased from 10 to 11 of 'whom two [had] to be Aborigines (at least one of whom was to be full-blood)'. See John McCorquodale 1987.

22. Gray 1998a: 74, footnote 86.

only be concerned with full-bloods including three-quarter castes, and with half-castes perhaps including three-eighths to be regarded as white.²³

It serves to underline that Elkin, like other anthropologists and social scientists of the period, was profoundly influenced by discourses of blood and culture. The future of 'part-Aborigines' was the social and economic (if not biological) absorption into the wider dominant culture; but it was not specific to them. Ronald and Catherine Berndt, students of Elkin's, believed that 'the Aborigines [full-bloods] must inevitably learn to adjust themselves to the introduced pattern of living, if they are to survive in their present minority position;²⁴ Aborigines

cannot continue to live in their old ways, and indeed few of them are able to do so now. Life is changing for them ... the white man is the new power in the land. It seems certain that they must, in the coming generations, become more fully absorbed into the mainstream of Australian life. ... [Aborigines are] 'forced to choose between two worlds, in such a way that the outcome is never, really, in doubt.'²⁵

The closer Aborigines came to the sites of European cultural dominance the more likely they were to lose their Aboriginal culture:

[N]early all the people whom we now call Aborigines are inevitably involved in processes which could lead to assimilation. Those nearest that goal are to be found in the cities and in the large towns. Few of them have any coherent knowledge of their Aboriginal traditions. ... There are virtually no Aboriginal groups which have not had some contact with Europeans, by hearsay or repute if not through direct face-to-face association. People whom we call traditionally oriented are harder to find than they were a few years ago. ... Just how long this orientation can be sustained is a matter for conjecture. ... That is not to say that traditional elements will cease to survive in some form or other, but that Aboriginal life, as a way of life, will have ceased to exist.²⁶

Aborigines were presented as unable to change unless they lose their Aboriginality. 'Traditional Aborigines', in much of the anthropological literature, are presented as the past (loss), although anthropologists claim to be writing about the present: it is, it seems to me, to be a valorisation of an imagined past without context. As well there was a reluctance to deal with the social and political realities of Aboriginal life in 'remote' Australia.²⁷ The problem of acculturation versus assimilation has not been adequately explored in the literature on assimilation: civilisation (modernity) always means loss rather than gain or adaptation and the development of a new way. (This is an avenue that requires further exploration). Thus anthropology was confronted in the southeast with a series of problems: who were Aborigines, what was the nature of Aboriginal cul-

²³ Elkin to Carrodus, 7 December 1944. 177/4/2/213, Elkin Papers (hereafter EP). Compare this with the 1937 Commonwealth conference during which AO Neville, Chief Commissioner for Aborigines in Western Australia, asked the question: 'Fifty years hence ... are we going to have a population of a million blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into the community and eventually forget that there were any Aborigines in Australia?'

²⁴ Berndt and Berndt 1951: 33.

²⁵ Berndt and Berndt 1952: 141. In the 1974 edition the above passage is in the text, p. 127.

²⁶ Berndt and Berndt 1964: 443-5.

²⁷ See for example Gray 1997: 27-46; 1999.

ture, where did Aborigines live and how resistant was Aboriginal culture to the encroachment of European culture?

Beginnings of a professional and academic discipline

In a recent review of Les Hiatt's *Arguments about Aborigines*, Ian Keen made reference to ethnographic descriptions of people in the southeast. He states that for 150 years 'anthropologists have argued over the right way to discuss [Australian] indigenous social life and culture.'²⁸ Keen — as well as de-historicising the discipline — ignores the importance of other disciplines, particularly anatomy and physiology in the development and practice of Indigenous Studies rather than ethnography. Anthropology is usually understood by its practitioners as having a long historical lineage, tracing its beginning to those armchair anthropologists (often jurists, philosophers, theologians) who were interested in uncovering humankind's past or discovering early forms of sociality. They are the precursors to the professionalisation and institutionalisation of anthropology; but they were not social anthropologists. A most important distinction between these so-called armchair anthropologists and professional social anthropologists is systematised participant-observer fieldwork. Elkin, for example, set out four phases in the development of scientific knowledge about Aborigines: firstly, a phase of incidental anthropology (c1788 to c1870s); secondly, a compiling and collating phase (1870–1900); thirdly, a phase of fortuitous, individual field projects; fourthly, a phase of organised, systematic research (1925–1961 (present)).²⁹ Grant McCall argues there are five phases: firstly, development of social science phase, pre-1788; secondly, casual or incidental phase, 1788 to mid-nineteenth century; thirdly, a compiling and collating phase, mid-nineteenth century to late nineteenth century; fourthly, systematic research phase, late nineteenth century to 1925; and finally, professional anthropology phase, 1925 to present.³⁰ Thus, like Elkin and McCall, I place the professionalisation of social anthropology at 1925, the creation of the chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney. Acceptance by the academy was critical in creating social anthropology as a professional discipline; the academy provides institutional and scholarly support; it also marks a point where the discipline is self-conscious about its methodology and theorising.

Baldwin Spencer and Frederick Gillen may have conducted the first systematic field research in Australia³¹ although Alfred Cort Haddon is credited with introducing the method of participant observation when he led the Cambridge Expedition to Torres Strait in 1898.³² Other early field researchers included AW Howitt, Lorimer Fison, WE Roth, AR [Radcliffe-] Brown and Daisy Bates.³³ This early research provided a foundation for reliable material about Aborigines rather than securing a place for anthropology in the academy. There was an anthropology section in the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) from its inception in 1888 which was mainly concerned with a range of matters which were placed under the rubric anthropology.³⁴

28. *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 May 1997.

29. Cf. Elkin 1963a.

30. McCall 1982: 2.

31. Mulvaney et al. 1997: 23–49. Baldwin Spencer was instrumental in advocating anthropology in Australia and was associated with the establishment of the chair of anthropology.

32. Herle and Rouse 1998.

33. Mulvaney 1991, 1988.

In 1895 the Anthropological Society of Australasia was founded by Alan Carroll but this society was short-lived; moreover its concerns were 'holistic in the extreme'.³⁵ The Museum of South Australia participated in and its members often led scientific expeditions to examine all aspects of the flora and fauna including examining all aspects of the Aboriginal body and way of life. After 1926 the University of Adelaide's Board for Anthropological Research joined with the Museum's expeditions in research which was primarily museum and medical-based, although they did engage in a project — Aboriginal sexuality and family life — sponsored by Clark Wissler of the American Museum of Natural History.³⁶

The attempt to establish a chair of anthropology in Australia starts with the meeting of British Association for the Advancement of Science, held in Melbourne and Sydney in 1914. The Pan-Pacific Science Congress of 1923, however, was instrumental (Elkin called it the 'key event') in the establishment of a chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney; the meeting passed the resolution:

[In] view of the great and particular interest of the [Aborigines] as representing one of the lowest types of culture available for study, of the rapid and inevitable diminution of their numbers, and of the loss of their primitive beliefs and customs under the influence of a higher culture. ... that steps be taken, without delay, to organise the study of those tribes that are, as yet comparatively uninfluenced by contact with civilisation.³⁷

This specifically excluded Aborigines who had been colonised, dispossessed and dispersed, although this desire to record everything 'before it was too late' was a direct consequence of colonial occupation and dispossession;³⁸ at the same time this ethnographic enterprise denied the social and political realities of Aboriginal people who acted as its informants.³⁹ Joe Birdsell argued that Australian anthropology as practised in the Sydney department viewed Aborigines as 'forever unchanging in spite of onslaughts of time, depopulation, and a shift from a pre-contact ecology to a food support base dependent upon European charity or exploitation.' It ignored such disturbances as occurred a 'number of decades before the investigating anthropologists arrived on the scene'.⁴⁰ This is perhaps exemplified by Ronald Berndt's assertion about Aboriginal people living on the Birrindudu outstation as people 'with minimum alien contact', who devote 'much of their time and energy ... in food collecting and in performing ceremonies which are considered vital to their very existence'.⁴¹ The people on Birrindudu had had their lives disrupted by the introduction of cattle and labouring for the cattle industry which — as Ronald and Catherine Berndt pointed out in *End of an era* — had affected their economic, social, political and religious lives.⁴²

34. *Ibid.*

35. McCall 1982: 9.

36. Jones 1987; Cleland Papers, Museum of South Australia.

37. Extract from Minutes of General Meeting of the Second Pan-Pacific Congress, held in Sydney, September 1923. National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA) A518, N806/1/1, Part I.

38. This call of 'before it's too late' predates the calls at the Pan-Pacific Congress. See McGregor 1998.

39. See Gray 1997.

40. Birdsell 1970: 116.

In July 1926, when Radcliffe-Brown arrived to take up the Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, he was confronted by the belief that Aborigines were facing extinction. He agreed. He reckoned that with the rapid disintegration of Aboriginal society there was only fifteen years left to make an adequate record of the culture of Aborigines. It was therefore incumbent upon the Australian government to assist in the 'preservation of some record of the aborigines, who are in [the] process of rapid extermination as a result of the appropriation of their lands'. Anthropological research 'must take the form of a general extensive survey of all surviving tribes, and a more intensive study of a certain number of selected tribes. Its aim was not merely to collect information on native customs and belief, but to arrive at an understanding of the Australian culture as a functioning system.' This research would 'give the world a great deal of very valuable knowledge about this most interesting and rapidly vanishing culture'.⁴³

Radcliffe-Brown left for Chicago in May 1931. Raymond Firth was made acting Professor; in September the following year he left for London and a position in the London School of Economics. Elkin was made lecturer-in-charge. During this time the future of the chair was under threat. When the chair was created, the Commonwealth and the states had provided funding; the financial crisis of late 1920s and early 1930s led to all the states except New South Wales withdrawing. By the end of 1933 the Commonwealth government assured the university that it would fund the chair until 1935. The Commonwealth was left as the main benefactor. Rockefeller funding for research was dependent upon continued government funding for the chair which the Rockefeller Foundation subsidised pound for pound.⁴⁴ Elkin was appointed to the chair on 22 December 1933, taking up his position on 1 January 1934. Elkin's appointment led to a change in the anthropological enterprise.

⁴¹ Berndt 1950: 184-5. They wrote to Chinnery after they returned from Birrundudu: 'We are sorry that we were not able to show you the material which we have collected, but perhaps this may be possible later on. As a sideline, we obtained a series (several hundred) of adult drawings (lumber crayon and pencil on brown paper); many of these are extraordinarily good (although not of course, in the style of Albert Namatjira), and all show excellent prospects for development. It is unfortunate that there is not some person who could collect such drawings from various areas. We ourselves regretted that there was not some person with us who could record in this way many (sic) aspects of everyday and ceremonial life which could not be obtained by medium of either camera or descriptive writing. It is a pity that something of this kind could not be done before it is too late.' RM Berndt to EWP Chinnery, 24 June 1945. CP.

⁴² Berndt and Berndt 1987.

⁴³ See correspondence between Radcliffe-Brown and Minister for Home and Territories, NAA A518 P806/1/1, Part 1. He noted that Elkin had made a survey of a considerable portion of the Kimberley district in Western Australia; Warner had likewise made a survey of Arnhem Land and an intensive study of the Murngin tribe of the extreme northeast of that area; CWM Hart had made an intensive study of the Tiwi tribe of Melville and Bathurst Islands; Ursula McConnell and DF Thomson had made important additions to 'our knowledge' of the tribes of the Cape York Peninsula. Elkin was engaged in a systematic survey of all the surviving tribes of South Australia. Ralph Piddington had undertaken the intensive study of a tribe in Western Australia.

⁴⁴ See Mulvaney 1991, Gray 1997, Peterson 1990.

Practical anthropology

I have argued elsewhere that Elkin focused on the relationship between anthropology and native administration — what he called 'practical anthropology'.⁴⁵ To facilitate this he emphasised the helping and understanding role of anthropology.⁴⁶ Thus the training of colonial officials for work in native administration in New Guinea and Papua, as well as the training of missionaries, was an important task for the chair. Anthropology was foremost in the colonial context a science available for the use by government and mission; research was critical to the success of this enterprise. Elkin oversaw those he sent to the field as part of that larger helping enterprise, and to answer particular epistemological problems in Aboriginal anthropology. Aboriginal life, as they understood it, was in a state of disintegration. Each field worker was part of Elkin's team and they read and used each other's field notes (including Elkin's) and from the correspondence with Elkin were eager participants in this project.

Anthropology had not had the same sympathetic reception by governments in Australia as in the Australian external territories of Papua and New Guinea. Nevertheless, anthropology was regarded as useful by the army in responding to the immediate perceived threat of invasion by the Japanese. The army sought from anthropologists, particularly WEH Stanner and Donald Thomson, comment and advice on how best to use Aborigines in the war effort. Elkin continued to provide unsolicited advice to both army and government on Aborigines and the war effort.⁴⁷

The general enlistment of Aborigines received little support from army or government authorities, concern being expressed, especially in the north, that it would alter the relationships between Aborigines and white people. Nonetheless the army employed Aborigines under much the same conditions as it did other persons, and thus created a new model which had far-reaching consequences not only for social and economic relationships in the north but also for the way anthropologists, especially Elkin, revised their views on the ability of Aborigines to make adjustment to changing situations and adapt to new ways of living.⁴⁸ Thus the relationship between the army and Aborigines, and the manner in which Aborigines were employed by the army, raise issues that were of interest to anthropology as a practical discipline and to individual anthropologists. The changes initiated by the army had also a profound impact on post-war Commonwealth government policy and practice, particularly in regard to wages, working conditions and facilities on cattle stations.

Elkin, who had no official government or military role during the war, had heard reports of changes introduced by the army in their treatment and employment conditions of Aborigines which could be regarded as beneficial to the future of Aborigines.⁴⁹ By 1943 he was engaged in two projects; one was preparing a national policy for the

⁴⁵ Gray 1997.

⁴⁶ Cowlishaw 1990.

⁴⁷ See Gray 1994a, 1996, 2000. See also Ronald and Catherine Berndt, 'Voluntary war service for Aborigines', April 1942 (Sydney), NAA 60, Cleland Papers, South Australian Museum.

⁴⁸ Hall 1989; also Gray 1991: 158–60.

⁴⁹ The Guided Projectiles Project is an example of the way Elkin's altered views were received by humanitarians and others who continued to promote protectionist and isolationist views of Aboriginal welfare. Gray 1991.

Aborigines and their administration in case powers for this purpose were handed to the Commonwealth either by the states or by the planned 1944 referendum.⁵⁰ This was a preoccupation of Elkin's, who believed the Commonwealth should be responsible for Aboriginal affairs. The other project was the effect of economic development on Aborigines in the northern parts of Australia. He wrote that it was possible that as a 'result of putting down aerodromes, strategical (sic) roads and artesian bores and the visit to the north of soldiers, there may be some attempted intensive development by white folk.' Such development would react on the 'remaining Aborigines, and judging by the past the Aborigines will be required to play their part in it. Indeed they will be essential to it. This is going to mean very wise [postwar] administration, for otherwise it will mean a hastening of the process of extermination of the Aborigines.'⁵¹ Both health and 'reproductive power' had been undermined by inadequate diet plus the fact that 'their country is invaded, their ritual life broken down and that they are reduced to parasitism ... In the middle of this is the refusal of women to have children face this parasitic future and in some cases their inability to do so because of disease contracted directly or indirectly from white men.'⁵² The 'preservation of Aborigines', stated Elkin, was linked with the continuance of the pastoral industry in the North.⁵³

From March 1944 Elkin sent out his students to obtain what he called 'vital statistics' (health) about Aborigines throughout Australia; this involved what he called 'the whole question of Aboriginal vitality'⁵⁴ particularly infant mortality rates and fertility rates as well as the 'reproductive, physical and mental vigour of mixed-bloods'.⁵⁵ Ronald and Catherine Berndt had been sent to Menindee in late 1943;⁵⁶ Marie Reay and Grace Sitlington⁵⁷ went to Bourke, Brewarrina, Gulagambourne and Coomable in northwestern New South Wales to investigate these problems.⁵⁸ (Elkin noted to all heads of Aboriginal Affairs departments in the states, the army authorities in the

50. See Attwood et al. 1997: 5-12 for a brief discussion of the campaigns to alter the Australian constitution and grant Commonwealth control over Aboriginal affairs.

51. Elkin to Mary Durack Miller, 18 May 1944. EP 73/1/12/205. During the interwar years a great deal of consideration was devoted not only to the preservation of 'the Aboriginal race' but also to evergrowing problem of 'half-castes'.

52. Notes, Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Welfare Authorities, Darwin, February 1948, EP 55/1/12/6.

53. Elkin to Evatt, 9 October 1944. EP 197/4/2/573.

54. Elkin to FR Morris (Director Native Personnel, Army HQ, NT Force), 21 September 1945. EP 73/1/12/206.

55. Marie Reay and Grace Sitlington, c1944, 'Vigour of half-castes', typescript; also Reay's correspondence with Elkin and Elkin to Bray (WA), 20 March 1944. EP 73/1/12/206.

56. RM Berndt and CH Berndt, 'A short study of acculturation at Menindee Government Station, Darling River'. Typescript, 92 pp + tables and diagrams, maps. Adelaide 19 November 1943. This research was funded by the Australian National Research Council. See also RM Berndt, 'Wuradjeri magic and iclever men', *Oceania* 17(4), 1947: 327-65; 18(1), 1947: 60-86; see also *Menindee Mission Station 1933-1949*, compiled and edited by Beverley and Don Elphick, Canberra, 1996. Privately published.

57. Marie Reay in a letter to the writer wrote: 'She was a lay person who accompanied me as a chaperone at the request of my mother, who did not like the idea of me going alone to the blacks' camps in the rough outback. Elkin tried to persuade her to study anthropology but she was not academically inclined. I deeply regret allowing her to bully me into citing her as co-author of one of my better juvenilia in return for incorporating her observations on mothers and children. She was an informant not a co-worker.'

Northern Territory as well as to some mission stations such as Cherbourg, seeking information on mortality rates and fertility of Aborigines.⁵⁹ Elkin wrote that the 'results of this work, now carried out ... for a period now extending over four years or more, are of first-class importance, both from our understanding of Mixed Blood social and psychological problems, and also for the way they adjust themselves to the environment.'⁶⁰

During the war most of the research was funded by a combination of Carnegie Foundation funds, the residue of the Rockefeller Foundation funds, the Aborigines Welfare Board of New South Wales, the Northern Territory Department of Native Affairs, and university grants provided by both the university and the Commonwealth: 'field-work went on ... but usually on inadequate budgets'.⁶¹ The Berndts were the main recipients of this funding. During the second half of 1941 Ronald and Catherine Berndt undertook research in Ooldea, South Australia.⁶² After Ooldea the Berndts continued their 'valuable work among the remaining Aborigines of the Lower Murray region', which included their statewide survey of Aborigines in South Australia between 1941 and 1944.⁶³ Ronald had started his work at Murray Bridge in 1939 among the descendants of those who were referred to then as the Yaraldi (Jaralde), now more commonly known as Ngarrindjeri.⁶⁴ He was joined by Catherine.⁶⁵ Elkin provided funds for the writing up of this and the Ooldea work.⁶⁶ There was one notable funding exception, the survey of Vestey's pastoral stations by Ronald and Catherine Berndt between 1944 and 1946. They were employed by the Australian Investment Agency as welfare and liaison officers; it had the support of Elkin and EWP Chinnery, the then director of the department of Native Affairs in the Northern Territory.⁶⁷

Near the end of 1943 Elkin outlined a plan to the Commonwealth government for research both in postwar Papua New Guinea and in Aboriginal Australia.⁶⁸ The Australian National Research Council (ANRC)⁶⁹, because of its past experience, 'would be

58. Marie Reay and Grace Sitlington, c1944, 'Vigour of half-castes', typescript; also correspondence with Elkin. EP 73/1/12/206.

59. Typical was his letter to Bray (WA), 20 March 1944. Correspondence with FR Morris, director of Native Personnel, Army HQ, Darwin 1945. Letter to Matron, Cherbourg Aboriginal Station, Queensland, 1945. EP 73/1/12/206.

60. Report on the Committee on Anthropology, undated (c1949). EP 161/4/1/81.

61. Elkin 1963a: 21.

62. Elkin to Raymond Firth, 13 November 1948. EP 178/4/2/178. Berndt had published several papers on Ooldea in *Oceania*: 'Aboriginal sleeping customs and dreams, Ooldea, South Australia', 10(3), 1940: 286-94; 'Tribal migrations and myths centring on Ooldea, South Australia', 12(1), 1941: 1-20; and C Harvey Johnston, 'Death, burial and associated ritual at Ooldea, South Australia', 12(3), 1942: 189-208. Their Ooldea work was published as Berndt, RM and CH, 1942-43: 'A preliminary report of field work in the Ooldea Region, western South Australia', *Oceania*, 12(4): 305-30; 13(1): 51-70; 13(2): 143-69; 13(3): 243-80; 13(4): 362-75; 14(1): 30-66; 14(2): 124-58; 14(3): 220-49; 14(4): 338-58; 15(1): 49-80; 15(2): 154-65; 15(3): 239-75.

63. *From Black to White in South Australia* (1951) was produced as a result of this survey. For a contemporary critique read Phyllis Kaberry, Review (p. 140), *Man*, September 1953. The Berndts were upset by this review: 'We feel rather annoyed about Kaberry's review', RM Berndt to Elkin, 2 May 1954. EP 41/4/2/375.

64. This type of research, that is, recording the memories of old people, was a common practice by members of the Museum of South Australia, especially Norman Tindale. Albert Karloan was Tindale's informant.

Table 1 - Elkin's proposed three year research plan c1943-45

A three-year plan of Anthropological Research amongst the Australian natives.

- A. Research is required into the effects of the war situation in northern Australian regions on the social, economic and psychological life of the Aborigines. When possible, Anthropologists who have worked in these regions should be invited to return and spend a year in them. Three regions could be selected with advantage. This is of importance for the development of Northern Australia.

Three (3) experienced workers and expenses. £3000 for a year and £1200 for preparing reports, during the following six months. Total = £4200.

- B. Intensive study of Aborigines where they still maintain much of their old way of life.

Two (2) workers a year and expenses £1500 p.a. (3 years = £4500)

- C. Research into social and psychological problems of mixed-bloods.

Two (2) workers a year and expenses £1500 p.a. (3 years = £4500).

Total of A,B, & C = £6000 first year; £4200 for second year; £3000 for third year.

The programme in the first instance should be for three years to allow completion of work to be undertaken.

Total = £13200.¹

willing to 'act as trustee and administrator of funds made available for anthropological research in Australia's dependent territories and amongst the aborigines'.⁷⁰ There was no formal response from the Commonwealth.⁷¹ In February 1950 Elkin wrote to EO

⁶⁵ See Ronald Berndt, 'Some aspects of Jaralde Culture, South Australia', *Oceania* 11(2), 1940: 164-85. Their research was not published until 1993, three years after Ronald's death: Ronald M Berndt and Catherine H Berndt with John Stanton, *A world that was. the Yaraldi of the Murray River and the Lakes, South Australia*, Melbourne University Press at the Miegunyah Press 1993; cf Diane Bell, *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin: a world that is, was, and will be*, Melbourne, Spinifex Press 1998. Catherine's role in this research has been the subject of serious investigation as a consequence of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission and its aftermath. It has been suggested that Catherine's research was minimal - it was Ronald's project and Catherine assisted him rather than conducting her own research.

⁶⁶ Elkin to Hon Sec ANRC, 26 February 1943. EP 156/4/1/14. Only the Ooldea work was written up.

⁶⁷ The Berndts published this research as *End of an era* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press) in 1987.

⁶⁸ See Table 1.

⁶⁹ The ANRC was disbanded in 1955 and with it the anthropology committee which had overseen the spending of Rockefeller and Carnegie funds for anthropological research. It was replaced by the Academy of Science.

⁷⁰ Elkin to Halligan, 11 October 1945; ANRC to Prime Minister, 3 December 1945. EP 163/4/1/100.

⁷¹ He did discuss these proposals with both Halligan, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, and Carrodus, EP 176/4/2/210; see also Elkin to Carrodus, 30 April 1947. EP 163/4/1/100.

Hercus, honorary secretary of the ANRC, that 'the whole plan and these recommendations have gone into a hidden file'.⁷²

The impact of war

The Pacific War had several consequences for Australian anthropology. The creation of the Australian National University broke the dominance (hegemony) of the Sydney department; there developed an institutional separation between Australia and Papua New Guinea (including the South West Pacific); and finally a growing distance between scholarly research (ANU) and training of government officials and mission workers for work in Papua New Guinea, the South West Pacific and the Northern Territory (University of Sydney).⁷³

During the war the army's directorate of research and civil affairs recruited several prominent anthropologists such as Camilla Wedgwood, H Ian Hogbin, Ralph Piddington, Lucy Mair and WEH Stanner, with the view to developing policy for post-war Papua and New Guinea; it was also responsible for establishing the School of Civil Affairs (later the Australian School of Pacific Administration) which it hoped would replace the anthropology department in the University of Sydney as a training school for colonial officers.⁷⁴ As the Sydney department increased in size — Hogbin and the linguist Arthur Capell were appointed Readers and student numbers increased — there were a number of events which were to diminish its authority and that of the professor. The Commonwealth government, keen to support research into problems it perceived to be important in administering its colonies, created the Australian Pacific Territories Research Council to advise on matters of policy and administration.⁷⁵ The Council was a peacetime successor to the army's directorate of research and civil affairs. The Research Council met for the last time in April 1947, and was replaced by the Council of the Australian School of Pacific Administration, previously the School of Civil Affairs. It was intended that the school would train colonial officials for Papua New Guinea. By 1953 the Australian School of Pacific Administration was responsible for training officers for the Northern Territory service. The School could only 'conduct research activities in the subjects appropriate to the courses of the School and for the needs of the Territory as approved by the Minister'.⁷⁶

The *Australian National University Act, 1946*, empowered the university's interim council to 'establish such Research Schools as are deemed desirable, including ... a Research School of Pacific studies'.⁷⁷ Raymond Firth, Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics, was invited by the interim council of the Australian

⁷² Elkin to Hercus, 1 February 1950. EP 156/4/1/14.

⁷³ See Gray 1994, 1996.

⁷⁴ See Gray 1994, 1999; Jiriks 1982, 1983.

⁷⁵ NAA A518, Item R815/1/1, 19 June 1945. The proposal was originally made to the Cabinet subcommittee on 15 September 1944 and referred to the interdepartmental committee for consideration. Cabinet Agendum, No 104 of 15 September 1944.

⁷⁶ Australian School of Pacific Administration, Monthly Notes 1(9), May 1947: 7.

⁷⁷ *The Research School of Pacific Studies: Its Future role and organisation, A Report by the Faculty Board*, Australian National University, 1958 p. 1. Marie Reay was sponsored by the Australian School of Pacific Administration to conduct research in the Northern District of Papua. Her research was cut short by the eruption of Mt Lamington in 1950.

National University to advise in the setting up of the School of Pacific Studies, and was consulted with regard to the making of appointments as well as research programs.⁷⁸ Firth asked Ian Hogbin to prepare a report on anthropology in Melanesia in view of his long field experience in the area.⁷⁹ Firth did not ask Elkin for advice although Elkin had sent him a copy of the research proposal which he had submitted to the commonwealth government.⁸⁰ Elkin lamented the way in which the ANRC – and he as chair of the anthropology committee – had been ignored:

It is interesting to notice that in spite of the fact that the ANRC was established to be an authoritative advisory body on scientific matters of national importance and was the main means of developing anthropological research in the South-west Pacific, it has not been consulted with regard to present plans at all. What is even more interesting, though pathetic, is that I was told at least three years ago that an effort was being made to develop research in the South-west Pacific and that the [Australian National] Research Council and this Department were to be bypassed.⁸¹

The importance of the Sydney department and the control the professor of anthropology exercised over research in Australia and the South West Pacific were being undermined by both the establishment of the Australian National University and the shortage of available funds. Elkin assessed the situation at the end of the 1940s; the ANRC's anthropological research committee was 'not active for the simple reason that we have no money for research purposes and at present no problems have been referred to us.' It might be opportune, he suggested, to renew their approaches to the Commonwealth Government 'at least for money for research into all aspects of the anthropology of the Australian Aborigines', which meant asking the Prime Minister 'whether an answer could be given to our letters regarding the proposed plan of Anthropological research in Australia and the South-west Pacific.' Research in the South West Pacific would, he presumed, be undertaken by the School of Pacific Studies although he wanted the ANRC's committee for anthropology to oversee all anthropological research emanating from Australian universities. Firth had assured Elkin that the School of Pacific Studies was not concerned with the Australian Aborigines and did not want the Australian National University to be part of such an arrangement.⁸² The Research School was to focus on the Pacific, and other Australian universities could undertake work with Aborigines.⁸³ Nor would the Research School of Pacific Studies be a training school for government officials; Firth believed such 'career training [would] definitely cut across the research commitments of members of the school'.

⁷⁸ The Interim Council chose three prominent Australians to head the four research schools - Howard Florey (Medical Sciences), Mark Oliphant (Physical Sciences), Keith Hancock (Social Sciences) and — because there was no prominent Australian anthropologist — New Zealander Raymond Firth to head the Research School of Pacific Studies (including Anthropology). See also Firth, Memorandum, ANU file 6.1.1.0, Part 1.

⁷⁹ Firth to Elkin, 22 March, 1948, EP 174/4/2/178. See Ian Hogbin, 'Anthropological research in the Pacific', nd, ANU file 6.1.1.0.

⁸⁰ Elkin to Firth, 30 March 1948. EP 174/4/2/178.

⁸¹ Elkin to Firth, 1 July 1948. EP 174/4/2/178. See also letter from Copland to WD Forsyth, in ANU file, 6.1.1.0, Part 1.

⁸² Elkin to Hercus, 1 February 1950. EP 156/4/1/14.

⁸³ Firth, interview by Margaret Murphy, Australian National Library, p. 16.

In February 1951 SF Nadel, foundation Professor of Anthropology in the Australian National University, put forward the main research problems which the Department of Anthropology was concerned with.⁸⁴ He set out five areas of research: firstly, 'the social organisation ... and types of society occurring in the Highlands of New Guinea'; secondly, 'social change on the Pacific Islands', concentrating on the 'appearance of Cargo Cult' and the 'recorded striking changes in population'; thirdly, a study of 'process of assimilation among the recent European immigrants to Australia'; fourthly, what he described as 'the many-sided problem of the adjustment of a primitive population to modern values and way of life' particularly in places such as Western Samoa and Fiji where 'ethnic mixture and the influence of western civilisation are most strongly pronounced' and finally, a study of an Indonesian community 'which I should like to carry out myself'.⁸⁵

There was no formal liaison between Elkin and Nadel. Despite Firth's assurances to the contrary the Australian National University did engage in anthropological research in Aboriginal Australia, albeit forced in part by the refusal of the Commonwealth government to allow anthropologists into Papua New Guinea who were either members of the communist party or who – because of their association with the communist party – were thought to constitute a risk to the good order of government. Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories, 'always refused to admit certain people ... because we do not wish to have in the territory, persons who, by their activities, might impede or distort our work, or in other ways prevent Australia from fully discharging its responsibilities to the native peoples under trusteeship'. Peter Worsley⁸⁶ fitted the latter category. Worsley, who originally planned a study of cargo cults in Papua New Guinea, was sent to the Northern Territory.⁸⁷ Jeremy Beckett suffered a similar fate when he applied to do work in Papua New Guinea. This brought him to work in north western New South Wales and later the Torres Strait.

Paul Hasluck's appointment as Minister for Territories in 1951 oversaw the further diminution of anthropology's policy role in Australia. Elkin hoped for a continued role in formulating government policy but Hasluck, an interventionist minister, saw no need for Elkin or anthropology.⁸⁸ Yet the 1950s were to usher in a golden age of anthropological research in the highlands of New Guinea (the last bastion in many ways of

⁸⁴ SF Nadel's Research plan, May 1951. ANU file 6.1.1.1 part 1. See also Hogbin's report to Firth; Firth's memorandum of January 1948 (ANU file, 6.1.1.0, part 1).

⁸⁵ SF Nadel, Research Projects in Anthropology, February 1951, typescript. See also ANU file 6.1.1.1, part 1.

⁸⁶ Located in ANU file 6.4.1.49. It is ironic that Worsley was able to do field work amongst Aborigines who it appears were not subject to such threats from the outside. See also McKnight 1994: 146–7. The ANU engaged in self-censorship by ensuring that scholars who were considered a security risk would not be appointed to positions of responsibility. See Gray 1998b for further discussion on these matters; also Beckett 2001.

⁸⁷ Although he never went to PNG, Worsley wrote *The trumpet shall sound* which was a result of his study into cargo cults. His doctoral research was entitled 'Social structure of the Groote Eylandt Aborigines'. See ANU file, 6.4.1.49, Peter Worsley. Cargo cults was an area Nadel wanted investigated. Peter Lawrence, who was a student of Reo Fortune's in Cambridge, did work on the Rai Coast (near Madang) before Nadel was appointed. See correspondence with Fortune and Copland, ANU files.

⁸⁸ Gray 1994a: 207–8.

Australian colonial rule).⁸⁹ This was not so with Australian Aboriginal anthropology. (The way Australian anthropology dealt with the postwar changes remains largely unexamined).⁹⁰ In all these proposals the southeast as a site for anthropological research was ignored.⁹¹

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies

The theme of 'before it is too late' was heard again in the formation of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS). This call characterises much of the motivation for orthodox social anthropology in the twentieth century. WEH Stanner, a key figure in the formation of the Institute, argued that 'there was a case for a national research effort; ... in some fields the last opportunities had gone and in several others only a little time remained, much might be done to obtain basic information'.⁹² It was formally established in 1964⁹³ with the view that Aboriginal life was of interest in understanding the evolution and development of western civilisation. One of its founders, the politician William Wentworth, wrote: 'from an academic viewpoint, these people are among the most primitive races in the world, and perhaps even the most interesting. Certainly they are in many respects unique'. He listed the following characteristics: the nomadic nature of their hunter/gatherer society, the complexity and rigidity of the social structure, their spirituality, their lack of material possessions, their isolation from contacts with other races, that they were probably of Caucasoid stock, and therefore in origin nearer to the white races than the native peoples of Africa and East Asia. He emphasised how little remained of the Aboriginal field, stressing that 'within ten years there will be nothing but a fraction of a fraction left'.⁹⁴

At the conference, attended by the leading lights in anthropology and Aboriginal studies, that set up the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies there was the prevailing view that 'recording and analysing the distinctive way of life was an important aspect of our duty to posterity, and at the same time, a contribution to scientific understanding'. It was a lofty if pretentious aim. Ignoring Australia's history as a settler dispossessionary nation the conference stated that 'at a time when Aboriginal life is changing

⁸⁹. See Hays 1992.

⁹⁰. In April 1997 I conducted a seminar on the practice of anthropology between 1950 and 1970 at which Ruth Fink, Jeremy Beckett and Les Hiatt spoke about their work. John Barnes spoke about his time as professor of anthropology at both the University of Sydney and the ANU: Gray 2001.

⁹¹. Elkin established the Australian Institute of Sociology in June 1942; it was intended that this institute would oversee sociological research in urban and rural centres, migration and acculturation (Elkin 1943). For an example of the sort of work he wanted to encourage see Caroline Kelly, 1943; see also Gray 2001: 1-29. Elkin also created a journal, *Social Horizons*, as a vehicle for the publication of research results.

⁹². Stanner 1963.

⁹³. The Act [*The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Act*, No. 56 of 1964, assented 2 June 1964] establishing the Institute made it clear that it was not to be concerned with current problems as they affected Aboriginal people, but that its work was to be scientific and anthropological. The Act defined 'Aboriginal Studies' as 'anthropological research ... in relation to the aboriginal people of Australia'. Aboriginal history as relations between settlers and Aborigines was left out: if there was any history it was a history of cultural and biological extinction, recognising a loss to western knowledge.

⁹⁴. William Wentworth, 'An Institute for Aboriginal Studies', pMs, AIATSIS Library, Canberra.

rapidly, it is important that the fullest amount of information on their characteristics and conditions should be readily available to all those concerned with their welfare.' There were 'considerable gaps in existing knowledge of social organisation, education, value systems (including religious belief), informal leadership, individual variations, and the economic bases of traditional Aboriginal life. It is obvious that these are all matters where opportunities for acquiring or extending our knowledge and understanding are disappearing very rapidly because of the influence of white (sic) culture'.⁹⁵ It was a holistic desire premised on the belief that a totality of Aboriginal ('primitive people') life could be mapped.

There was reference to the need for anthropological research in settled Australia but it was insignificant in comparison to those projects in 'remote' Australia. Aboriginality as 'full-blood' and 'traditionally oriented' was dominant:⁹⁶ the persistent and largely unchallenged belief was that Aboriginal people who lived in settled Australia had limited knowledge of their 'past' cultural and social lives. Ronald Berndt commented that 'a certain amount may be obtained from Aborigines and people of Aboriginal extraction who are no longer traditionally-oriented: that is, from those who no longer live in an Aboriginal environment but who, because they were brought up in such a situation as children or adolescents or were told about it by their parents or grandparents, are able to recall something about it'.⁹⁷ In a sense this denied that there existed an Aboriginal life in settled Australia as described in the late 1950s and 1960s, for example, by Diane Barwick and Judy Inglis.⁹⁸

The purpose and task of anthropology had however altered in the 1950s. The interests of anthropology as we have seen shifted to problems associated with assimilation and the ability of Aboriginal people to make the move to modernity. This was reflected by post-1945 research promoted by Elkin; he enabled research to be conducted in northwest New South Wales, including urban centres. As well as Reay, Catherine Webb (Berndt), Ronald Berndt and Caroline Kelly (who worked mostly pre-war), there was Malcolm Calley who did his PhD among the Bandjalang (northern New South Wales), Ruth Fink at Brewarrina, Jeremy Beckett in the far west of New South Wales (Walgett), Pamela Nixon's MA thesis was on La Perouse, James (Jim) Bell did his PhD on La Perouse, Alison Beauchamp did an education degree which dealt with the patterns of relationships between Aboriginal and European children in the senior class of the primary school at La Perouse, and Esther Wait did a study of Aborigines in the metropolitan area of Sydney.⁹⁹

Many of those who conducted research in the southeast were not trained anthropologists. In fact Elkin told David Hollinsworth that research in the southeast was an 'example of Australian sociology'.¹⁰⁰ The work of Judy Inglis, Fay Gale and Diane Barwick was not, in Elkin's terms, social anthropology, and nor was it recognised as such

⁹⁵ Sheils 1963: 461-3.

⁹⁶ See for example RM Berndt 1963a: 443-51; Strehlow 1963: 452-58.

⁹⁷ RM Berndt 1963b: 397. This makes interesting reading when compared with Berndt and Berndt with Stanton 1993.

⁹⁸ Barwick 1964; Inglis 1964.

⁹⁹ Bell 1963: 430-2.

¹⁰⁰ Hollinsworth 1992: 152, footnote 4 (Hollinsworth's emphasis).

by the newly formed Institute.¹⁰¹ The Institute claimed a role for an orthodox anthropology by focusing on its 'traditional' subjects and method. The Institute thus disengaged Aboriginal anthropology from the social and political realities of Aboriginal life in settled Australia, which had been developed in the Sydney department.

Research dealt with urban and rural Aborigines and was concerned, for example with demographic and genealogical surveys in Victoria; the psychological effects of the 'part-Aborigines' awareness of differences and similarities between themselves and the full-blooded [Aborigines]' in rural townships in South Australia. Nevertheless, the overriding impression is that this research problematised the Aborigine: 'there appeared to be no one Aboriginal or mixed-blood problem, but a series of problems varying enormously from place to place.'¹⁰²

Changing interests

In 1964 Marie Reay edited *Aborigines now: new perspective in the study of Aboriginal communities* which was a compilation of essays by younger anthropologists and other social scientists 'who had done significant work among aborigines'. Reay decided to 'collect a number of essays by people whose professional acquaintance with aborigines dated back no further than about 1950 and who had not yet begun to pronounce orthodox views on aboriginal questions'.¹⁰³ It was also a critique of government assimilation policies; Reay suggests that Aboriginal views on the subject should be considered.¹⁰⁴ Reay pointed to two recurring themes in the papers which underlined the break with what she saw as an orthodox past (she chose Stanner to write the introduction because she regarded him as sympathetic to her enterprise). These themes were:

Firstly, the authors stress that the aborigines' own wishes and choices are important in planning successfully for their future; secondly, they draw attention to the presence of aboriginal *communities* and urge that the method of administering native policy ... should change from a pre-occupation with individual assimilation to an emphasis on community development.¹⁰⁵

These were a precursor to other factors, such as the changing political climate and the increasing demand by Aboriginal people for land (rights) and justice (equality), which have had a profound effect on anthropological practice. These changes were rarely instigated by anthropologists, although anthropologists such as Ronald Berndt saw themselves as the guardians of Aboriginal welfare and advocates for their advancement.¹⁰⁶

JA Barnes, albeit not addressing Berndt specifically, made a pertinent observation about social anthropology in Australia post-1960 which has relevance to the role of anthropology in the southeast. He said:

¹⁰¹ See Reay 1964.

¹⁰² Discussion, Sheils 1963: 435-40.

¹⁰³ Reay 1964: xv.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Catherine Berndt's review of *Aborigines Now*, a particularly carping review; it seems her main complaint is that members of her generation (those who worked in Aboriginal Australia pre-1950) were not asked to contribute nor were their views given an airing (CH Berndt 1966: 505-8).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*: xvi.

Anthropologists and other social scientists became involved in one way or another with some of these events [namely, the Gove case, the beginning of arguments about the constitutional basis for the British occupation of the Australian continent, land rights, and the equal wages case in the Northern Territory] but none of them ... occurred as a result of initiatives taken by [anthropologists] ... This dependence on events not of our own choosing is particularly marked in the case of the land rights industry [what we might now refer to as the native title industry] which has provided so many opportunities for employment for anthropologists.¹⁰⁷

Barnes' assertion has considerable substance. Don McLeod was invited by a group of people to assist in the organisation of a strike in the Pilbara;¹⁰⁸ McLeod wrote to Elkin seeking his advice and assistance. Elkin, initially interested, refused.¹⁰⁹ In the southeast there was the continuing struggle for equality, land and citizenship;¹¹⁰ the more notable events were the formation of FCAATSI (1957) to bring about constitutional change which culminated in the 1967 referendum which gave the Commonwealth the ability to legislate for the benefit of Aborigines,¹¹¹ the Freedom Ride (1965), the Tent Embassy outside of Parliament House (1972), the introduction of self-determination rather than integration or assimilation as government policy and the granting of land rights in the Northern Territory (1976); all served to underline changes in Aboriginal affairs, that is the relation between Aboriginal people and the state.¹¹² It also brought about a change in relations between Aboriginal people and anthropologists and had consequences for the practice of anthropology.

Land rights invigorated and privileged anthropological knowledge but were confined primarily to so-called traditional people in the Northern Territory (remote Australia); pressure on state governments led to grace and favour land rights and Aborigines in the southeast were confined to seeking to retain what little they had left, viz mission stations. In Victoria, for example, this led to the communities on Framlingham, Lake Condah and Lake Tyers being given freehold title. Anthropology and anthropologists were not required nor did they seek a role in this process.

The High Court's Mabo decision changed the way anthropology is practised in Australia in quite significant ways. It is not only a matter of showing continued occupation but – in the southeast – of demonstrating continuity of cultural practices. One of the aims of the collegium 'Aboriginality in the Southeast' was to address the problem of continuity and discontinuity of cultural practices in the southeast, problems addressed

¹⁰⁶ 'For several decades, persons who showed particular concern with Aboriginal advancement ... were anthropologists, who served as spokesmen for the virtually inarticulate Aborigines, as they were then.' RM Berndt 1976: 32. There is more work to be done on the role of anthropologists as advocates and political activists, and the tricky situation in which anthropologists were placed needing to point out the obvious abuses and shortcomings of administration policy and practice, and the demands of academic scholarship. See Gray 1994b and 1998a for some discussion about these matters in the Australian context

¹⁰⁷ Barnes 1988: 272.

¹⁰⁸ McLeod 1984, Palmer and McKenna 1978.

¹⁰⁹ See correspondence between McLeod and Elkin, EP.

¹¹⁰ See Goodall 1996.

¹¹¹ Attwood et al. 1997.

¹¹² See Howard 1982.

by Jeremy Beckett and Ian Keen.¹¹³ Both turned their attention to the problem of 'Aboriginal identity' in settled Australia. Both books dwell on problems of continuity and discontinuity which beleaguered understandings of Aboriginality in the southeast; this found further expression in cases such as Hindmarsh and Yorta Yorta.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

The southeast was largely ignored by orthodox anthropologists until 1993 because no 'real' Aborigines were to be found there, and if they were, they did not live as Aborigines. People were placed on mission stations, reserves, which were sites of both protection and modernisation; here people were to be prepared for introduction into the dominant white community in the belief that their culture had been lost. This is reminiscent of Ronald Berndt's continuum of Aboriginal change: 'at one extreme are those who are still traditionally oriented, at the other extreme are persons of Aboriginal descent who ... are for all intents and purposes ordinary everyday Australians - except for the heritage of their past.'¹¹⁵ Wayne Atkinson proposes another view, an Aboriginal view, of the southeast, specifically Victoria:

The present day Koorie community in Victoria is still closely-knit by strong family kinship ties, shared experiences and on-going cultural and social links with specific places. These attachments are to the regions surrounding the reserve, or mission stations where our ancestors were settled last century [nineteenth], which in most cases was part of our tribal territory. ... Aboriginal culture today in Victoria is alive and well. ... We still retain many aspects of our traditional culture and through historical circumstances and necessity have blended with many aspects of European society. ... However, regardless of where we live we all retain a strong sense of pride in our Aboriginality, in our own tribal regions and communities and in our own history and cultural heritage.¹¹⁶

Native title provides an explanation, but not the only one, for the present interest by anthropologists in the southeast. A consequence of the external requirements of a legal system, formed by the workings of the Northern Territory Land Rights practice, which understands that only anthropologists can properly interpret and understand Aboriginal people and culture. This has privileged anthropological knowledge above all other knowledge(s) about Aborigines. Anthropologists have, however, contested their knowledge about Aborigines, as is the case in two landmark decisions in the southeast, the Hindmarsh Bridge Royal Commission and the Yorta Yorta native title claim. It has broken the hegemony of common anthropological understandings through a contest over histor-

¹¹³. Beckett 1988, Keen 1988.

¹¹⁴. The problem of 'identity' as discussed by Beckett and Keen is deserving of a wider discussion, not least because the problematic of Aboriginal identity in settled Australia assumed such importance in political debates during the 1980s and 1990s. This is not to say that such issues are no longer important but they do not assume such central significance now. The excursion by anthropology into the problematic of Aboriginal identity in the southeast was in itself problematic. The title of the 1997 conference 'Continuity and Discontinuity in the southeast' was altered partly because of concern expressed by Aboriginal people about its implications for understandings of their identity. In terms of anthropological interest the collegium looked to the work of Reay et al. in the early 1960s and that of Beckett and Keen and its implications for native title in the late 1990s.

¹¹⁵. RM Berndt 1969: 1-2.

¹¹⁶. Atkinson 1985: 5-6.

ical interpretation of past ethnographies. Hence a more significant development, revealed in both cases, has been the importance of history because of the lack of historicising and contextualising the ethnographic material by anthropologists.¹¹⁷

The change in dealing with ethnographic material has created a problem for both anthropology and history. Anthropologists expect the historian to re-analyse the anthropologist's work, and this is an understanding anthropologists have brought to Native Title matters in the southeast (see for example the Yorta Yorta native title case).¹¹⁸ That is, they are interested in the epistemological developments of the discipline: their presentation of ethnographic material has emphasised this aspect rather than setting the ethnographic material in its historical and political context. The notion that the circumstances under which the anthropologist worked may influence where and how they did fieldwork and the knowledge produced as a consequence, as a legitimate field of historical inquiry, is resisted by many anthropologists. In fact some anthropologists act as a 'gatekeeper' for the discipline, keeping out articles that interrogate the social and political history of the discipline.¹¹⁹

It has led to a questioning of anthropological models for understanding historical accounts of Aboriginal life. A discipline that has traditionally ignored the southeast and built its theory (and reputation) on Aborigines living in the desert and tropical Australia now brings these models to bear on the southeast: the archetypal hunter-gatherer. As Heather Bluiht¹²⁰, writing about the Gundjitrara of southwest Victoria, states, 'the resource rich wetlands of western Victoria encouraged different modes of exploitation and cultural development. The Gundjitrara cannot be compared to any society of central or northern Australia. Their landscape requires a more appropriate interpretative approach which recognises rather than misconceives the distinctive archaeological, historical and cultural records of the region.'

The practice of anthropology might, in the future, be influenced by the historicising of nineteenth and twentieth century ethnographic texts, but at the very least it will lead to a new way of thinking and writing about the southeast by anthropologists and historians.

¹¹⁷ A good example of this occurred at a recent Australian Anthropology Society conference in Perth; a session on Daisy Bates and the significance of her work for native title cases revealed the interest anthropologists (linguists as well) have in mining these past texts for information regardless of its quality and context. Tom Gara, a historian who has worked extensively on native title cases as well as on the work of Daisy Bates, presented a finely nuanced analysis of her work within the political and social context of her time. The anthropologists in the audience expressed no interest.

¹¹⁸ In May 1999 I helped organise, through the Native Title Research Unit in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, a workshop on history and native title. These and other issues such as expert witnesses were raised (to be published in 2001).

¹¹⁹ I would like to thank Christine Cheater, Fiona Paisley and Peter Gifford for their discussions with me on such issues. An example: I recently received a reply from an anthropological journal to which I had sent a article which examined the political context in which anthropologist conducted their fieldwork. It was rejected on the grounds the paper has 'neither anthropological perspective nor adequate conceptual underpinning'. Another referee was of the opinion that 'the author seems not to be anthropologically knowledgeable at all' as if this was a criteria for such a discussion. The article has since been published in another anthropological journal.

¹²⁰ Bluiht 1996: 138-9.

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