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Cast(e) in between: A mixed-descent family's coexistence in the West Kimberley 1944-1969

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CAST(E) IN BETWEEN

A mixed-descent family's coexistence in the West Kimberley

1944-1969

By Jacinta Solonec

**A dissertation submitted as fulfilment for the
Master of Arts (Aboriginal & Intercultural Studies)**

**Edith Cowan University
Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences.**

Date of submission: 31st August 2004



Frank Rodriguez with Fulgentius & Phillipena Fraser

Liveringa Station 1950s

Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the social and racial dynamics of life in the West Kimberley between 1944 and 1969. It identifies three groups defined by their racial characteristics which co-existed on the land: full-descent, mixed-descent and Gudia. It argues that despite many people in these different groups being related to each other, their lives followed different trajectories as a result of government policies and laws which defined people by their degree of Aboriginality. These racial categories were reflected in the social and economic relations of full-descent, mixed descent and Gudia people. Coexistence of these groups is analysed by focusing on one extended mixed-descent 'Nygkina' family. During the 1940s, 50s and 60s, the children of Fulgentius and Phillipena Fraser left their mission haven and entered the world of employment under Gudia management.

In 1944, a young 21 year old Spaniard, Francisco Casanova-Rodriguez, ventured to the Kimberley to work as a station hand. Rodriguez crossed paths with the Frasers in 1946 and he married their eldest daughter, Katie, in December of that year. He was accepted into the mixed-descent family, where kindred relationships deepened by virtue of mutual religious belief systems, amidst a life of discrimination and financial hardships. Rodriguez and Katie were devout Catholics and that became the strength of their relationship.

An insight into this family's coexistence with Gudia during the twentieth century is extracted from Rodriguez's diaries, oral histories collected from the Fraser family and associates, and from government archival files. With their mission training the Fraser children became subservient employees to Gudia pastoralists and town business people. Rodriguez taught himself his trade as a builder, and he, too, worked for pastoralists in an industry that was expected to flourish. But the certainty of a profitable sheep industry never eventuated, and by the early 1970s there were no sheep stations operating in the region. Neither were there many Aboriginal people living and working on the stations. Most had relocated to the towns. Full-descent people lived on reserves, while both mixed-descent and Gudia people lived either in their own homes, or in Housing Commission houses.

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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Jacinta Solonec

31st August, 2004

This work is dedicated to my father, Frank Rodriguez, who by keeping a record of his movements since 1944, has inspired me to investigate the livelihoods of West Kimberley people during the middle of the twentieth century.

My special thanks to Dad, my siblings, close relatives and friends for taking your time to give me your stories, perspectives and opinions. To my daughters Kylie and Tammy who helped me with technical aspects, I am forever grateful.

I would like to pay special tribute to my ever patient supervisor, Associate Professor Peggy Brock. Your expertise, advice and ongoing support will always be highly valued.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land and I respect the laws and customs by forewarning, that deceased people's names may be mentioned and images depicted. I ask that individuals take caution when reading this thesis.

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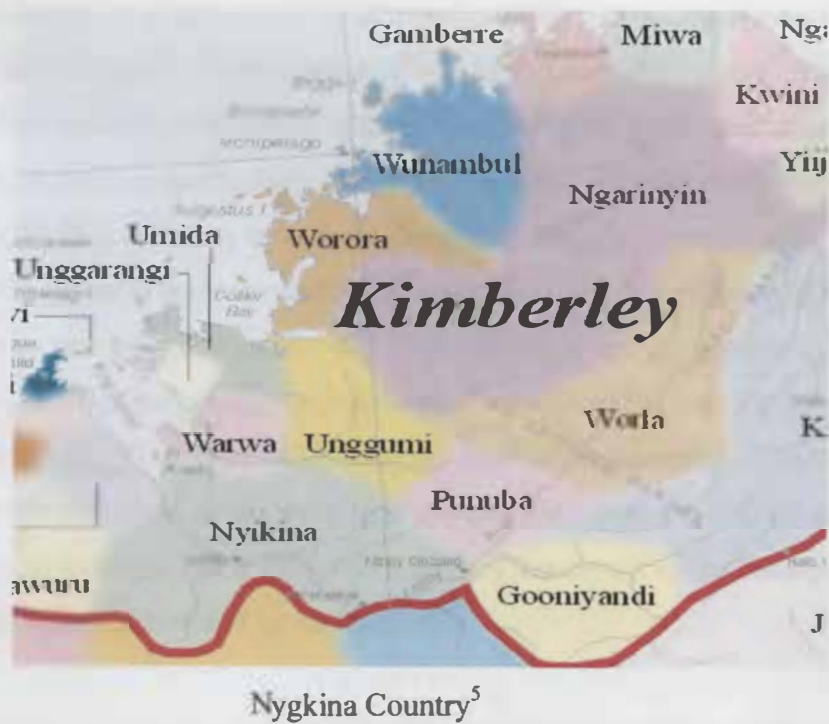
Chapter One: Gudia meets Nygkina - from the northwest of España to the northwest of Australia.

The underlying theme of this study is the concept of *coexistence*. Coexistence is embedded in the social history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people where they shared land and used it for their lifestyles. This research project investigates, by way of one family case study, the nature of coexistence in the Kimberley in the middle of the twentieth century. Aboriginal people have lived on pastoral stations and in towns in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia in ways which have not been captured in the existing literature. The research follows the lifestyles of my mixed-descent family and their associates. It analyses the lives of the Fraser and Rodriguez families and their interactions with other people in the region. Race relations in the Australian pastoral industry are usually conceptualised as two groups: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. In this study I argue that there were three social groups defined by racial characteristics coexisting in the Kimberley. Aboriginal full-descent people, people of mixed-descent and Gudia (people with no Aboriginal ancestry). The families which are the focus of this study are three generations of the Fraser family including Frank Rodriguez, a Spanish immigrant, who married into the family. Frank Rodriguez married Katie Fraser in 1946. He still lives in the Kimberley, while she died in 1994.

I was born in Derby in 1953 and grew up, when not at boarding school, on my parent's small sheep station 'Debesa' 100 kilometres east of the town. There, my childhood interaction was largely with my siblings, my parents and with Aboriginal workers employed on a seasonal basis. People of full Aboriginal descent worked with my parents on Debesa and occasionally a stockman of mixed-descent such as Georgy Dann or Frank Ozies would be there for mustering time. But it is my parent's strong association with my mother's family that is the focus of this research. The Frasers are descendants of Nygkina¹ people, and the aim of this research is to provide a better understanding of their lifestyles as they coexisted with full-descent and Gudia people.

¹ The spelling of Nygkina has several variants including Njiena (valid variant), Nigena, Njigina, Nyikina, Nyigina, Nyi-gini, Njikini. Norman Tindale, *N.B. Tindale's Aboriginal Tribes of Australia (1974)* (SA Museum: Norman Tindale, 1974 [cited 2003]); available from <http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/tindale/HDMS/tindaletribes/njikena.htm>. I choose to use the spelling Nygkina because phonetically it best represents the local pronunciation.

During the 1940s, 50s and 60s the Fraser and Rodriguez families lived on West Kimberley pastoral properties. Rodriguez with his family lived at Liveringa Station, a large sheep property of 175,000 acres and later on his own lease, Debesa Station, of 52,000 acres², while the Frasers lived at Willumbah, an outstation for Liveringa. Liveringa is one hundred and twenty kilometres southeast of Derby while Willumbah is ten kilometres north of the station and Debesa, another twenty kilometres north of Willumbah. The properties sit within the boundaries of the Shire of Derby, West Kimberley and are part of the traditional homelands of the Nygkina people, whose country covers around 200 square kilometres, encompassing some eight pastoral leases and their out-stations. The Nygkina's permeable boundary extends north to the Oscar Range and southward to Dampier Downs Station and captures the township of Derby.³ Nygkina language comes under the Nyulnyulan group. Today, older Nygkina speakers use Walmatjarri, Kriol or English as their second language while children speak Kriol or Aboriginal English as their first language.⁴



² Pastoral Land Management Department for Planning and Infrastructure, "Debesa and Liveringa Stations," (2004).

³ David Horton, "Documenting a Democracy - Australia's Story," (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies., 2000).

⁴ SIL International, "Nygkina: A Language of Australia," (SIL International, 2004).

⁵ Horton, "Documenting a Democracy."

Willumbah skirts the flood plains of the Fitzroy River and the name is derived from the Nygkina word *wila*⁶ that means water. For twenty years Willumbah was the family home of my maternal grandparents, Fulgentius and Phillipena Fraser. It was there that my grandfather was employed as the Head Stockman. They worked and foraged on Liveringa and nearby properties with members of their immediate family, their extended family and their Nygkina countrymen. At times during this period, they resided in Derby. Today, surviving members of the family and their descendants continue to frequent the area.⁷ On part of the Liveringa lease is Camballin, an area excised for the purpose of growing rice in the early 1950s. It is situated between Willumbah and Liveringa and is where Rodriguez and his family lived for some time, after they had moved from Liveringa.

In this study, the term 'mixed-descent' is frequently used to identify people who have both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry. Mixed-descent people's reputation in Australian society is often not clear and overshadowed by non-Aboriginal historians' emphasis on the impact of colonisation of Aboriginal people in general. However, it is clear in this research, that people of mixed-descent were treated differently and expected to assimilate and become like 'white' people. As a mixed-descent researcher, while it is not my intention to ignore atrocities committed against my people in the region, I am interested in exploring the contribution made in the West Kimberley by one particular family and their continuing coexistence with other groups in a familiar environment. The research aims to add to and complement the existing literature. This study will investigate how Aboriginal, mixed-descent and Gudia⁸ people coexisted on the same land and how they interacted. Over an extended period of time from the 1950s there was a gradual movement off pastoral stations and into towns, which accelerated in the late 1960s.

Rodriguez's diary is the motivation behind my decision to undertake research in social history. I have always been curious about my father's diary and wanted to delve into it. But how does one go about doing that? Not coming from a literary background, despite my father's insatiable appetite for literature, I was never one for

⁶ B Stokes, G Johnston, and L Marshall, "First Nyikina Dictionary - Draft," (Fitzroy Crossing: Kimberley Language Resource Centre, 2000).

⁷ Aggie Puertollano, 28th August 2003.

⁸ North Australian Aboriginal term for non-Aboriginal people.

reading books and perhaps that is because growing up I was only ever around my parents during school holidays. Comics were my main reading source. After completing a university degree at the age of forty, I decided that perhaps I could 'do something' with the diary by the way of a Masters Degree. I really had no idea about research, although I thought I did! I embarked on postgraduate study, believing the best way to investigate the diary would be under the watchful eye of a supervisor. I decided to investigate, '*coexistence between Aboriginal and Gudia people in Nygkina country*'. At the time, Aboriginal people were learning about the Native Title claims process and trying to articulate their coexistence with Gudia on pastoral leases. Because my father had lived most of his working life on stations in the region and he had married into a Nygkina family, I thought his diary would be an invaluable source for a study of coexistence. His day by day account of living and working in the Kimberley would reflect how coexistence operated in ordinary people's lives.

Frank and Katie Rodriguez owned and ran Debesa Station, which they had bought in June of 1953.⁹ The lease was first gazetted for pastoral development in 1937 and had had two previous owners, neither of whom developed the property. Rodriguez, who had first ventured to the West Kimberley as a 21-year-old station-hand, was forced to relinquish his dream, Debesa, in 1969 as it was no longer financially viable.

Coexistence

Aboriginal people from the research area are known as Nygkina and neighbouring groups include Mangala, Walmatjarri and Bunaba.¹⁰ Nygkina have lived in their homelands from time immemorial. Non-Aboriginal people continue to be a transient class in the region. There is no generic title for Kimberley Aboriginal people therefore they will be referred to as full-descent or mixed-descent throughout this study. White people, who have in the last two hundred years relocated to the region to develop pastoral properties on government leases, are Gudia. While this study effectively is a social history that explores how the three cultural groups, full-descent Aboriginals, mixed-descent Aboriginals and Gudia, shared land during the mid

⁹ Pastoral Land Management Department for Planning and Infrastructure, "Debesa and Liveringa Stations."

¹⁰ SIL International, "Ethnologue: Languages of the World, 14th Edition," (SIL International Partners in Language Development, 2003).

twentieth century in the West Kimberley region, the mixed-descent group are the main focus. The study provides a social view of relationships at the time.

The concept of coexistence is complex. The word is a relatively new term espoused by the Land Rights movement in Australia but the phenomenon has always been a way of life in countries worldwide. In some areas a contentious issue, while for others a mutual way of living. Under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), coexistence has become a common term that encompasses a complex set of rights for people who share the same land. The concept took on prominence in the pastoral industry following the *Wik* decision in the High Court in 1997.¹¹

To writers around the world, the term 'coexistence' has differing connotations as applied to their particular field of inquiry. The Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor talks about coexistence as opposed to conflict between 'citizenship' and 'faith' in Catholicism;¹² while in India, coexistence has been used in terms of traditional and modern modes of matrimony.¹³ But it is Maureen Tehan's explanation of coexistence as a concept imparted from England that best illustrates the theme of this research. People for centuries have shared many different interests by coexisting on the one piece of land, each interest having a shape and form that allowed parallel livelihoods that best demonstrates the 'then' theory:

In England, the doctrine was based on the notion that the ultimate title to all land was in the Crown and all tenures were referable to some original grant. The doctrine enabled many different interests to be granted and harmoniously co-exist in the one piece of land, each interest having a shape and form that allowed concurrent enjoyment and determined priority, if necessary, of those interests.¹⁴

Coexistence for Aboriginal Australians was never 'granted' as described by Tehan; they have had to struggle to maintain connection with land that was alienated by Europeans. It is strikingly apparent that while coexisting, the Gudia dominated. The

¹¹ National Native Title Tribunal, "Glossary," (NNTT, 2003).

¹² Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, "Citizenship and Faith: Co-Existence or Conflict Roscoe Lecture," (John Moores University, Liverpool, 2002).

¹³ Kirsten Sterling, "Monsoon Wedding," (Columbia News, 2002).

¹⁴ Maureen Tehan, "Co-Existence of Interests in Land: A Dominant Feature of the Common Law," Land, rights, laws: issues of native title. Issuespaper; no. 12 (Native Titles Research Unit, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: Maureen Tehan, 1997).

understanding of Aboriginal people I interviewed for this project who had lived in the region, demonstrates a reluctant acceptance of the new order:

In those days, the White fullas had no respect for Aboriginal people . . . [On Liveringa] I felt sorry for the Aboriginal people. They were treated like rubbish; they had to have rations. Whenever I went out to fix windmills, troughs, I'd take tobacco and things to hand out . . . [as for the] original Australians, it never occurred to me what was happening, I just thought it was the white people's lease.¹⁵

Today, this miscarriage of justice for Aboriginal Australians in relation to land is better understood by all interested parties. The concept of coexistence supports the notion that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups have continued shared use and enjoyment of land in accordance with their rights and interests.¹⁶ While the notion of coexistence came into vogue following the High Court dispelling of the *terra nullius*¹⁷ concept in the *Mabo* case and reaffirmed in the *Wik* case,¹⁸ Tehan explains that coexistence is not new:

Nor is the notion of coexistence of rights and interests in land in the Australian property law system. Similarly there are now many examples of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests in land coexisting in a non-native title context.¹⁹

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in Australia, Aboriginal people lived in harmony with the land and nature; it was their total way of life. They coexisted with each other sharing resources, exchanging goods through trade, engaging in conflict, enforcing laws and living within a religious sphere that explained their total existence and creation; a belief system that anthropologists would come to label as the Dreamtime. Aboriginal people had no reason to question that their mundane existence would ever change and that they would be forced to coexist with other cultures, despite the unannounced arrival of foreigners in their midst. Aboriginal people behaved appropriately and in accordance with their belief systems even though their norms were being severely disrupted. Gudja intruded on their country while Aboriginals

¹⁵ Tony Ozies, 12th August 2003.

¹⁶ Tehan, "Co-Existence."

¹⁷ Gary Partington, "Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education," (Katoomba: Social Science Press, 1998). p.67.

¹⁸ National Native Title Tribunal, "Wik Decision," (NNTT, 2003).

¹⁹ Tehan, "Co-Existence."

assumed that the intruders would abide by the well-established rules, rules not understood nor even considered by the Gudia.

Gudia built dwellings near water resources that were already the 'property' of existing Aboriginal groups, forcing people to move away or share the resource.²⁰ As they pushed into Aboriginal country, the intruders attracted hostility because of their ignorance. In turn, they labelled the original inhabitants as 'uncivilized', 'savages' and 'fiends'. Gudia compared Aboriginal people with "Milton's devils and Shakespeare's witches" when they refused to be conciliated.²¹ Confrontations and brutality erupted. The original inhabitants resisted the invasion by not succumbing to the invaders who resorted to getting their own way, by 'teaching the natives a lesson' and 'nigger-hunting'.²² It is clear, that Aboriginal Australians were always on the back foot from the start of the invasion. The more dominant group had already labelled Aboriginal people as inferior from the time of William Dampier's landing on the Australian northern coastline. They were labelled as the most miserable people in the world; a label hardly questioned by the Gudia and embraced and accepted by them.²³

Not all encounters were seen as hostile. In his diary, Julius Brockman, a pioneer pastoralist to the North West and Kimberley regions during the 1800s, consistently mentions the attitude of the local Aboriginal people in terms of their usefulness to him.²⁴ It is clear that in these instances the two groups had a mutual respect for each other, within limits. Brockman provides detailed descriptions of Aboriginals' livelihood, such as the time he came across women gathering mussels. At the sight of Brockman's party, the women cautiously secreted their catch then retreated noisily to the opposite side of the river.²⁵ He found the Aboriginals were astute and showed resourcefulness when introduced to the latest commodities in their sphere. Brockman

²⁰ Don Pashley, *Policing Our State: A History of Police Stations and Police Officers in Western Australia 1829-1945* (Cloverdale: W.A. EDUCANT 2000, 2000).

²¹ Elizabeth Webby, "Colonial Voices," in *Colonial Voices: Letters, Diaries, Journalism, and Other Accounts of Nineteenth-Century Australia*, ed. Elizabeth Webby (St. Lucia QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1989). p.50.

²² F. K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from the First Settlements to Modern Times* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960). p.48.

²³ Eve D Fesl, *Conned!* (St. Lucia QLD: University of Queensland Press, 1993). p.33.

²⁴ Joan Brockman, "He Rode Alone: - Being the Adventures of Pioneer Julius Brockman from His Diaries," (Perth: Artlook Books, 1987).

²⁵ Ibid. p.90.

interpreted what he saw within his own cultural terms. When his party landed at Beagle Bay he noted:

Crowds of natives followed us from the entrance to the landing and were most willing to help; also to steal all they could lay their hands on! Now came the difficulty of splitting up the party – one lot to guard the stores on the beach, one lot to superintend the transit and another to receive and guard the depot.²⁶

Aboriginal people believed they had rights to these goods on their land. Their lifestyle dictated that resources were shared, a practice not understood by Brockman. The Gudia continued to bring new possessions which the original inhabitants found useful for the production of their survival tools. For example, in later years the telegraph line's ceramic insulators were ideal for making spearhead flints, while stock proved an easily acquired source of meat.²⁷ Brockman's diary goes on to show that large populations of Aboriginal people lived contentedly off the land, where natural sustenance was abundant.²⁸ His recorded encounters with Aboriginal people are in contrast to the many other accounts of the Kimberley. Crowley, a historian, suggests an air of fear among the Europeans. On contact there were not a lot of sightings of Aboriginal people, but the settlers still insisted on armed protection against them. If there were only a few sightings of Aboriginals, why then was there a need for a safeguard? Moreover, while Brockman's perception is that of mutual support between the two, others suggest that initially there was no mutual acceptance; Aboriginals were seen more as a nuisance.²⁹ Others, too, believed that Aboriginal people were both numerous and troublesome.

Nevertheless, given there is no documented historical accounts in a European sense of what Aboriginal people actually felt about the intrusion, it can only be assumed that there was some mutual acceptance between the two groups. Aboriginal people accepted the intruders because their belief system did not anticipate living with other humans in any way different to the way it had always been. In some respects the two groups probably got along a lot better than is often implied:

²⁶ Ibid. p.68.

²⁷ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*. p.74.

²⁸ Brockman, "He Rode Alone." p.198.

²⁹ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*.

The tendency of Aboriginal people to try to remain close to their traditional areas continued to be supported by the decentralisation of pastoral activities. The resulting access to the bush and bush resources continued to support the maintenance of Aboriginal knowledge of country and of foraging skills. This was a period in which traditional continuities and gradual changes were intermingled. The economy of stations was not purely pastoral, but a mixed economy of pastoralism and foraging.³⁰

The Gudia's capacity to survive in unfamiliar environments was dependent on Aboriginal people, who led them to fresh water and often remained with exploration parties to provide ongoing assistance.³¹ Early explorers consistently wrote about the presence of Aboriginals and their reliance on them.³²

- A Native informs us that there is no water on the coast and that we will have to return inland . . . while cooking our porridge another native appeared on the scene, whom we promptly pressed into service as guide, for our lives depend upon the finding of Balangarra.³³

The expansion of the pastoral industry in the 1880s had resulted in the disruption to Aboriginal people's established way of life and the dispossession of country. At that time, their coexistence was on shaky grounds as Aboriginals found themselves in competition with the stock for waterholes and natural subsistence, and they were forced to access food supplies at homesteads, feeding depots and missions.³⁴ The Nygkina also found themselves in competition with other Aboriginal groups who were forced to relocate from their desert homelands for various reasons that included: their permanent water soaks destroyed by wells created for the Canning Stock Route; a prolonged dry cycle in the desert areas during the first half of the last century; the abundant supply of exotic meats and other foods; and people seeking news about relatives who had left with earlier groups.³⁵ Patsy Yambo, a Mangala woman whom I interviewed for this research, said her mother came from the other side of Lulugui Station in Mangala country near the desert.³⁶

³⁰ Peter Sutton, "Kinds of Rights in Country: Recognising Customary Rights as Incidents of Native Title," (NNTT, 2001). p.36.

³¹ Brockman, "He Rode Alone." p.73.

³² Ibid. p.77.

³³ Ibid. p.81.

³⁴ Steve Hawke and Michael Gallagher, *Noonkanbah: Whose Land, Whose Law* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1989). p.43.

³⁵ Ibid. p.54

³⁶ Patsy Yambo, 1st September 2003.

Today stories are still told of force used by some pastoralists to make Aboriginal people work on stations as Ivan Watson recalls:

The first kartiya [gudia] I ever saw was a bloke by the name of Len McAlear. He used to live on Lulugui and he was always chasing after the Aboriginal people and trying to put them to work on the station.³⁷

Not all non-Aboriginal people were ignorant of Nygkina cultural belief systems. Officers with the Department of Native Affairs regularly referred to customs and practices of those they serviced. Paul Hasluck a journalist and, later, Federal Minister for Territories (which included Aboriginal Affairs), commenting on his experiences in government and covering a period from 1925-1965, provides valuable data on the way people did coexist on pastoral stations, and the evolving lifestyle of Aboriginal people. His work stems particularly from his observations in Western Australia. Hasluck's accounts of how people interacted are from a European perspective and are important to this project, as he indicated that coexistence was the result of mutual agreement between black and white. As he saw it, the two groups had settled down to a reciprocal understanding of coexistence.³⁸ The stations were big enough for the Aboriginal people to live their customary lifestyle while station owners had plenty of room for their stock. One would not have to interfere with the other. His depiction of Aboriginal people's lifestyles on stations is somewhat overshadowed by the attention he gives to their value as labour.

The pastoral industry relied on Aboriginal labour because there was not enough white labour and Aboriginal labourers had the advantage of being well suited to the climatic conditions and were familiar with the country. Mutual coexistence was established on the proviso that Aboriginals did not inconvenience the pastoralists and that their stock was not interfered with. Tony Ozies, a man of mixed-descent, commented,

Bush people were allowed to move from station to station no problem, but most stock boys stayed on respective stations. Sustenance remained the same.

³⁷ Paul Marshall, *Raparapa Kularr Martuwarra : All Right, Now We Go 'Side the River, Along That Sundown Way* (Broome: Magabala Books, 1988). p.196.

³⁸ Sir Paul Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness, Aboriginal Affairs 1925-1965* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988). p.56.

Wet season people would go on ceremonies ok; this did not interfere with the station managers.³⁹

Henry Gooch, station manager, described relationships during the 1960s with Aboriginal people as, "Great. Everyone was happy. Most people living there belonged to country. Tribal business was their business".⁴⁰ But not all stock workers saw tribal business solely as that of the full-descent Aboriginals. Perhaps it was because Frank Rodriguez Junior was of mixed-descent that he took a keen interest in learning survival skills from Nyglna stockmen in the bush. Perhaps they, too, knowing the young Rodriguez's ancestry and family, his full-descent countrymen made sure he learned the skills.⁴¹

It may have been puzzling to some as to why the Aboriginal station workers appeared to be loyal to their bosses and contented with their lifestyle.⁴² Perhaps it was the history of violence that effectively saw servile behaviour evolve among Aboriginal station workers.⁴³ Rodriguez witnessed cruel behaviour towards Aboriginal people in the stock camp as noted in his diary:⁴⁴ "In the afternoon the Boss [Vic Jones] gave a thrashing to four natives. I all day by the station."⁴⁵

During the mid twentieth century pastoral leases were worked and run by Europeans. Properties in the Fitzroy Valley were mostly sheep runs that were serviced on a seasonal basis by teams of shearers, wool classers, rouseabouts and wool pressers. Shearing teams travelled to Derby by ship then by truck to the larger sheep stations in the area.⁴⁶ Liveringa, Mount Anderson and Quanbun were managed by the Roses, a well-known family in the industry. Earlier in the century, members of the Rose

³⁹ Tony Ozies.

⁴⁰ Gooch Henry, 1st September 2003.

⁴¹ Frank Rodriguez Jnr, 28th August 2003.

⁴² Jebb Mary Ann, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare. A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers.* (Perth: UWA Press, 2002), p.211.

⁴³ Ibid. p.225

⁴⁴ Frank Rodriguez Snr, "Diary," (*held with the author*) (1944-1969).

⁴⁵ Italics explain Rodriguez' entry: *Vic Jones got some Aboriginal boys by saying he'd give them some rations, but instead he hit them with a pinch bar because they'd attacked another boy called Crowbar. He wanted to teach them a lesson. There were two [Gudia] men outside with revolvers in case the boys got away. One Aboriginal boy was holding the other up; he had blood all over his shoulder.*

⁴⁶ Don Sears, n.d. 1990.

family carried out official duties as Protectors of Aborigines and as Justices of the Peace. Percy Rose held both responsibilities from 1906 to 1908.⁴⁷

In retrospect, coexistence between Aboriginal people and Gudia was never a choice. Its evolution was inevitable. Convict labour was not permitted north of the Murchison, so the Gudia coerced Aboriginal people to work for them.⁴⁸

Subsequently, relations between Gudia men and full-descent women resulted in large populations of mixed-descent Aboriginal people.⁴⁹ Well into the twentieth century both full-descent and mixed-descent Aboriginals were working for the Gudia. They were employed as stockmen and women, and house servants. Men and women were also employed by pearlers, although women were considered the better pearl divers.

Many of the mixed-descent women and men worked for the pastoralists as station hands from a very young age during the 1900s. Often they had been fathered by Gudia men and consequently removed from their Aboriginal mothers and taken to mission settlements, only to return to their traditional homelands as employees of Gudia. At the time that Fulgentius and Phillipene Fraser were born, there was a racist view that children of mixed-parentage would be better raised away from the influence of their Aboriginal mothers. In 1896 the Protector of Aborigines in the Goldfields C. A. Bailey was explicit in his view:

What is to be the future of such half-castes is difficult to say, but it is certain that they have all the bad points of the black, with none of the good points of the white men. It would be better if these children should be taken and brought up in one of the institutions for that purpose. The father should be the only person to have a voice in the matter, for the mother would in most cases naturally prefer the child to remain with her, but this should be over-ruled for the child's sake. In most cases the father would never come up and own to the child and if he did he should be compelled to, at all events contribute to the proper upbringing of his child, this would be the only feasible plan for saving the children from being like their mothers, wild in the bush. If they are placed on a station, when they grow up they are treated just like a black, and kept well at a distance, and looked down upon although they have white blood in their veins.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ State Records Office WA, "Settlers Names," (SROWA, 2002).

⁴⁸ C D Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1970). p.71.

⁴⁹ Crowley, *Australia's Western Third*. pp.48-49.

⁵⁰ Penelope Hetherington, *Settlers, Servants & Slaves* (Perth: UWA Press, 2002). p.181.

Fulgentius and Phillipena were fathered by non-Aboriginal men and removed to missions where they, and later their children, received some formal education and were trained as domestics and labourers.⁵¹ Fulgentius Fraser, reputedly the son of Percy Rose,⁵² Manager at Liveringa Station at the turn of the century,⁵³ worked in the bakery at Beagle Bay. His full-descent mother's name is recorded as *Brumby*.⁵⁴ Phillipena's father was an Indian man recorded as *Jimmy Kassim* by Father Francis Huegel at Beagle Bay,⁵⁵ and as *James Melycan* on Fraser's Exemption application in 1940.⁵⁶ Kassim was a station cook at Yeeda Station and lived with his two Aboriginal wives and he never abandoned his children.⁵⁷ Phillipena's mother is recorded as *Lucy* on the application and by her Aboriginal name *Muninga* by Huegel.⁵⁸



Fraser and Rose children with Aboriginal stockmen at Liveringa 1940s

But the Frasers were not to be denied returning to their birth and spiritual country. Many of the skilled domestics and labourers eventually found their way back to their parent's country to work for Gudja. Fraser worked as an overseer on several stations including 'Sheep Camp' for Streeter and Male; 'Currigan' on Myroodah; and then

⁵¹ Anna Haebich, *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia 1900-1940* (Perth: UWA Press, 1988). p.74.

⁵² Tony Ozies.

⁵³ Heritage Council of WA, "Register of Heritage Place, July 1997.," (Perth: Heritage Council, 1997).

⁵⁴ Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40 A1280," (Perth: 1940).

⁵⁵ Fr Francis Huegal, *This Is Your Place*, ed. Nailon M & Huegal Fr F (Beagle Bay Community, 1990).

⁵⁶ Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40 A1280."

⁵⁷ Edna Fraser, 28th August 2003.

⁵⁸ F Huegel and B Nailon, "Police Took Us to the Ship : We Cried and Cried," in *This Is Your Place: Beagle Bay Mission 1890-1990* (Broome: Magabala Books, 1990).

•Willumbah' on Liveringa. He went on to find employment for his daughters and son on the stations and he ensured their safe delivery to the prospective station employers.



Willumbah 1960s

Generally, Gudia pastoralists were transient and eventually they moved away from the stations, often to comfortable homes and retirement villages in the south west, while the traditional owners, the Nygkina and Mangala people, have remained in the area. Since the Kimberley Pastoral Company acquired the Liveringa lease around the turn of the twentieth century,⁵⁹ it has changed hands four times. The Nygkina, however, have remained in their country and foraged and fished, and kept connections through customary and spiritual lore active, while witnessing their lands being passed from one white hand to another for material purposes. Many have today returned to their homelands where their resolve to strengthen and preserve their cultural customs is evident. The Watson Brothers leadership and commitment at Jarlmadangah are valued in the region.

Nygkina-Mangala elders John and Harry Watson saw much of the process which robbed Aboriginal people of their land and denied them an education. The community, formed in 1987, now has its own clinic, school, camel tours, a signwriting business, cultural mapping, aquaculture and community development programs, a women's centre and the Ngyginah Cattle Company which now runs Mt Anderson Station.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Dept of Land Administration, "File 396/529; 396/530; and 396/493 : Liveringa Station," (Midland: DOLA, 2004).

⁶⁰ Jarlmadangah Burru Aboriginal Community, "Jarlmadangah Burru," (N/A).

The Fraser family came from an institutionalised Christian background that meant they accepted their life's journey. Catholicism played and continues to play an integral and important part in the life of the Fraser family. Their whole attitude to the Gudia intrusion has been one of only a passive resistance, unlike their predecessors. Phillipena's mother was severely distressed at having her two mixed-descent children snatched from her; she grieved for them: "We went past there to see my mother. That was last I seen. She hit herself, bleeding all over. That was the last I saw of her."⁶¹ Fraser's children were born, then raised and trained on Kimberley missions to be labourers and domestics. They never received an education higher than primary school and were prepared to exist alongside Gudia as their servants. The children had a sheltered upbringing under the missionaries who did not groom their charges for life in a different social world outside of the mission environment and the harsh realities of making a living from their employment:

We did not understand money. We never had any until we came to the towns. The mission was self-supporting. The nuns looked after us well enough. If we needed to be punished, they did that, but they weren't cruel. The boys were taught trades. Everyone was happy. They taught us schooling, prayers, sport.⁶²

The historian Henry Reynolds in *The Other Side of the Frontier* eloquently described traits of Aboriginal Australians on contact with Europeans in the same manner that the Fraser siblings confronted other cultural groups:

Reciprocity and sharing were so fundamental to their own society that they probably expected to meet similar behaviour when they crossed the racial frontier. . . . Though Aborigines were accustomed to differences in power and status based on age and sex they had no experience of the extremes of wealth and poverty which existed in European society. Material equality was one of the central characteristics of traditional life throughout Australia.⁶³

Despite being institutionalised and assimilated the Frasers coexisted with Gudia and full-descent people in the West Kimberley in a chivalrous manner. But this is not to say that they succumbed in any way to the condescending attitudes of Gudia, for it was all they knew. As individuals, the Fraser siblings are strong minded people

⁶¹ Huegel and Nailon, "Police Took Us to the Ship."

⁶² Eúna Fraser.

⁶³ Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier* (Townsville: History Dept. JCU, 1981). p.129.

whose loyalty to their Nygkina heritage has remained unwavering. Foremost is the care and respect displayed towards full-descent people, as already alluded to by Tony Ozies early in this chapter, and will become more evident in Chapters Four and Five. Care and respect were accorded full-descent people because they were our relatives who were relegated to living in conditions inferior to the mixed-descent people. My mother would always insist that my father stop by the Aboriginal camp when we visited Liveringa Station, to give people food and clothes that she had brought for them. Furthermore, it is important to stress that the Fraser family have always remained loyal to the missionaries who raised them on Beagle Bay Mission, and to Catholicism. The Fraser siblings today are devout Catholics who maintain a strong attachment to Beagle Bay. People who grew up there in the 1920s and 1930s have varying memories of mission life and some recall distressing experiences.⁶⁴ But for the Frasers, Beagle Bay was an important and enjoyable phase of their lives. Katie, interviewed in 1991, stated that she loved mission life; they were the best days of her life.⁶⁵ Katie's memories of mission days are an important contrast to the traumas that besieged her in adulthood; she died from complications associated with diabetes. Aggie Puertollano speaks freely about childhood memories at Beagle Bay and her loyalty to the missionaries:

I was offsider for church cleaning and I was offsider for gardening in Brother John's vegetable garden. I used to do ploughing with bullocks; we'd push the grass through the plough. The bullocks knew us well, we used to wash them. Then to Brother Matt's garden; his was a sugar cane plantation garden. We were happy children. We were disciplined when needed. I would never say anything against those missionaries. When my parents were taken there, they looked after them. I'll always appreciate what they did for us and our parents. That was the St. John of God Sisters and the Pallottines. [The] Pallottines were all Germans. When Father Francis died, the local people made sure his wishes were carried out and he was not buried in Broome.⁶⁶

Back in his home country, Frank Rodriguez had a similar experience in that he, too, received minimal formal education, had a strong Catholic upbringing and was initially trained as a labourer. From a peasant farming family, and denied the opportunity to attend school in his formative years, Rodriguez found he was not advanced enough

⁶⁴ Helen Weller, "North of the 26th : A Collection of Writings, Paintings, Drawings and Photographs from the Kimberley, Pilbara and Gascoyne Regions," (Perth: Reeves Books, 1989). p.87.

⁶⁵ Katie Rodriguez, May 1991.

⁶⁶ Aggie Puertollano.

academically to train as a priest and opted to train as a monk. He became known as *Dom Beda* when he joined the monastery at Samos in Galicia, Spain:

When I first went to study, when they sent me from my home when I was 13 years of age, as I said before, I was too far behind and they reckoned that I was not scholarly and I could go back home with [my] parents or become a labourer.⁶⁷

The young Spaniard found he had a lot in common with this Aboriginal family. He first met Katie Fraser at Liveringa Station where he was a builder and she, the workers' cook. They lived the rest of their life until Katie's death in the West Kimberley as part of a lifestyle where land was shared and relationships developed between people of full-descent, mixed-descent and Gudia.

Frank & Katie Rodriguez

A brief overview of Frank and Katie Rodriguez's lives will provide a backdrop to this research. Rodriguez came from the province of Galicia in the northwest of Spain where people are renowned for their strong attachment to home. Many Spaniards have returned to Galicia suffering *Morriña* [homesickness], after having worked abroad. Even Rodriguez had considered returning home at one point, before fate intervened and he remained in Australia. But most of his four nephews, who had joined him in the Kimberley to work on farming developments at Camballin and Kununurra during the sixties, fell to *Morriña* and returned to Galicia. The extensive literature about Spain since the beginning of the twentieth century depicts a country that was in turmoil until the rule of General Franco, a nationalist dictator, following the 1936-39 Civil War.⁶⁸ During the 1920s and 1930s Spain experienced political conflicts that retarded the country for many years, and it continued to experience internal political upheavals following the ousting of its monarchy in 1931.⁶⁹ This led to a series of short-term Republican dictatorships and eventually to Civil War. Under Republican rule, laws on secular education, civil marriages, divorce, burials, and the separation of

⁶⁷ Frank Rodriguez Snr, n.d. 1990.

⁶⁸ Joseph Aceves and William Douglass, "The Changing Faces of Rural Spain," (New York: Halsted Press, 1976). p.105.

⁶⁹ S. F. A Coles, *Franco of Spain 1892-1975* (London: N. Spearman, 1955).

Church and State were introduced.⁷⁰ It is for this reason that Rodriguez's mother, Maria Casanova Rodriguez, refused to let her youngest son be educated under 'communist rule', so at thirteen she enrolled him in a Benedictine monastery as a novitiate monk. This eventually led to his migration to Australia in 1937.

At the age of sixteen Rodriguez arrived at the Benedictine monastery at New Norcia, situated on the Victoria Plains north of Perth. The New Norcia site, originally named *Mourin*⁷¹ by the local Aboriginal people, was the first Catholic mission in Western Australia. It was established in 1886 for Aboriginal people and it was founded by a Benedictine priest, Rosendo Salvado.⁷² He has been described as a robust man, with vision and commitment to improving conditions for Aboriginal Australians.⁷³ He appears to have established a good rapport with the locals as he and associate Dom Joseph Serra, were assisted by Aboriginal people in looking for a suitable site for the mission. Salvado had lived at the Benedictine monastery at Samos in Galicia before coming to Western Australia, but it is only coincidental that Rodriguez followed him to Western Australia. Rodriguez had not aspired to monastic life; it was the turmoil in Spain that led to his phase as a novitiate.



*Rodriguez with Dom Frutuoso (left) at Samos, Galicia in 1997.
Both had entered the Benedictine Monastery in 1933.*

⁷⁰ David Mitchell, *The Spanish Civil War* (London: Granada, 1982).

⁷¹ of New Norcia The Benedictine Community, *The Story of New Norcia : The West Australian Benedictine Mission* (New Norcia: The Benedictine Community, 1973).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ George Russo, "Bishop Salvado's Plan to Civilize and Christianize Aborigines (1846-1900)" (MA, UWA, 1972).

At twenty-one and after seven years in the monastery, he was required to choose whether or not to become a monk. He chose to part company with the Benedictines. Nevertheless, in the ensuing years he continued to correspond with the monks. When Rodriguez ventured to the Kimberley in 1944 to work as a station-hand on Christmas Creek Station, he worked for the pioneering pastoralists, the Emmanuel Brothers. Entries from his diary are amusing and depict a youthful demeanour:

1st August 1944: Today we left Christmas Creek to start mustering in both stations, Christmas Creek and Gogo. I was riding a mule that was very, very cunning. Knew I was a chum and did just whatever he liked with me; it dumped me twice. The native boys thought good fun, but I thought otherwise.

22nd November 1944: We went cattle mustering and me for the first time; we camped overnight in the bush. The boss Vic Jones was the only person allowed to carry a gun or revolver. Me and some native boys were making fun behind the boss's back, we were acting like cowboys but soon cut it out in case it became a reality.⁷⁴

Rodriguez went on to qualify as a builder, studying by correspondence while working on the stations in the Kimberley; the practical component to the trade he taught himself. Much of his legacy is in the buildings he constructed around the region.

Katie Fraser's strong commitment to Catholicism was formed at Beagle Bay Mission, located on the Dampier Peninsula. She grew up there, on the first Catholic mission established in the Kimberley. Father McNab, a Trappist monk, had arrived in the region in 1884 where he planted the seed of Catholicism. Seven years later, the Trappists established Beagle Bay Mission and they were later replaced by the Pallottine Missionaries in 1901.⁷⁵ They were then joined by the St. John of God nuns who raised Phillipena, then later, Katie and her siblings, in the dormitories. Most of the Fraser family had grown up on Beagle Bay. Under the *Aborigines Act 1905 (WA)* many people had been institutionalised on missions, where it was intended that they relinquish their Aboriginal cultural practises in favour of western lifestyles.⁷⁶ Trained

⁷⁴ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

⁷⁵ Margaret Zucker, *From Patrons to Partners: A History of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley* (Fremantle: Uni of Notre Dame Australia Press, 1994). pp.48-51.

⁷⁶ Hnebich, *For Their Own Good*. pp.83-89.

as skilled domestics and labourers it was intended that they seek employment with Gudias once released from the mission.' The two younger children, James and Lena, were raised by their parents, away from the mission. A ninth sibling was born to Fraser in Meekatharra. Clare Brown grew up with her mother, and in later life she visited the Kimberley where she was warmly accepted into the family by Phillipena and her half siblings. Such is the strength and unconditional support of this family. The attitudes of the Fraser clan have remained consistent from their mission days, to life on pastoral stations and eventually life in the towns. The reliance on each other and the interaction with the community remains strong.

Critical to the theme of coexistence is that there is little any of the three groups could have done without the interaction and support of the other in the pastoral industry. As the non-Aboriginal group intruded on Aboriginal lands they relied on Aboriginal knowledge for survival. In turn, as full-descent people were forced to move from their country, they relied on Gudia for sustenance at feeding depots, while the mixed-descent people settled on pastoral properties and a work culture of leading station-hands evolved. In the towns, mixed-descent people were able to secure work given their training in trades on the missions. Pastoralists' attitudes towards local Aboriginal people changed as they realised they were dependent on their labour. Coexistence among the groups grew into a mutual arrangement as they shared the same land. Richard Broome reflects on the inevitability of Aboriginal stockmen and women becoming indispensable to the pastoral industry. He noted that the industry was undercapitalised; and, by world standards, inefficient; and that the Kimberley terrain was inhospitable and remote to Europeans, making the pastoralists heavily reliant on Aboriginal labour.⁷⁷ By the 1890s pastoralists were selecting their own small groups of bush people to engage in seasonal and other specific tasks.⁷⁸ A lot of the early shearing at Liveringa Station was done entirely by Aboriginal labour.⁷⁹ In later chapters, a more comprehensive coverage is provided on the three ethnic groups portrayed in this study.

⁷⁷ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin Aust P/L, 1982). p.127.

⁷⁸ Mary Ann Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare. A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers* (Perth: UWA Press, 2002). p.36.

⁷⁹ Hugh Edwards, *Kimberley: Dreaming to Diamonds* (Swanbourne: H. Edwards, 1991). p.64.

Government policies made in the interests of Aboriginals laid the foundations for the way in which missions operated, including decisions about marriages, cohabitation, the removal of children, and the treatment of 'wayward' young women.⁸⁰ The upshot of these decisions is reflected in oral histories collected by Fr. Francis Huegel from many of the 'stolen generations' at Beagle Bay. These narratives are an invaluable source of early history that records the contributors' homelands and close relatives.⁸¹ Most people were brought to Beagle Bay from the Kimberley region; however, some were brought from as far away as Marble Bar. Huegel shows an understanding of a culture that was being transformed by his decision not to modify the interviewees' Aboriginal English, capturing authentic accounts that dovetailed nicely into historical records of mission development in the Kimberley. These accounts give a human face to a history otherwise portrayed through the eyes of Westerners. Phillipena's account of being forcibly taken from her mother in Derby demonstrates his style:

I was about seven years when I was taken by police. My name was Sara [sic] then, my sister was Gypsy, she was only five. A native boy spoke in language to Gypsy and I to come with him for a ride. We jumped in the cart. One boy named Albert saw us get into the cart and Albert ran away because he knew we were going to be taken to the police station. Gypsy and I were too young to know. My mother, named Lucy, started calling for her two children and did not get any answer. They told her the police took them for a ride. So Lucy called in language. Gypsy and I could hear Mum calling. They locked us in, we were there for the night. Only we two. The ship must have come in the night. You know, we had that tram early days. The tram pulled up in the morning and took us to the water.⁸²

Fulgentius Fraser meanwhile was raised at Pago (the missionaries later moved to the new site, Kalumburu) from about the age of ten. He was given the surname of Fraser by a Gudia stockman, Walter Fraser, but it was his Aboriginal father and his biological mother Brumby who raised him until he was taken to the mission. His Aboriginal name was *Eulla* and he was known as Fred.⁸³ Pago was slow to get started. It has been described as a wild and remote location where the missionaries survived attacks from hostile Aboriginals –⁸⁴ a western perspective that conveys

⁸⁰ Christine Choo, *Mission Girls: Aboriginal Women on Catholic Missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1900-1950* (Perth: UWA Press, 2001). p.128.

⁸¹ Huegel, *This Is Your Place*.

⁸² Huegel and Nailon, "Police Took Us to the Ship." pp.29-32.

⁸³ Aggie Puertollano.

⁸⁴ Zucker, *From Patrons to Partners*. p.13.

little empathy for the Aboriginal experience. Ironically it was Fraser who saved the missionaries from certain death at the hands of the Aboriginal locals:

As I, with the help of Fr Alcalde, was distributing watermelon around, the men called persistently for Brother Vincent to come where we were, as they had done on other occasions. He fell into the trap and came to join us, just as we heard the frightened voice of the boy, Fulgentius who cried with horror: Father, spear! Father, spear! Immediately, three men jumped on the brother, and two other on Fr Alcalde . . . the aim of the Aborigines (as they later often told us) was to kill me first and then all the others . . . the Aborigines did not complete their plan, because the boy Fulgentius . . . ran to my room, took the shot gun and fired into the air.⁸⁵

By the 1920s it was apparent that Aboriginals were not a dying race, but rather that the population of mixed-descent Aboriginals was increasing. In the early 1920s, the Frasers were living at Drysdale River Station, where Aggie was born, before they returned to live at Beagle Bay so their children could be educated.⁸⁶ Aggie was recorded as being the first infant baptised on the mission in January of 1924, registered as Agnes *Eulla*, under Fraser's Aboriginal name.⁸⁷ The young family remained at Beagle Bay until missions around the country began experiencing financial difficulties and mission inmates were forced to seek employment outside of the mission. Many were employed in the pastoral industry.⁸⁸ By 1940 the family had left Beagle Bay. In 1946 Fraser, enticed by better pay conditions and the offer of a position as Head Stockman at Willunbah, returned with his family to Nygkina country.

During the 1940s there was an unsuccessful attempt at Beagle Bay to establish an Aboriginal convent. The Order was the result of the initiative and passion of Bishop Raible,⁸⁹ who first went to Beagle Bay in 1928 as a priest and Administrator of the Kimberley vicariate.⁹⁰ Katie and her sister Edna were expected to join the new Order:

⁸⁵ Eugene Perez, *Kalumburu: The Benedictine Mission and the Aborigines, 1908-1975* (Wyndham: Kalumburu Benedictine Mission, 1977). p.19.

⁸⁶ Katie Rodriguez.

⁸⁷ Choo, *Mission Girls*. p.223.

⁸⁸ Dawn May, *Aboriginal Labour and the Cattle Industry: Queensland from White Settlement to the Present* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994). p.136.

⁸⁹ Mary Durack, *The Rock and the Sand*, 1st ed. (London: The Anchor Press Ltd, 1969). p.249.

⁹⁰ Zucker, *From Patrons to Partners*. p.86.

The very first Aboriginal nuns were the Regina Apostolorum Convent; Katie Vera, Bidy and Lucy. They were all consecrated. Others after them including Aunty Eddie were Aspirants. Aunty Gertie stayed in the convent because Katie looked after her . . . Katie left because it was not very strong. She then came to Derby after leaving the 'Blue' convent, and she worked for Rowell. Joining the convent was people's choice; no pressure what so ever from our parents. Katie probably did not want to stay too, because all the family had left.⁹¹



Lucy Dolby, Vera Dann, Bidy Kelly and Katie Fraser

It is conceivable that the profound difference in Aboriginal and Gudia culture was not conducive to Aboriginal women embracing celibate careers. In Ireland, parents made a promise to the Church that resulted in many young women becoming nuns, a practice alien to Aboriginal people. Furthermore the attitude of the missionaries at that time would not have lent itself to the success of Aboriginal people as priests and nuns. Despite assimilation policies, it was considered that Aboriginal people needed time to assimilate suitably to be worthy Christian leaders:

. . . religious assimilation is retarded by social prejudices and by doctrinal difficulties: a mission to Aborigines does not regard them as part of parochial or circuit pastoral work along with, and in the same way as, white residents. Further, neither full-bloods nor part-Aborigines will enter fully into our

⁹¹ Aggie Puertollano.

religious life until they can relate it to the social life which they lead or adopt.⁹²

During Katie's and Edna's time in the convent, the Frasers moved away from the mission to earn an income. Fulgentius had secured work with Streeter and Male on Denham Station near Broome as the head stockman and he relocated there with Phillipena and most of the children; Aggie, Frances, Dorothy, Jimmy and Lena. Gertie, still at school, was left in the care of her older sister Katie, in the convent. In the absence of immediate family, the sisters became very close and Gertie considered Katie as her surrogate mother; a fervent bond that endured until Katie's death. Katie was one of the first four *native* sisters to reach the status of novice and was duly named, Sister Agnes. But she chose to forsake the convent life and married Rodriguez soon after meeting him in June 1946. They married on December the 8th, the Feast Day of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Rodriguez's engagement to Katie was initially problematic, not because she was Aboriginal but, because she had been in the convent at Beagle Bay and it seems she was expected to remain there. Rodriguez was not too clear about the reasons, but she must have been adamant she was not going back:

29th July 1946: She was upset, but I did not know why. Something to do with the convent – she possibly did not want to go back. But I did not understand the problem, so I backed off.⁹³

Historian Christine Choo investigates the apparent secrecy surrounding the failure of the Bishops Riabie's dream, in her book *Mission Girls*, which explores the lifestyles of Aboriginal women at Beagle Bay and Kalumburu in the first half of the twentieth century.⁹⁴

The remainder of this study investigates the concept of coexistence and is set out in the five remaining chapters. In Chapter Two I discuss the methodology I used to record the entries from the diary and to collect the oral histories through a series of interviews. I present a case for oral history as an important component of historical

⁹² A P Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1938). p.376.

⁹³ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

⁹⁴ Choo, *Mission Girls*.

investigation which enlivens and personalises written evidence. Oral history has been the conduit by which Aboriginal people have kept their history alive and, while there are arguments for and against oral history in academic research, it is increasingly accepted as a legitimate form of historical investigation. In Chapter Three, I provide an overview of the laws affecting people in Western Australia and how they impacted on the three groups under study. I go on to examine previous historical interpretations of the pastoral industry in the Kimberley. Chapters Four and Five present my research based on Rodriguez's diary; oral accounts by the Fraser family, their employers and acquaintances; and archived sources. This presents a case study of coexistence in the Kimberley in the mid-twentieth century. Twenty-five oral historians have contributed their knowledge to this research project. Chapter Four analyses the lifestyles in the Kimberley under the headings: living arrangements (includes a section on the Derby reserve), travel, religion and relationships.

Chapter Five considers how people negotiated employment, education and training in the pastoral industry, and how the three social groups, full-descent, mixed-descent and Gudia experiences differed, yet overlapped. The final Chapter brings together the research and analyses coexistence and what it meant for the different groups in the Kimberley in the mid twentieth century.

Chapter Two: Approaches to history - methodological and historiographic issues.

The research for this thesis is based on an analysis of my father's diary; interviews with 25 members of my extended family and people associated with the pastoral industry in the western Kimberley in the mid twentieth century. Other sources include newspapers; pastoral lease maps; station diaries and letters; film footage and audio taped interviews housed at the Battye Library in Perth; government records; reports; gazettes; parliamentary debates; and public relations' documents. Permission in writing was obtained from the Department of Indigenous Affairs to peruse archived documentation available in the State Records Office while the Department of Community Development provided my mother's personal file. Personal memoirs and fiction set in the Kimberley were among other sources used in the project. The Kimberley Land Council provided written permission for me to make contact with communities and they offered access to their library. In turn, I will provide the Kimberley Land Council with a copy of my final thesis. The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) provided some funding that assisted with travel expenses; the organisation will also receive a copy of this thesis.

Frank Rodriguez began writing his diary in 1944 when he first went to the Kimberley. The personal diary, in the form of yearly booklets doubled as a 'work' journal for day to day activities, but importantly, it comforted the young, adventure-seeking migrant. He had no family, knew no-one and was headed for a remote area of Western Australia to work as a station-hand for the Kimberley cattle pioneers, the Emanuel Brothers. From 1944 to 1950 Rodriguez wrote in his native dialect, *Gallego*,⁹⁵ a language similar to Portuguese, but then he changed to writing in English. For the next few years, whilst most entries are written in English, they are interspersed with *Gallego*, and from 1955 the entries are only in English. Rodriguez's literacy in two languages can be attributed to his commitment to his daily diary; remarkable for a man who was denied an academic education in his formative years because his mother detested the secular education enforced under a left wing regime in Spain. Snippets from his diary depict the anticipation of a youthful Rodriguez who ventured to the Kimberley outback in the 1940s:

⁹⁵ Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, "Instituto Da Lingua Galega: Galician," (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 1995).

15th July 1944 - Left Perth by plane for Fitzroy Crossing at 11am. Stopped overnight at Port Hedland.

16th July 1944 - At 4.30am we left Port Hedland via Broome and Derby, to Fitzroy Crossing arriving here about 10.30am. At the airport I was met by Sam Thomas, a man I never met before. He took me to Gogo Station to the homestead, which is only 10 miles from the Crossing. Here at the station met up with new people that I never met before.

17th July 1944 - Today from Gogo Stn they sent me to Christmas Creek Stn, some 65 miles away. I got a lift with a truck carrier by the name Tom Cross. I was not too happy. I was sent without any tucker for the road. The station cook, Thomas, gave me a good feed and after had a good sleep in the men's quarters.⁹⁶

Rodriguez has always been a keen reader. His unit near Kununurra is full of newspapers, current affairs magazines and history books in both Spanish and English, Catholic literature and handwritten letters that satisfy his appetite for suitable, non-fiction reading material. Spanish newspapers are always a treat, especially the *El Pais* [The Country] printed in Spain. Today the paper is no longer available in Perth and he has to be satisfied with Spanish papers printed in Australia.

I collected all of my father's journals from him and set about a process of entering the text of the diary entries on my computer. Initially I typed up only the years that I am researching, 1944 to 1969. That amounted to around 150,000 words in itself. I soon discovered he had at times reverted to writing in Spanish so that prompted me to bring him to Perth from his home in Kununurra to translate all of the Spanish written entries. For two weeks in May 2003, we spent many hours as he translated and I entered the data. An unexpected turn in the translation exercise was to find him at times struggling to understand what he had written. He explained to me that, back in the 1940s, he was still speaking and writing in *Gallego*. Galicia borders Portugal and the language resembles that country's vernacular more than *Castilian*, the globally spoken and official Spanish language. Over the years he had inadvertently moved away from using his native language to that of *Castilian* because most Spanish people he came into contact with were not from Galicia, and the literature he reads is in

⁹⁶ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

Castilian. Now, he had forgotten some of his dialect and he had to give dogged thought to what some words meant that he had written in *Gallego* sixty year earlier!

Over the years, the longer he lived in the Kimberley region and the more familiar he became with the environment, its country and its people, the more proficient he became in English. After his marriage he had an extended family, whose members are often mentioned in his diary. I interviewed as many people mentioned in the diary as I could contact. There were times when he had neglected the diary for a few months on end, either because of work pressure or because he was in a state of melancholy, but he always came back to it. Rodriguez wrote either in pencil or ink. Some of these entries in pencil on one side of a page, were made illegible the entries on the other side. The diary's pages have deteriorated but most entries are readable and are now preserved on computer. Working with my father in this way was also a good opportunity to clarify a lot of points and he often explained entries. The computer texts are colour coded to reflect the English entries (black), Spanish translations (purple) and his explanations (blue). As we worked our way through the entries, he was undoubtedly influenced in his explanations by today's environment and the speed at which technology has changed the world and his worldview. In hindsight, and at the age of eighty-two, he could afford to be light-hearted about past events. My father who has always had a dry sense of humour but is never complacent, has maintained a philosophical outlook on life. At times the entries are cryptic and his reaction amusing:⁹⁷

Sat 3rd May 1947- Finished making the steps for the boss. In the afternoon Katie and myself went fishing, and to kill kangaroos. We put a lot of poison out. Katie killed many kangaroos.⁹⁸

Wed 3rd September 1947 - All day working for Watt. Tonight we had several visits from half a moon.⁹⁹

Given the strength and support of the Fraser family, it is⁷ with little surprise then that there was no resistance to me, a close relative, using the family as a case study for this

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Italics are Rodriguez' comments (Rodriguez's comments hereafter): *That is news to me; but she must have done! (14.5.2003)*.

⁹⁹ Rodriguez's comments: *Well that's what I've written there! (15.5.2003)*.

work. Prior to the interviews, information was sent to the prospective interviewees about the project, and the types of questions that would be asked. This allowed them to be prepared to some extent, or alternatively to decide against being interviewed. All people approached agreed to participate, although not all were comfortable at being tape recorded. In these situations I took notes. At the interview, consent forms were explained to the interviewee that they then signed. I asked questions which revolved around their relationships while living in the West Kimberley during the research period. They included issues of social interactions between full-descent, mixed-descent and Gudia; between the workers and managers on pastoral leases; the choices people could make while working for Gudia; where they lived; how Gudia viewed Aboriginal and mixed-descent people; how different groups lived on the same land; and the influence of mission upbringing.

After going through the journals with my father, I interviewed many of the people mentioned in the diary, including members of my mother's family and others who worked with Rodriguez in the Kimberley. This methodology, supplemented with other written records from the archives, presents daily life in the Kimberley from many perspectives. It raises interesting and important issues about the role of oral history and memory. It also shows how oral and written sources can be used together effectively to enhance our understanding of social interaction.

History is no longer the *historians' history*, but rather it is the *people's history* in that history is being written from the reconstructed memories of ordinary people.¹⁰⁰ History always reflects the perspective of the writer, whether based on documentary or oral sources.¹⁰¹ But memory and history can complement each other. The contributors of oral history in this research have contributed perspectives which go beyond policies implemented for Aboriginal people by proffering their memoirs. They inadvertently capture the effects of authoritarian government rule by the dominant group and reveal the regional social history.

¹⁰⁰ Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, "The Knife Edge: Debates About Memory and History: Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia," (Melbourne: Oxford Uni. Press., 1994), p.92.

¹⁰¹ Keith Windshuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002).

Oral histories from Aboriginal people, and indeed the wider community, are one of the most valuable primary sources that we can assemble for posterity. In this section I discuss some issues raised by using this methodology. Daniel Connell in his paper 'Oral History - A Complementary Source not a Competing Source' emphasises the importance of personal experiences in understanding the past:

. . . the sweep of history through the ages is made up of a multiplicity of individual finite human lives. People are at the centre of all historical processes and oral history is particularly suited as a source to make future generations aware that when they study history they are not looking at abstract forces shaping the fate of anonymous masses. When they look at the big picture they should never be allowed to forget that the masses they observe are composed of a vast number of idiosyncratic individuals, each and every one struggling to find their own way through the storm.¹⁰²

Narratives or oral histories expand on the personal accounts given in Frank Rodriguez's diary. Oral history is an important methodological tool that cannot be used uncritically as demonstrated in this chapter.¹⁰³ Interviewees were mostly identified through his diary. It was crucial to the legitimacy of the project that they knew my father as it is his diary that is central to the research. As the interviews touch on personal and sensitive matters, it was important that I understood, respected and practised an ethical demeanour. Given that I was already well informed when I undertook the interviews, I was conscious I should not unwittingly influence the interviewee. I was also conscious that I brought my own emotional and personal responses to the interview; that I was known by all the participants, and these factors would inevitably influence the way the interviews were conducted. It was important, too, that the informants did not feel pressured into making any statements, political or otherwise that they were not comfortable with, or for them to think they had to remember events, dates and names accurately. With personal accounts the interviewees were at liberty to express their memories on their terms.

The Fraser siblings have interacted closely over the years, attending weddings, birthdays, and funerals and holidaying together. It is because of this interaction that

¹⁰² Daniel Connell, "Oral History - a Complementary Source Not a Competing Source," (Daniel Connell, 1997).

¹⁰³ A Green and K Troup, "The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory," (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p.204.

the narratives in this study can in one sense, be termed as 'collective memories', despite each partaking in individual interviews. While each has told his or her own autobiography, each person talked about other family members, friends and places that complement other narratives. Consequently, the Fraser family members have made continuous 'use' of their memories over the years through family gatherings and reminisces, that has allowed them to hold onto to their past, through oral histories.

Both memory and history have a role in giving an account of the past. Through recalling their lives, the family have been able to assist the historian, to research and fill in the gaps. Oral history, the melding of memory with history, is sanctioned by many proponents who demonstrate its value and necessity in the recording of history. Many will argue that history no longer is recorded only by trained historians or those with the cultural authority to interpret history. History belongs to the public. "Now people want to recognise themselves in the history that's made – it has to have some meaning for them".¹⁰⁴ Given that memory and history have always assumed a symbiotic connection, it is interesting that they have sparked intense scrutiny amongst academics.¹⁰⁵ While memory provokes considerable concern for those who argue against its reliability, oral history in effect allows the experiences of everyday human beings to be represented and considered in the recording of history. Memories have the capacity to complement the documented evidence in newspapers, journals and memoirs and illuminate the invisible collective social context of history.

Recent discussion on the reliability of oral history has been debated in the context of the 'Windschuttle affair'. In 2000, Keith Windschuttle, a writer with a background in Australian history and social policy, published *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*.¹⁰⁶ The book attacks the work of some Australian historians in the 1960s and 1970s, especially Lyndall Ryan and Henry Reynolds,¹⁰⁷ who have exposed the findings of documented reports to reveal mistreatment of Aboriginal Australians since the time of colonisation. Windschuttle asserts that the approach of these historians to

¹⁰⁴ Paula Hamilton, "Are Oral Historians Losing the Plot?," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 18 (1996). p.45.

¹⁰⁵ Darian-Smith and Hamilton, "The Knife Edge." p.9.

¹⁰⁶ Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*.

¹⁰⁷ Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told* (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1999).

Aboriginals in the nation's history is corrupt.¹⁰⁸ Amidst his findings he is sceptical of oral histories and he says that historians embrace oral histories to suit their own political agendas:

... Aboriginal oral history is today riven with wild allegations that the simplest amount of checking in the archives would immediately refute. Tales of this kind [Mistake Creek massacre] have now become endemic within Aboriginal culture. Not only are historians today unwilling to correct their most obvious falsehoods, they also give uncorroborated oral history the imprimatur of scholarly respectability. However it does not take much foresight to see that the real interests of Aboriginal people are not served by any of this. These stories generate an unwarranted sense of bitterness and a debilitating resentment towards the wider Australian society. They lead many Aborigines to seek comfort in myth, legend and victim hood. They blame all their social problems on the distant past and thus avoid taking responsibility for their own lives now and that of their children in the future.¹⁰⁹

On the contrary, in cross-checking oral history against the archives, I have found the archives to support and complement oral histories I gathered for this project.

Windschuttle has generalised about Aboriginal people and his sentiments do not reflect the Fraser siblings' lifestyle. While there are serious social issues affecting Aboriginal Australians which are related to the impact of colonisation, the social problems are no more prevalent than with other low-socio economic groups. The evidence of mistreatment of Aboriginal people is blatantly obvious from sources other than Aboriginal people or their 'sympathisers'. An example of these sources is *Men's Work – An Australian Saga* written by policeman Richard Henry Pilmer between 1937 and 1941. Pilmer served in the West Australian police force in the early 1900s patrolling and capturing Aborigines who killed stock. Many of these prisoners were sent away from their country, south to Rottnest Island off the coast from Perth:

I collected twenty five offenders on that round and took them to Mount Abbott, where Mr. Isador Emanuel, a pioneer of the Lower Fitzroy and local magistrate, held court in the little 10ft by 12ft police hut there.

After having been duly found guilty and condemned to imprisonment in Derby gaol, the natives were chained in a circle round a tree, the leading and tail ends of the chain locked together.

¹⁰⁸ Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, p.403.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

Rottneest Island, now a tourist paradise, opposite Fremantle, was at that time a native prison, where the worst offenders of the coast mined salt and made roads. The notorious murderers and cattle-killers of the north-west were sent there for periods of years – the place was the most diabolical blot on the escutcheon of Australia. We may be thankful that human memory is so short, and that the young generation of West Australians knows so little of that monumental crime of the past, exile and death on the unsophisticated children of the wild, who “know not what they do”. What agonies and miseries those dungeons and those crags have seen! . . .

Few of them saw their own country again. Like shackled beasts, they died. Such horrors are best forgotten and Australia is wiser and kinder today. It is a good thing that stones do not speak.¹¹⁰

In my interviews with people who know each other and shared important periods of their lives, stories told by one speaker were often consistent with those told by others, because of their shared experience. Their memories were often celebratory, hardly a conspiracy at victim hood. Oral history enables Aboriginal Australians to contribute to a national history from their own perspective. Given the width and length of Australia in the days of lengthy travel before technological advances made it possible to network with contemporaries, it is unlikely that any conspiracies could have evolved.

The ages of the interviewees in this research average 64 years and range from 82 to 34. This age range raises the question of memory and aging. While the general assumption is that as people age, their memories deteriorate, it is plausible that dynamics such as gender, self perceptions, career, education or family are factors that aid memory. My father's ability to remember events amazed me. It is unlikely that he would have been re-reading his journals over the years and for five years prior to putting the entries onto computer, I had his journals. It was obvious to me, that with his memory intact, Rodriguez was able to recall events with minimum effort:¹¹¹

10th June 1945 - Things are still in the 'dark' as far as the unions are concerned.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Richard Henry Pilmer, "Men's Work, an Australian Saga," (Perth: 1937-1941.), p.108.

¹¹¹ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

¹¹² Rodriguez's comments: *I remember this very well because the police from Derby had to come over [to Cockatoo Island] and take about 12 men away; after all, they were prisoners who where sent to the Island to work.*

16th Jan 1946 - In the afternoon it tried to rain but all went into dust. I put in another run of cement in the bathroom. [at Christmas Creek Station].¹¹³

3rd March 1946 - In the afternoon the Boss [Vic Jones] gave a thrashing to four natives. I all day by the station.¹¹⁴

Individual biographies can be therapeutic. A classic example of the therapeutic aspect was brought to light when American war veterans were interviewed, allowing them the opportunity to relieve confused feelings. Japanese Americans who had fought for the USA in the Second World War have been able to overcome a 'disabling silence', a silence that did not allow them to express what it felt like to 'look like' the enemy. Vietnamese Americans, too, who fought for their country during the Vietnam War, suffered this much-overlooked phenomenon.¹¹⁵ Rodriguez's eldest child Pepita Pregelj was sent to boarding school at the age of nine, along with her cousin Pat Bergmann who was then thirteen. The girls were the first Aboriginal boarders at Stella Maris College in Geraldton. However, Pepita never openly acknowledged her Aboriginality at school, despite learning a lot about the culture from her mother. It was not until she was about twenty-one that she felt able to acknowledge her Aboriginal identity. Experiences at boarding school where she was treated differently from other girls influenced her to subsume her Aboriginal identity:

I remember one of the nuns was checking the lockers and in front of my locker, she told me off. I think I had one thing on the floor, and she was quite cross and she said that I was very dirty. It was quite a demeaning kind of comment. It has always stuck with me that what she'd said, was that I was dirty. She then went across to my best friend whose locker was a pig sty; clothes everywhere, junk and smelly shoes and socks and she never picked on her the way she did on me. At the time, I did not see that as a racial thing. I could be misjudging the nun, but I think that was the time that there were Aboriginals from the bush; I was a bush person . . . so there was that feeling of being treated differently.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Rodriguez's comments: *It was awful, because you could see a giant cloud of red dust coming towards us; it was hard to breathe.*

¹¹⁴ Rodriguez's comments: *Vic Jones got some Aboriginal boys by saying he'd give them some rations, but instead he hit them with a pinch bar because they'd attacked another boy called Crowbar; he wanted to teach them a lesson. There were two [white] men outside with revolvers in case the boys got away. One Aboriginal boy was holding the other up; he had blood all over his shoulder.*

¹¹⁵ Alistair Thomson, "From Memory Maps to Cyberspace," *Oral History Spring*, no. Sporting Lives (1997), p.21.

¹¹⁶ Pepita Pregelj, 7th September 2003.

The way in which people communicate their memories is influenced by their age, gender and culture. People's attitude to their memories, and consequently the way they articulate their recollections must be understood by the historian or interviewer. Critics of oral history do not appreciate the efforts to correct bias and fabrication, or acknowledge that memories are reconstructed in specific ways that represent the past. They do not acknowledge that the distortions of memory can be a resource as much as a problem.¹¹⁷ Windschuttle demonstrated his ignorance of the differences in the interpretation of language when he suggested Peggy Patrick, a storyteller of the Mistake Creek massacre was lying. Patrick speaks the local languages of Kija and Kriol and when communicating with non-speakers Patrick uses the derivative, Aboriginal English. She retold the story that had been passed onto her by her parents, to the ABC's *7.30 Report* presenter Kerry O'Brien, that her grandparents and aunts and uncles were killed in the massacre. Impelled by Windschuttle's accusation, Patrick in a statement defending her words to O'Brien said:

I don't talk that high English but everybody who talk to me face to face understand properly what I bin tell 'em. My ganggay, my mum mum, bin get killed along with big mob more family.¹¹⁸

In Aboriginal way, she had referred to her grandmother as 'mum mum'. Windschuttle's reaction clearly shows he misunderstood her limited English and had not himself, investigated the interpretation of the local *lingua franca*:

O'Brien's research should have also made him question Peggy Patrick who appeared on his program claiming both her parents, two brothers and two sisters were massacred at the time. If her parents were killed in 1915, Patrick must now be at least 86 years old, yet on television she did not look a day over 50.¹¹⁹

Patrick was 71.¹²⁰ Narratives from people of various relationships such as the elderly, one's contemporaries and even school children who tell of past events can support an untold history; they even add authenticity to a story. Memory to ordinary folk

¹¹⁷ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford Uni. Press, 1978), p.228.

¹¹⁸ Peggy Patrick, "Statement of Peggy Patrick," in *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, ed. Robert Manne (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2003), p.215.

¹¹⁹ Cathie Clement, "Mistake Creek," in *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, ed. Robert Manne (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2003), p.205.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

provides people with a trinity of “. . . memory as the creation of self-history, establishing an identity, and having a sense of history”.¹²¹ By tapping into people’s memories, historians have presented another source by which to research historical events. In effect oral historians bring another dimension to the past. This dimension considers the people who make history as individuals, families and local communities:

The challenge of oral history lies partly in relation to this essential social purpose of history . . . it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.¹²²

West Australian historian Jenny Gregory asserts that “. . . oral history underlines the interpretive aspect of history in a much more blatant way than do other historical sources”.¹²³ Blatant interpretation refers to the sense that contributors of oral history themselves believe they go right to the crux of historical accounts, regardless of how accurate their recollections. Memories appear to expose the very core of people’s experiences as opposed to written documents that may have been written for political agendas.

On one level, memory is an individual act; individuals remember what is a personal, private and often spontaneous activity. Once individual memories are articulated and thus shared, they enter the realm of social or collective rememberings.¹²⁴

Memories can be triggered in many ways. Material evidence, objects, photographs, smells and weather conditions can all be significantly effective in stimulating people’s memories. Repeating an experience, too, can arouse memories, particularly if it has a strong emotional significance. Psychoanalysts have realised that there are different levels of recall that “. . . telescope, superimpose [and] fuse . . .” memories that can result in several past events being described as a single event. The functionings of memory is extremely complex as Gregory also argues:

¹²¹ L. Passerini, "Attitudes of Oral Narrators to Their Memories: Generations, Genders, Cultures," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* 12, no. Oral History and Social Welfare. (1990). p.19.

¹²² Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*. p.2.

¹²³ Jenny Gregory, "The Destruction of Memory: Exploring Childhood Memories of Class," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*. 11 (1989). p.71.

¹²⁴ Darian-Smith and Hamilton, "The Knife Edge." p.1.

Gerontologists have been puzzled by the way in which distant events and complex experiences can apparently be recalled in great detail by the elderly, while short-term recall of simple information is often poor.¹²⁵

On the other hand, the recollecting capabilities of the elderly decreases as they age. Some elderly people in an attempt not to forget will describe past events with "glib improvisation".¹²⁶ Nevertheless, while human recall is strongly connected to our identities despite memories being rekindled in varying ways, they do not provide us with the pinpoint preciseness conspicuously demonstrated in documented evidence.¹²⁷ Memories had previously always been the major source of oral traditions of 'spoken' nations, crucial in the total organisation of societies who practised and continued inherited customary laws and culture. Consequently "... we cannot assume a simple process of rupture and opposition ..." in the relationship between memory and history.¹²⁸ Memories allow people to pass on and to retain their identities, which are substantiated in varying ways.

Acceptance of identity can be realised through objects, historical clues or traces and collective memories. It has been suggested that presenting objects is a good way to stimulate an interviewee's memory. "It often brings a flood of recollections about people and events seemingly long forgotten".¹²⁹ Historian Christina Gillgren does not disagree with the use of objects to prompt memory, but she insists that prompting tools such as photographs and objects should be used *after* the interviewee has finished. Such tact, she spelt out, will provide the opportunity for a more 'unsanitized' version of history to be expressed.¹³⁰ The opposite was found to be the case with the interviewees in this research. Photographs kept people's memories alive as they themselves drew on their own private collection of photographs, to stimulate the discussion.

Critics of oral history question its validity. They argue that oral history is:

¹²⁵ Gregory, "The Destruction of Memory." p.73.

¹²⁶ David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London: New York: Longman, 1982). p.112.

¹²⁷ Oral History Association of Australia Journal, "Are Oral Historians Losing the Plot?," *Oral History Assoc of Australia* 18 (1996). p.11.

¹²⁸ Hamilton, "Are Oral Historians Losing the Plot?."

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Christina Gillgren, 30th April 1998.

The world of image, selective memory, later overlays and utter subjectivity . . . The oral historian is creatively free to avoid talking to tiresome persons of alien outlook or values, and to neglect questions which are not deemed worthwhile and, of course, those which do not occur to him.¹³¹

All historical evidence should be treated with caution.

The thrust of the criticisms was that memory was unreliable as an historical source because it was distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age, by the personal bias of the interviewer and interviewee, and by the influences of collective and retrospective versions of the past.¹³²

The role of the interviewer in collecting oral histories must be steeped in the ethical considerations necessary when dealing with oral histories. The interviewer is in a privileged position in that she controls the interview through her questions, demeanour and in other ways and can manipulate the interviewee's memory to some extent. This poses dilemmas for some interviewees if they feel obliged to satisfy the interviewer by saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear. One of my interviewees gave the histories of her older sisters, as she recalled the stories that were told to her. It took some gentle coaxing until she accepted that it was her story, too, that was important to the interviewer, not only that of her siblings. She needed reassurance that her life was interesting.

Approaches to Australian History

In the previous chapter the methodology of oral history is discussed, but I again consider it here in terms of an approach to history. The discussion in this chapter acknowledges that historians worldwide take different approaches to recording history. It pays special attention to the contributions by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Writers are influenced by subjective persuasion and focus on particular streams in their profession; and while there are different approaches to history, so too, there are different kinds of historians. Generally, historians investigate and present information extracted from written primary sources, but today oral histories are more readily accepted. As Greg Lehman, a Trawulwuy descendent

¹³¹ Patrick O'Farrell, "Oral History: Facts and Fiction," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* 5 (1982-83), pp.4-5.

¹³² Thomson, "From Memory Maps to Cyberspace." p.33.

in Tasmania says: "Our grandmothers, most important in Aboriginal culture, draw on their own experience and the collective memory of their family and their community".¹³³ This research project examines relationships between Aboriginals and Europeans by engaging with oral historians who provide accounts of local history that complement the written sources. Historians' backgrounds can influence their perceptions and may become apparent as Ann McGrath does in *Born in the Saddle*. The writer uses a feminist approach to explain coexistence and expose Aboriginal women as stock workers in an industry that was otherwise presumedly masculine:

In his 1928 report on the Northern Territory, Queensland administrator J W Bleakley paid special homage to the Aboriginal woman, who, he argued, was the "true pioneer". Without them, white men could not have carried on. Even where white women ventured, Aboriginal women were indispensable.¹³⁴

Australian history was originally portrayed from a 'white blindfold' approach that shifted to a 'black armband' approach in the last forty years. Prior to the 1960s, Australian history was characterized as an expansion of colonisation by the British in an empty land. A land initially targeted as a place for the dispersal of unwanted people, rather than an invasion.¹³⁵ The earlier teachings of Australian history have been labelled as a 'white blindfold view'¹³⁶ of history, written by 'enlightenment thinkers'¹³⁷ because it ignored the mistreatment of Aboriginal people. It served the purpose of neo-conservatives who focus on the development of a nation through "... land settlement, pastoralism and free selection, followed by accounts of the gold rushes, urbanisation, federation, the World Wars and so on".¹³⁸ But, by the 1970s, many historians had taken a post-colonial approach to Australian history and were subsequently labelled as 'black armband' historians.¹³⁹ The shift to post-colonialism became known as Aboriginal History. The black armband brigade threatened the mindset of conservative politicians who revere Australian history as conventionally progressive since colonisation. But in the 1970s and 1980s, the more liberal thinking

¹³³ Greg Lehmann, "Telling Us True," in *Whitewash: On Keith Windshuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, ed. Manne Robert (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2003). p.177.

¹³⁴ Ann McGrath, *Born in the Saddle* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987). p.21

¹³⁵ Green and Troup, "The Houses of History." p.277.

¹³⁶ Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation QLD, "Black Armband History," (2003).

¹³⁷ Gary Foley, "Reflections on History," (The Koori History Website, 1999).

¹³⁸ Lehmann, "Telling Us True." p.162.

¹³⁹ Dr Mark McKenna, "Different Perspectives on Black Armband History," (Dr Mark McKenzie, 1997).

historians began to investigate new sources of documented evidence. They sifted through government and archival records and policies, mission registrars, archived letters and station diaries in an attempt to correct the imbalance. They exposed a side of Australian history not previously presented to the psyche of a developing nation. State Record files researched for this project clearly reveal the hidden history of how Aboriginal Australians were used as cheap labour in developing the West Kimberley pastoral industry. The industry was heavily dependent on Aboriginal labour as indicated in a report to The Commissioner of Native Affairs after the Department's District Officer visited Liveringa in May of 1946:

Mr. Rose informed me that Upper Liveringa Station was suffering from a serious shortage of native labour only about 40 natives including pensioners and dependents being now resident on the property whereas a few years ago the number was in the vicinity of 100. . . Mr. Rose has stated that he has done all in his power short of offering wages in cash to attract natives to his station without success, he has a times recruited desert natives from the west of the Fitzroy River but they are not inclined to stay as it is out of their tribal country.¹⁴⁰

The evolution of Australian historiography from an imperial perspective to post-colonialism and the debates they engendered have culminated in a reconciliation process between the indigenes and the newcomers.¹⁴¹ The reconciliation process is intended to address the mistreatment of Aboriginal Australians and promote a better understanding between the two. The post-colonial approach questions the validity of an imperial approach which supported the notion of European expansion as unproblematic.¹⁴² However, as discussed in the previous chapter, opponents of Australia's history as it is presented today, prefer to deny the documented evidence and suggest that some historians present information to suit their own particular agendas. Keith Windschuttle is best described as a 'revisionist' writer as he attempts to undermine the authenticity of the "black armband" findings as he reverts to earlier "white blindfold" perspectives of Australian history.

¹⁴⁰ Department of Native Affairs, "File 239/1930," (Perth: SROWA, 1930).

¹⁴¹ Veracini and Muckle, "Reflections of Indigenous History inside the National Museums of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and Outside of New Caledonia's Centre Culturel Jean-Marie Tjibaou.," (James Cook University, 2003).

¹⁴² Green and Troup, "The Houses of History." p.278.

Australian history still portrays a 'them and us' mentality. Visitors to the Hall of Fame at Longreach in Queensland are hard pressed to locate mention of Aboriginal stockmen and women despite their strong contribution to the pastoral industry. But when it comes to history and Aboriginal Australians, no-where is the division more obvious than at the very new National Museum of Australia (NMA) in Canberra. A comparative study between three museums, in Australia, Aotearoa and New Caledonia exposes the NMA as tokenistic towards Aboriginal Australians. While the state-of-the-arts Museum acknowledges Aboriginal people as the *First Australians*, it presents Aboriginality as developing alongside Whiteness, without connecting.¹⁴³ Coexistence among Australians from the time of contact has been ongoing. However, Veracini wonders why the Museum chooses to put a time frame on armed conflict and a commencement date for coexistence:

One wonders, though, why armed conflict is limited to 1788-1928 and why cooperation/coexistence only follows this phase. More importantly, it is the location of this history – in relation to the rest of the country's historical experience and in relation to the rest of Aboriginal history – that begs a monumental question: why should the conflict on the frontier only relate to Aboriginal history; why is it alienated from 'mainstream' history; and why is the onus of coexistence placed on Aboriginal history rather than [sic] the nation's history?¹⁴⁴

The acknowledgement of Aboriginal historians' contributions to Australian historiography appeared to be limited. For instance, secondary sources recommended during my undergraduate studies were weighted in favour of non-Aboriginal writers. However, during the course of this project, I have discovered a rich selection of historical accounts presented by Aboriginal writers in varying mediums from novels, to poetry to children's stories. With the exception of Sally Morgan and Jack Davis in Western Australia, Aboriginal writers are not widely acknowledged. Marnie Kennedy's *Born a half-caste*¹⁴⁵; James Miller's *Koori: a will to win*¹⁴⁶; Rosemary Van den Berg's *No Options No Choice*¹⁴⁷; Stephen Kinnane's *Shadow Lines*¹⁴⁸ and from

¹⁴³ Veracini and Muckle, "Reflections of Indigenous History . . ."

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Marnie Kennedy, *Born a Half-Caste* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990).

¹⁴⁶ James Miller, *Koori: A Will to Win* (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1985).

¹⁴⁷ Rosemary Van den Berg, *No Options, No Choice! : The Moore River Experience : My Father, Thomas Corbett, an Aboriginal Half-Caste* (Broome: Magabala Books, 1994).

¹⁴⁸ Stephen Kinnane, *Shadow Lines* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003).

the West Kimberley, Edie Wright's *Full Circle*¹⁴⁹ are all Aboriginal Australian writers. The books are 'straight from the heart' accounts about the impact of colonisation and government policies on Aboriginal Australians, written from Aboriginal perspectives. Koori activist Gary Foley offers a useful website addressing Aboriginal history issues,¹⁵⁰ while Gordon Briscoe delivers much needed statistical information on Aboriginal health issues in *Counting, health and identity: a history of Aboriginal health and demography in Western Australia and Queensland, 1900-1940*.¹⁵¹ Generally, Aboriginal writers have not enjoyed the fame of Henry Reynolds; Mary Durack; or now, the controversial historian Keith Windschuttle¹⁵² in writing about the Aboriginal past. History about Aboriginal Australians of mixed-descent is not immediately evident as European historians have been inclusive of all Aboriginal Australians. On closer scrutiny, the focus is on full-descent people. Is this an agenda to suggest the mixed-descent Australians are not the 'real' original inhabitants? Is this an attempt, too, to conceal that mixed-descent people are the descendents of Europeans? More recently however, non-Aboriginal historians of the calibre of Anna Haebich, Peggy Brock and Christine Choo have researched the lives of mixed-descent Aboriginals, while Penelope Hetherington highlights the fact that 'half-caste' children actually posed a problem for the authorities:

A population of mixed Aboriginal and European parentage, characteristic of frontier situations where there were few European women, also began to emerge in the North West after 1860. The last years of the century saw a growing uneasiness about the fact that these children were as much European as Aboriginal. The question of what should be done with them began to exercise the minds of people who regularly dealt with Aboriginal people. The idea took shape gradually that they should be separated from both European and Aboriginal people and given special treatment. Not until the early twentieth century did this special treatment become the basis for an ambitious project in social engineering, which would see Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their parents and denied access to their culture.¹⁵³

Nevertheless, the initial void in Aboriginal writing is largely due to Aboriginal people descending from a non-literate society and government policies established early in

¹⁴⁹ Edie Wright, *Full Circle: From Mission to Community a Family Story* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2001).

¹⁵⁰ Foley, "Reflections on History."

¹⁵¹ Gordon Briscoe, *Counting, Health and Identity: A History of Aboriginal Health and Demography in W.A and Qld.* (Canberra: AIATSIS, 2003).

¹⁵² The controversy instigated by Windschuttle is discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁵³ Hetherington, *Settlers, Servants & Slaves*. p.178.

Australia's colonial history that denied Aboriginal Australians a fully fledged formal education. Policies prevented Aboriginal Australians having a formal educational beyond primary school, resulting in few Aboriginal writers embracing academic Australian history. They prefer oral histories collected and presented through various mediums. Aboriginal contributors today largely use multi-media modes such as film and video. Technological mediums are extensions and modern versions of oral traditions that were passed down in Aboriginal societies. All the same, the majority of oral histories are still represented by non-Aboriginal writers.

Historians have adopted varying styles and methodologies to portray Aboriginal Australians over recent decades. Essentially, the writers use oral history to explore the relationships between white and black at any given time and explore a rich variety of contemporary historical documents.¹⁵⁴ Others have adopted a colloquial style that is palatable and makes for entertaining reading. This approach is often descriptive and nostalgic. At times, too, there is a clear appreciation of the intricacies of customary laws, kinship patterns and languages, such as Mary Durack's family history in *Kings in Grass Castles*¹⁵⁵ and her account of Catholicism in the Kimberley, *The Rock and the Sand*.¹⁵⁶ Aboriginal women have become a focus of study as historians investigate the impact mission establishments had on them in the Kimberley. Decisions by governments about marriages, cohabitation and the removal of children and the treatment of 'wayward' young women reflect attitudes towards the treatment of Aboriginal women in the Kimberley by the authorities.¹⁵⁷

Many writers have investigated the pastoral developments in northern Australia, and the impact on Aboriginal people. Historians like Mary Anne Jebb, Christine Choo, Anne McGrath and Catherine Clement have provided documented accounts of Kimberley history in recent times.¹⁵⁸ Earlier, writers like A. P. Elkin, C. D. Rowley, Ronald and Catherine Berndt, Paul Hasluck and Phyllis Kaberry had collated

¹⁵⁴ McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*. p.VIII.

¹⁵⁵ Mary Durack, *Kings in Grass Castles* (London: Corgi Books, 1967).

¹⁵⁶ Durack, *The Rock and the Sand*. p.7.

¹⁵⁷ Choo, *Mission Girls*.

¹⁵⁸ Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare. A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers*; Choo, *Mission Girls*; Cathie Clement, *Pre-Settlement Intrusion into the East Kimberley, East Kimberley Working Paper; No. 24*. (Canberra: East Kimberley Impact Assessment project, 1988); McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*.

Kimberley data and more specifically, information on Aboriginal societies.¹⁵⁹ Many of the academic commentators are complemented by a palatable array of colloquial writers. The individual styles of Mary Durack, Ion Idriess, Les Schubert, Marion Nixon, Tom Austen and Ian Crawford have made significant contributions to history through elaborate stories from the region.¹⁶⁰

Some historians of the West Kimberley are critical of histories which make no attempt to understand an Aboriginal perspective of the past. Steve Hawke and Michael Gallagher in their book *Noonkanbah* and Mary Ann Jebb in *Blood, Sweat and Welfare* make plain their concern.¹⁶¹ They are concerned that historians have neglected to show the aspirations of Aboriginal people. Specific literature on the West Kimberley pastoral development is limited, while reference to the wider Kimberley pastoral industry and European settlement can be found in general histories written from a European perspective. There is little doubt that the overriding theme in all of these documents of life in the pastoral industry is that people co-existed, long before Native Title rights were recognised. Whether a mutually agreed arrangement or, as in most cases, a forced lifestyle, the pertinent fact is that these groups did live alongside each on the same land and, together, they developed the pastoral industry.

¹⁵⁹ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*.

¹⁶⁰ Durack, *Kings in Grass Castles*.; Ion Idriess, *Outlaws of the Leopolds* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1952).; L Schubert, *Kimberley Dreaming : The Century of Freddie Cox* (Perth: Wordwork Express, 1992).; Marion Nixon, *The Rivers of Home* (Perth: Vanguard Service Print, 1978).; Tom Austen, *A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia 1829-1929* (Darlington: Darlington Publishing Group, 1998).

¹⁶¹ Hawke and Gallagher, *Noonkanbah*.

Chapter Three: Government Policies. The Fraser Family achieve Citizenship Rights in their country.

In 1935 a fair-skinned Aboriginal man of part Indigenous descent was ejected from a hotel for being an Aboriginal. He returned to his home on the mission station to find himself refused entry because he was not an Aboriginal. He tried to remove his children but was told he could not because they were Aboriginal. He walked to the next town where he was arrested for being an Aboriginal vagrant and placed on the local reserve. During World War II he tried to enlist but was told he could not because he was Aboriginal. He went interstate and joined up as a non-Aboriginal. After the war he could not acquire a passport without permission because he was Aboriginal. He received exemption from the Aborigines Protection Act and was told he could no longer visit his relations on the reserve because he was not Aboriginal. He was denied entry to the RSL Club because he was Aboriginal.¹⁶²

The laws that we abide by in Australia today are of British origin. They were introduced following the invasion of this land in 1788. The laws are from a literate and English speaking society that was oblivious to the Aboriginal customary laws; laws that organised some 600 different language groups. At the onset of the authoritarian British rule, unbeknown to them, Indigenous Australians became British subjects and came under the same law as the intruders. But, as the colonial frontier expanded throughout Australia, the Aboriginals suffered adverse affects from the dispossession of their land, from conflict and from diseases introduced by the foreigners. This led to the decision by the West Australian Government in the 1840s to implement laws which specifically targeted Aboriginal people.¹⁶³ In 1886 the Aborigines Protection Act was passed. At that time, the Social Darwinist theory, 'the survival of the fittest', influenced the thinking of white Australians as they embraced the belief that it was only a matter of time before the Aboriginal people would become extinct. As part of the protectionist policies in the late nineteenth century, the government commissioned reserves for the benefit of Aboriginal people. Initially the reserves were to allow people to live in their traditional ways where they had "... uncontested access to their traditional means of subsistence".¹⁶⁴ But, eventually missionaries controlled some reserves as they attempted to 'christianise and civilise' Aboriginal people:

¹⁶² Peter Read, "Community Attitudes: The Fact Is Aboriginality Cannot Be Defined by Skin Colour or Percentages of Aboriginal 'Blood'," (ATSIC, 1996).

¹⁶³ Haebich, *For Their Own Good*. p.47.

¹⁶⁴ WA Department of Indigenous Affairs, "Lost Lands Report," (Perth: DIA, 2003), p.11.

In 1878, 50,000 acres [20 234.2 ha] were reserved for this purpose between the Sandford and Murchison rivers. In 1883, 100,000 acres [40 468.5 ha] were reserved for similar purposes near Mount Dalgety on the upper Gascoyne River and 5000 acres [2023.4 ha] reserved in the Kennedy Range. In 1884, 600,000 acres [242 811 ha] was reserved on the Fraser River on the western side of King Sound. Management of Aboriginal reserves was officially the responsibility of the Aborigines Protection Board, a department of five persons appointed by the Governor and reporting directly to him, but in practice the Aborigines Protection Board had little to do with large remote reserves. These larger reserves were essentially an ad hoc gesture, and they did not represent any systematic attempt to make adequate provision for the future of Aboriginal people.¹⁶⁵

At the turn of the century the *Lands Act 1898* was passed granting land to Aboriginals, but only on strict conditional status. The condition made certain that, even if Noongar¹⁶⁶ people in the southwest as early as the 1900s had wanted to be assimilated, they were excluded in accordance with law:

A major difficulty was the *Land Act 1898* prohibited Aboriginals from being given more than 200 acres [80.9 ha] to farm – despite the fact that in 1907 the Agricultural Bank declared that 400 acres [161.8 ha] of good land was the minimum requirement for a viable wheat and sheep farm. Another difficulty was that because Aboriginal farmers were not granted title to the land, they were unable to secure loans for improvements. It was a strict condition of the land that within two years they build a house and clear or crop land to the value of 30 pounds. Within five years they had to fence at least a quarter of the land, and within seven years the entire block. Unable to obtain bank loans, the only way Aboriginal farmers could finance these requirements was to work for others. This would often take them away for a season at a time placing themselves at risk of being accused of having abandoned their farm.¹⁶⁷

In April of 1906 the *Aborigines Act 1905* was proclaimed and, according to historian Anna Haebich, rather than improving the situation for Aboriginal people:

... it laid the basis for the development of repressive and coercive state control over the state's Aboriginal population ... the Act drove a wedge between them and the wider community and served to hamper their efforts to make their own way in life.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Noongar is the generic name for Southwest Aboriginals.

¹⁶⁷ Department of Indigenous Affairs, "Lost Lands Report." p.13.

¹⁶⁸ Haebich, *For Their Own Good*. p.83.

The principle forces that shaped Indigenous people's destiny, along with their ethnic status during the middle of last century, were these policies. Policies dictated the power, control and organisation of racial groupings: where people could live, who could be an Australian citizen, who could be formally educated and to what extent, and who was entitled to land. The *Aborigines Act 1905* set the framework for the control of Aboriginal people to the present day. The Act was originally implemented based on recommendations from the *Roth Report*, a royal commission into the mistreatment of Aboriginals in the pastoral industry.¹⁶⁹

Government policies and legislation over the years have profoundly impacted on the lives of Aboriginal people of both full and mixed-descent. The legislation had varying impacts on Aboriginals depending on their ancestry. Those who were not 'full-blood' Aboriginals were considered to be more intelligent than their full-descent brothers and sisters because of their European parentage, but not as intelligent as white people.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, as both Aboriginal groups were denied the right to be formally educated past lower-primary school, with full-descent people often gaining no formal education at all, many were not conscious that they were being disadvantaged. It is also clear that generally, ordinary non-Indigenous Australians even today are not aware of the implications the legislation imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the ramifications that still exist.

From the first decision to implement legislation to control Aboriginals, under the guise of protectionism, Kimberley Aboriginal people's ability to fully embrace either their own customary lifestyles or the introduced European ways had been restricted by ongoing amendments and name changes to the *Aborigines Act 1905* until it was fully repealed in 1971. Alongside exclusive legislation for Aboriginals, they also caught the attention of other legislators who made provisions against them. For example "... the Western Australian *Native Administration Act*, the *Electoral Act*, the *Liquor Act*, the *Criminal Code*, the *Firearms and Guns Act* and the *Dog Act*, among others.¹⁷¹ While most contained provisions discriminating against Aboriginal people, it

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p.70.

¹⁷⁰ Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000). p.236.

¹⁷¹ Tamara Hunter, "The Myth of Equality: The Denial of Citizenship Rights for Aboriginal People in Western Australia," *Studies in Western Australian history*, no. 22 (2001). p.71.

seems there were some minor clauses implemented in favour of Aboriginals. Under the *Dog Act* 1903 the general population was required to licence dogs, but Aboriginals could keep one unregistered dog:

Any adult male Aboriginal native may lawfully keep one unregistered male dog; but such dog shall be kept free from mange or other contagious disease. Upon representation being made by any person to a Justice of the Peace that such dog is a dangerous dog or is liable to spread disease by reason of its neglected state, the Justice may order the destruction of the dog.

Whenever the number of unregistered dogs found in the possession of one or more natives shall be in excess of the numbers of adult natives in such party, such dogs or dogs in excess shall be liable to be destroyed, and all police officers and constables are hereby authorised to destroy the same.¹⁷²

In 1886 the WA government had implemented the *Aborigines Protection Act* making it legal to remove Aboriginal children from their parents to missions. In 1905 the Act was amended to give wide powers to the Chief Protector so he became the legal guardian of every Aboriginal and 'half-caste' child under sixteen. By 1930 the Protector of Aborigines in WA, Auber Octavius Neville, had control over all people defined as Aboriginal by the 1905 Act, regardless of their living arrangements. He vehemently believed that the best upbringing for Aboriginal children would be to assimilate to the ways of westerners:

Essentially Neville's vision was a program of racial and social engineering designed to erase all Aboriginal characteristics from a desired White Australia. Directed at Aborigines of mixed-descent (Neville remained convinced that Aborigines of full-descent were doomed to extinction), it was predicted on the removal and institutionalisation, of 'mixed race' children.¹⁷³

Neville did not anticipate that putting people of the same cultural grouping together to learn a foreign culture would not work. How were they ever going to be like people they had no complete association with? While the Fraser family are devout Catholics, brought up on a mission, they only interacted with the missionaries for prayer, elementary education and apprenticeship, but maintained Indigenous traits that related

¹⁷² *Dog Act, (1903).*

¹⁷³ Haebich, *Broken Circles*. p.273.

to subsistence and kinship. Neville's assimilation policies were gradually abandoned in the 1950s and 1960s and replaced by self-determination strategies.

Fraser Family and government policy

In this section, I present an insight into how the aforementioned Western Australian laws affected the Fraser family in the Kimberley during the research period. Fulgentius and Phillipena Fraser were both victims of the policies which led to what is now known as 'The Stolen Generations'. Under the *Aborigines Act 1905*, the Chief Protector could lawfully take children from their parents. The idea that European fathers of Aboriginal children should be compelled to financially support their offspring was introduced and some advocates genuinely believed that white fathers would acknowledge their offspring. The West Kimberley Sub-Inspector of Police:

... believed that in nearly every case, European men would willingly contribute to the upbringing of their children. He thought that the children should not be taken from their [Aboriginal] mothers until they were 5 years old and said that they made splendid station hands when they were trained.¹⁷⁴

Children mostly did not know their biological fathers, and neither did their fathers openly acknowledge their Aboriginal children. But it would seem that Fraser may have known his father and Phillipena definitely knew her Indian father, Jimmy Kassim. Percy Rose purported to be Fulgentius' father was a JP, and an honorary protector of Aborigines as well as a station manager. He may have felt he should lead by example and abide by the law by acknowledging his son. Tony Ozies explains:

Fraser was Percy Rose's son and Helen's [Ozies' wife] father was Jeff Rose. Percy Rose was a JP and the Protector of Natives. Rose paid Fraser to bring up Grandpa [Fulgentius].¹⁷⁵

Ozies' statement is supported by Katie Rodriguez who in 1990 told me that Fraser was taken from his mother by Percy Rose and given to a white stockman, Walter Fraser. In keeping with Section 34, 'father liable to contribute to support of half-caste child' under the *Aborigines Act 1905*, Rose is said to have paid Fraser £500 to care for

¹⁷⁴ Hetherington, *Settlers, Servants & Slaves*, p.180.

¹⁷⁵ Tony Ozies.

Fulgentius.¹⁷⁶ As revealed in Chapter 2, Phillipena was forcibly and lawfully snatched from her mother at a very early age. In order to facilitate the removal of Aboriginal children to missions, this provision was further amended in 1911. Under the amendments, the Chief Protector became the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children 'to the exclusion of the rights of Aboriginal mothers of [children of mixed-descent]¹⁷⁷ as were other children as Tony Ozies discloses:

Then the police came and took them to Beagle Bay. You see, Benedict, Fraser, Vincent, Charlie Martin went to Kalunburu. Some kids were sent to Mogumber. Some kids to Drysdale (Kalumburu). Those who tried to hide, they got them in the end. Aunty Grace was from Halls Creek. Aunty Eva was from Halls Creek. Aunty Helen's mother was from Bidgydanga; half sister to Louisa Corpus; she was a Marshall.¹⁷⁸

Aboriginal people did not live independent lives and were controlled from an early age. Their nurturing, schooling, travel, employment and marriage all came under the direction of the missionaries who acted as agents of government policy. The Frasers lived at Beagle Bay and Kalumburu Missions as inmates until Fraser secured work away from the mission environment around 1931. Phillipena and the children remained at Beagle Bay until they could join him. By 1940, they were living at Myroodah Station where Fraser was the head stockman, and the family needed to apply for an exemption from the *Aborigines Act, 1905* to be in a position to enjoy privileges that white people had.

¹⁷⁶ Katie Rodriguez.

¹⁷⁷ Hunter, "The Myth of Equality," p.73.

¹⁷⁸ Tony Ozies.



Phillipena Fraser and her children at Beagle Bay 1940. L-R: Aggie, Edna, Lena, Phillipena, Dottie, Gertie, Katie, Jim & Frances.

Exemption v Citizenship in Western Australia

Under Section 63 of the *Aborigines Act 1905*, there were provisions where people could apply for exemptions from the Act, if they were deemed suitable, but the clause was discriminatory and the 'privilege' could be revoked at any time. Applications were at the discretion of the Minister:

63. The Minister may issue to any aboriginal or half-caste who, in his opinion, ought not to be subject to this Act, a certificate in writing under his hand that such aboriginal or half-caste is exempt from the provisions of this Act, and from and after the issue of such certificate such aboriginal or half-caste shall be so exempt accordingly:

But any such certificate may be revoked at any time by the Minister, and thereupon this Act shall apply to such aboriginal or half-caste as if no such certificate had been issued.¹⁷⁹

The interpretation of 'half-caste' under the Act read:

¹⁷⁹ *Aborigines Act*, (April 1906).

"Half-caste" means any person being the offspring of an aboriginal mother and other than an aboriginal father: Provided that the term "half-caste", where it occurs in this Act, elsewhere than in section three, shall, unless the context otherwise requires, be construed to exclude every half-caste who, under the provisions of the said section, is deemed to be an aboriginal, but shall not apply to quadroons.¹⁸⁰

Persons deemed to be an Aboriginal was defined under section 3:

3. Every person who is--
- (a.) an aboriginal inhabitant of Australia; or
 - (b.) a half-caste who lives with an aboriginal as wife or husband; or
 - (c.) a half-caste who, otherwise than as wife or husband, habitually lives or associates with aborigines; or
 - (d.) a half-caste child whose age apparently does not exceed sixteen years, shall be deemed an aboriginal within the meaning of this Act, unless the contrary is expressed.

In this section the term half-caste includes any person born of an aboriginal parent on either side, or the child of any such person.

By this definition, both Fulgentius and Phillipena were officially Aboriginals, as were their children, until they turned sixteen. But by the mid 1930s, the Act was amended following a Royal Commission. HB Moseley was appointed to investigate the situation following "allegations of slavery, maltreatment of Aborigines by pastoralists and the abuse of Aboriginal women".¹⁸¹ In the southwest of the State, the 1930s depression had reduced employment opportunities on farms for Aboriginal people that forced them to move onto reserves near towns in search of food, limited work and kin support. White people, who detested their increasing numbers and their close proximity to the towns, pressured the authorities to re-locate the camps further out. In the north of the state, Moseley ignored complaints about the pastoralists' treatment of Aboriginals. He chose to support "the use of indentured Aboriginal labour and non-payment of wages by Kimberley pastoralists" and allowed them strict control of wages and responsibility for Aboriginal workers. The 1936 Act was extensively amended following the Moseley Report. The *Native Administration Act 1905-1936* expanded the definition of Aboriginal to include more people. It was supposed to improve things for Aboriginal people, but it effectively stifled the movement of West

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Department of Indigenous Affairs, "Lost Lands Report." p.18.

Australian Aboriginal people. The amendments included broadening the definition of who was a Native:

“Native” means –

- (a) any person of the full blood descended from the original inhabitants of Australia;
- (b) subject to the exceptions stated in this definition any person of less than full blood who is descended from the original inhabitants of Australia or from their full blood descendants, excepting however any person who is—
 - i. a quadroon under twenty-one years of age who neither associates with or lives substantially after the manner of the class of persons mentioned in paragraph (a) in this definition unless such quadroon is ordered by a magistrate to be classed as a native under this Act;
 - ii. a quadroon over twenty-one years of age, unless that person is by order of a magistrate ordered to be classed as a native under this Act, or requests that he be classed as a native under this Act; and
 - iii. a person of less than quadroon blood who was born prior to the 31st day of December, 1936, unless such person expressly applied to be brought under this Act and the Minister consents.¹⁸²

Children under the age of 21 came under the protection of the state – previously it was 16 years; the Governor could appoint anyone he saw fit as a travelling inspector of Aborigines; and the Commissioner could authorise any suitable person to examine Natives thought to have a disease.¹⁸³ This was the year Katie Fraser turned sixteen, so under the amended legislation she remained a ward of the state for another five years. Under the Act, a Quadroon was defined as “. . . a person who is descended from the full blood original inhabitants of Australia or their full blood descendants but who is only one-fourth of the original full blood.”¹⁸⁴

In 1940, while living at Myroodah Station, Fraser applied for an exemption from the Native Administration Act for himself, Phillipena and their children under fourteen years. They included Gertrude, Dorothy, Jimmy and Lena and the older children applied for their own exemptions.¹⁸⁵ As long as Aboriginal people lived on the

¹⁸² *An Act to Amend the Aborigines Act, 1905. No. 43 of 1936.*

¹⁸³ *An Act to Amend the Aborigines Act, 1905.*

¹⁸⁴ *An Act to Amend the Aborigines Act, 1905. No. 43 of 1936.*

¹⁸⁵ Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40 A1280."

mission they were not normally required to have an exemption, but Katie, now a Native Sister in the convent at Beagle Bay and known as Sr. M. Agnes, applied for an exemption in 1943. The exemption was approved but not before a name confusion was sorted out. Katie's younger sister's birth name was Agnes Fraser and she had received an exemption in 1942, leading the authorities to understand that Katie already had an exemption.¹⁸⁶ However, following clarification from Bishop Raible who explained to the incensed government authorities that all women entering the convent received a new name, and that Sister M. Agnes was in fact Catherine Fraser, her application was approved. The missionaries had obviously upset the authorities as reflected in remarks on Katie's file:

There have been other instances of confusions in the names of natives through the actions of Missions in bestowing new names. In this instance the confusion is all the more so since the applicant has a sister named [Agnes]. To my mind the re-naming of Catherine Fraser as Sister M. Agnes was thoughtless." And further:

Such name changes cause difficulties in our records and for this reason I am not favourable to changes of names. Other Missions have changed the names of ordinary natives and there has been much unnecessary trouble in tracing records and papers. In consequence, whilst I realise the reasons in this case, I trust you will discourage any changes in the names of natives.¹⁸⁷

Katie was considered a prime candidate by the authorities. The Commissioner of Native Affairs forwarded her Exemption Certificate along with a cover letter to the Officer in Charge of the Broome Native Hospital on the 22nd of September 1943. In his letter, he mentioned that, while this application was unusual, given that mission inmates did not need to apply for exemptions, he said that because the native girls had become sisters to work for the welfare of the natives, they could be regarded more as white, except in respect to status.¹⁸⁸

Meantime, while Fulgentius and Phillipena were at Myröodah Station, an amendment to the *Aborigines Act 1905* made Phillipena eligible to apply for child endowment, because she had an exemption from the Act. The exemption meant that she was a 'detribalised' Aboriginal and suitable for child endowment. On the 1st of July 1941,

¹⁸⁶ Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40," (Perth: 1940).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

she was granted £3 per month for the remaining children in her care.¹⁸⁹ The older siblings were of employable age and had secured work in the region (see Chapter 4 employment). Other amendments to the *Social Securities Act* (Cmth) followed; in 1942 the aged and invalid pensioners' amendment was enacted and in 1943 unemployment and sickness benefits.¹⁹⁰

In 1944, Rodriguez first travelled to the Kimberley and little did he know that his future family were being constrained by government policies, specifically designed to control Aboriginal people. It was the year the *Natives (Citizenship Rights Act)* came into force that stipulated Aboriginal people had the opportunity to apply for Citizenship rights. The 1944 Citizenship debate in the West Australian Parliament was significant for the Fraser family because it focused on Citizenship rights. The parliamentarians deliberated over which Aboriginals were eligible to become Australian citizens; the rhetoric of the era is bemusing. While they advocated in the best interests of the Aboriginals, they never veered from the mindset that Aboriginal people were inferior. An excerpt from the second reading in Parliament in 1944:

The MINISTER FOR THE NORTH-WEST: I think it will be understood by members that the certificate of exemption has served a useful purpose in somewhat training the better class of natives towards full citizenship. In my opinion it has served that useful purpose, and a percentage of natives is now prepared for a further advance . . . I did not introduce the Bill without first considering the whole question of the natives and the problems associated with them, and I am satisfied that if this measure becomes law, it will give great encouragement to a percentage of natives – and probably a larger percentage than I would care to state – to uplift themselves and apply for this privilege.¹⁹¹

The new legislation meant that Aboriginals would have to prove their worthiness to be an Australian and they could up-grade their exemptions to achieve Australian Citizenship status, "The main principle underlying the Bill is to provide an opportunity for adult natives to apply for full citizenship as Australians".¹⁹² The 'better class natives' the Minister was referring to no doubt, were people of mixed-descent. They were proving themselves to be suitable as citizens of Australia. They

¹⁸⁹ Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40 A1280."

¹⁹⁰ Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40."

¹⁹¹ Assembly, *Bill - Natives (Citizenship Rights)*, Second Reading, 28.09.1944.

¹⁹² *Bill - Natives (Citizenship Rights)*.

worked as farmhands, as domestics, secured seasonal jobs and even fought in the World Wars. Still, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-servicemen and women on discharge from the Defence Forces returned to Australian society as second class people. Despite their military membership they weren't automatically afforded Australian Citizenship. Ongoing discussion in Parliament demonstrates the degree to which Indigenous Australians were relegated to non-citizenship in comparison to Maori in New Zealand:

Mr. Seaward: The Maori sit in the New Zealand Parliament.

Mr. NEEDHAM: The member for Pingelly refers to the Maori. He is a vastly different man from the Western Australian aboriginal. He is a better man physically and mentally. Another native who is much stronger physically and mentally is the Papuan.

No person of unsound mind, attainted of treason, or convicted and under sentence for one year or more is entitled to vote at any election of members of the Senate or House of Representatives. No Aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific except New Zealand shall be entitled to have his name on an electoral Roll unless so entitled under s.41 of the Constitution.¹⁹³

In 1944 the *Native (Citizenship Rights) Act* was introduced whereby Aboriginal people could apply for a Citizenship Certificate as an alternative to an exemption from the Native Administration Act. The new Act gave people conditional freedom, "This enabled an Aboriginal person to apply for a Certificate of Citizenship which, among other things, enabled the holder to vote in state and federal elections, drink alcohol, visit licensed premises and travel freely within the state".¹⁹⁴ What it meant, was that Aboriginal people who had applied for Citizenship rights and qualified, were deemed suitable because they were of reputable character, were industrious and had agreed to "dissolve all tribal and native associations, except for lineal descendants of the first degree".¹⁹⁵ But it was also conditional on the continuing good behaviour and health of the person. The Fraser sisters Katie, Aggie, Frances and Edna, had all received an exemption certificate and were now eligible to apply for Citizenship. Katie, already married to Rodriguez for two years, received her certificate on the 23rd

¹⁹³ Bill - *Natives (Citizenship Rights)*.

¹⁹⁴ Hunter Tamara, "The Myth of Equality : The Denial of Citizenship Rights for Aboriginal People in Western Australia.," *Studies in Western Australian history*, , no. No.22 (Wordal), p.69-82, 994.1 STU, .bl1461676. (2001). p.77.

¹⁹⁵ Hunter, "The Myth of Equality." p.77.

of September, 1948 and Edna received her Certificate of Citizenship on the 24th of October, 1949.¹⁹⁶ The Citizenship Act was always problematic and confusing for Aboriginal people because it could be withdrawn at any time, if the holder breached any of the requirements laid out in the Act. Katie Fraser's application for Citizenship was supported by a reference from the Catholic priest P. R. Albert Scherzinger of Derby who had known her for over 20 years and vouched for her good character and behaviour, as did her first employers outside of the convent, Sylvia and Harold Rowell. The applicants had to abide by strict guidelines⁷ and demonstrate they were of sound character. Katie was considered suitable and the Protector of Natives, Derby, advised that:

1. The applicant has dissolved tribal and native associations and has adopted the manners and habits of civilised life.
2. Lives according to white standards in a good dwelling adjacent to Police Station.
3. The applicant is a clean living young woman of good character, sober, trustworthy, not addicted to drink and would not supply liquor to natives.
4. Catherine's parents hold Exemption Certificates.
5. Citizenship is conducive to her welfare, and the privilege would not be abused.¹⁹⁷

Citizenship Rights superseded exemptions. People who successfully applied for their Citizenship Rights had their exemption certificates cancelled in lieu of the new award. It is not clear what the difference between exemptions and a Certificate of Citizenship meant for applicants. Jack McPhee was granted his Certificate of Citizenship in about 1946 in Marble Bar and he remembers the time with humour. He said they often joked about being awarded Citizenship Rights and would say things to each other like ". . . you eating with a knife and fork, is your plate china and not enamel, you better get it right or they might take your Citizenship away!" or ". . . hey Jack, why do you need that Dog Licence! You walk on two legs not four!"¹⁹⁸ Several people who were awarded their Rights at the same time as Katie by the Commissioner of Native Affairs S. G. Middleton in 1946 were listed on her file. It declared them all:

¹⁹⁶ See Appendix 1

¹⁹⁷ Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40."

¹⁹⁸ Sally Morgan, *Wanamurraganya: The Story of Jack McPhee* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre, 1989). p.157.

... deemed to be no longer natives or aborigines and shall have all the rights, privileges and immunities and shall be subject to the duties and liabilities of natural born and naturalised subjects of His Majesty, unless and until the certificates are suspended or cancelled as provided for in section 7 of the said Act.¹⁹⁹

It is quite bemusing that one day you could be Aboriginal and the next day Gudia then the next day, Aboriginal again! Rodriguez seems to recall that both he and Katie took out respective citizenship titles so they could buy land. The same year that Katie applied for her Certificate of Citizenship, he became a naturalized Australian. However, not all of the Frasers were comfortable in applying for citizenship status. Katie's sister Frances, who had relocated to Perth to live in 1946, says she never applied for a Citizenship Certificate:

I never applied for citizenship; did not apply for it, did not believe I needed it. I went to get a birth certificate, but they did not have one for me. Native Welfare did not have one. The only record of me is my baptismal certificate. We're not registered. Our mother kept all our birth dates. We couldn't understand why on-one was registered.²⁰⁰

It was a short epoch for Indigenous Australians, but a significant period in time; the clause was dropped ten years later in 1954 by new legislation that superseded the 1936 *Native Administration Act*.²⁰¹ *AN ACT to amend the Native Administration Act, 1905-1947* superseded the *Native Administration*. Children could not longer be removed under the new Act, but nevertheless, they could be under the *Child Welfare Act 1947*. Despite a court order being required for the removal of children, between 1958 and 1961, the number of Indigenous children under government control more than doubled.²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40."

²⁰⁰ Frances Ward, 6th September 2003.

²⁰¹ Hunter, "The Myth of Equality." p.182.

²⁰² Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Bringing Them Home: The History: The Swan River Colony," (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2003).



Aboriginal Reserves

The establishment of reserves in Western Australia evolved from the need to address the problem of ‘what to do with the natives’ who had been dispossessed of their lands, yet were expected to work for the settlers under a system which exploited men, women and children. In Derby, the first reserve #5952 was gazetted under the Lands Act in 1898. This town was originally a camping ground that later became locally known as the Reserve or Ration Camp or *Russian Camp*. A second reserve for a Native Hospital was gazetted in 1923 under the same Act.²⁰³ In that year Sergeant Douglas of the Derby Police Station was appointed as Superintendent of Reserves by the Protector of Aborigines, A. O. Neville, in accordance with Section 11 of the *Aborigines Act, 1905*.²⁰⁴ By 1949 the Aboriginal population had grown in Derby and reserve #5952, referred to by the Native Affairs Department as the “transients’ camp”, expanded to include an adjoining reserve #25767 that had originally been gazetted as

²⁰³ Department of Native Affairs, "File 653/1951," (Perth: SROWA, 1951).

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

an 'explosive magazine' site in 1912.²⁰⁵ As a transient's camp, the reserve was intended to accommodate only people who had been discharged from the Native Hospital and were waiting to be transferred back to their stations. It was not intended to offer permanent accommodation for homeless people.²⁰⁶ A third reserve was allocated at Udialla Station, 100 miles southeast of the town. The Department planned to run the station as a 'training and trades' centre for half-castes. It was intended that the station operate principally as a sheep run with tropical agriculture and vegetable cultivation, but it never really got off the ground. There was a lot of interest from the Agriculture Department and the Minister for the North West, Mr. Covereley, who advocated that the site be used to experiment in growing sisal hemp that possibly could then be turned in ceiling plaster. However, after two years of experimenting in sisal hemp with little success, the Department decided to abandon Udialla Native Station. It never became a centre for half-castes as only one half-caste lived there. He was from Broome and had been sent to Udialla by the courts. To their credit, the Native Welfare authorities showed genuine concern for the full-descent people living at Udialla and where they should be relocated. Consideration was given to where they came from, and whether it was culturally appropriate to relocate them to La Grange.²⁰⁶

By the late 1940s, a minor building program at the transients' camp in Derby was instigated by the Department. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the town, people of mixed-descent squatted on an area that became known as "Indian Territory".²⁰⁷ Today this is the site of a privately owned caravan park. It is not clear whether it was ever a designated reserve. According to the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) *Lost Lands Report*, the only Aboriginal reserves were on the northern side of the town.²⁰⁸

By 1969, the Frasers had long moved on from Willumbah and were living in Derby. The Ozies were also residents of Derby, and Rodriguez was forced to sell Dehesa Station that year and moved his family to Derby. All three families bought their own blocks in the town. Rodriguez was the only one never to build on his block. The family's move into Derby followed closely on the heels of many Aboriginal workers

²⁰⁵ David Graham, 4th August 2004.

²⁰⁶ Department of Native Affairs, "File 179/49," (Perth: SROWA, 1949).

²⁰⁷ Cyril Puertollano, 1st September 2003.

²⁰⁸ See appendix 3 – Town of Derby. Leases of ALT Land as at 20 October 2003.

from the pastoral industry in the region who relocated in large numbers to the town during the 1960s. Rodriguez applied for and was allocated a State Housing Commission home where they remained until Katie's death in 1994.

Reserves were created close to towns in the Kimberley for Aboriginal people who were not eligible to apply for citizenship status (mainly full-descent people). These reserves became off limits to anyone other than 'residents'. Under Section 20 clause (1) of the *Native Welfare (Act) No. 79 of 1963*:

It is an offence against this Act for any person other than a native to enter or remain or be within the boundaries of a reserve for any purpose whatsoever, unless he is a manager or an officer of the Department, or a member of either House of the Federal or State Parliaments, or a person authorised in that behalf under the regulations.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ *Native Welfare (Act) No. 79 of 1963. S.20.(1).*

Chapter Four: Camps, cottages and castles. A West Kimberley way of life.

People's lives in the pastoral industry travelled along different pathways during the mid 1900s, which criss-crossed and interconnected. Unlike the Gudia folk, who were mostly transient in the true sense of the word, many of the Aboriginals still live in Nygkina country today and those deceased live on through their descendants; whether at Jarlmadangah, Looma Community (near Liveringa) or Derby and a host of small communities in the region. Skin colour basically determined which lifestyle you embraced. People interviewed for this project generally referred to others as either being a Blackfulla, Native, Aboriginal, Half-caste, Coloured, Gudia or White; effectively one is black, brown or white. Racial identity, and to a lesser extent educational status, determined a person's position in the workforce and in society. This and the following chapter will investigate how the three social groups identified by skin colour, coexisted in the West Kimberley. They generally lived in different forms of accommodation, travelled by different modes of transport and often had their relationships determined by their racial grouping. Yet they shared the land and their lives connected at various points, particularly through employment.

This journey, back in time to the middle of the twentieth century, explores the evolving coexistence of Aboriginal, mixed-descent and Gudia people. Full-descent Aboriginals and Westerners in Australia had collided some one hundred and fifty years earlier when the latter invaded the eastern seaboard of this land. The Westerners were here to stay and so commenced an uneasy coexistence between the two groups. Importantly, their interaction became the determining factor in a third group emerging.²¹⁰ This group are the mixed-descent people and it is the evolution and consequent lifestyle of my mixed-descent family that is under the microscope here, through their living memories. These accounts are often revealed through the eyes of adolescents from that period, viewpoints not yet captured in the existing literature in the pastoral industry. Coexistence is investigated through analysis of living conditions in the Kimberley, including the accommodation people lived in; their work environment; their schooling; how they moved about the region; their religion; their marriage relationships; and who their children interacted with. The

²¹⁰ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, p.369.

discussion in these two chapters will be developed under the headings which define areas of co-existence in the lives of West Kimberley people.

Governments had become conscious of their responsibility for Aboriginal people by acknowledging that Aboriginals could, indeed, be citizens. It was believed that Aboriginal people would survive better if they lived like westerners, thus assimilation policies were implemented:

Citizenship became the goal and assimilation the process. Commonwealth social services were extended, with prescribed limitations, to Aborigines and persons of part-Aboriginal descent, and methods were devised to exempt even full-bloods from all Aboriginal Acts, Ordinances and Regulations, provided that they were living independently in the general community.²¹¹

Nevertheless, Aboriginals of mixed-descent had realised that being inducted as official citizens did not mean that they had been admitted into the mainstream lifestyle. They responded by re-establishing their Indigenous cultural traits; a development that continues to strengthen in Indigenous realms today. They did this while coexisting alongside the Gudia:

As a reaction, there was a definite move to strengthen, or to recapture, at least some of the special and spiritual elements of the Aboriginal past. This was quite marked amongst the part-Aborigines of the third group, even amongst those who had been in close contact with the white man, his towns and activities, for two and more generations.²¹²

Living arrangements

Accommodation in the West Kimberley stations reflected the social relationships between the three racial groups, and their social status. The Gudia managers lived in the best accommodation and Gudia stock workers lived in station-hands' quarters and cottages. This included people of mixed-descent, many of whom had been raised on missions and were used to European style accommodation. Full-descent people lived in camps, where they adopted a sedentary lifestyle that caused problems of health and

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid. p.376.

hygiene. Their accommodation was mostly without proper sanitary facilities. Station owners were constantly reminded of their obligations under the Act in relation to taking out permits. In a letter to the Manager of Myroodah Station in August of 1945 the District Commissioner of Native Affairs outlined the station's responsibilities.²¹³ He cited Regulation 82 of the Native Administration Act 1938:-

“ . . . When an employer is required to supply his native employees with blankets and clothes and boots in lieu of or in part of wages, such clothing shall be of good quality, and in such quantity as may be approved by the Commission.”

The Commissioner further pointed out that under Regulation 81 (b) employers must also supply bedding, mosquito nets and ground sheets. At Udialla Native Station in 1946 the Travelling Medical Inspector Dr. Musso reported:

- (1) The camp conditions for the natives are the usual primitive structures and there was considerable rubbish. I impressed upon the acting Manager the need to keep the camp clean and told him the usual hygiene rules. There has been, of course, no permanent building erected at this institution.

A similar arrangement was practised in the towns. Dave Pullen, the Senior Administrative Officer at the Department in the North West, reported, in his survey of Aboriginal living conditions in 1949, on the lack of ablution facilities in Aboriginal station camps. He noted that water was carried by women from nearby water sources while showers were only available to women who worked in the homesteads. Men were humiliated by having to bathe in the open.²¹⁴ District Officers often reported that conditions on the stations were basic and dirty. Adequate arrangements for the removal of rubbish were not implemented and this led to unhygienic camps. In May 1959 at Liveringa the District Officer reported:

Employees appear happy and were satisfied with their conditions. The school, if persevered with, should give results in the long run. The area around the quarters was very dirty.²¹⁵

²¹³ Department of Native Affairs, "File 739/1948," (Perth: SROWA, 1948).

²¹⁴ Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare. A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers*, p.218.

²¹⁵ Department of Native Affairs, "File 775/1938," (Perth: SROWA, 1938).

Liveringa Sheep Station was established in the early 1900s where the manager's home, known as the 'top house', dominated the Liveringa community. By the time Kim and Pat Rose left in 1961, they had turned the site into a distinguished settlement with panoramic views that overlooked an alluring billabong set in a hilly landscape, beyond which sweeping flood plains stretched. The top house is well placed high on a hill, safe from any raging floods, and was enhanced by a swimming pool, tennis court, and well maintained lawns and gardens. The pool was built by Rodriguez where he had three children cast their footprints into the cement. The youngest of the trio was his daughter Pepita, along with the manager's children, Jarran and June Rose. Pepita is Spanish for Josephine, so it is no surprise that because the three initials are JR, imbedded on the 15th of August 1950, they were assumed to be that of only the Rose children as reported in the Kimberley Society's Bulletin.²¹⁶ Assembled neatly around, lower down the hilly terrain, were the married workers' cottages, the men's quarters, the mess, a meat house, the shearing shed, blacksmith's workshop, and a Nissen hut in the Aboriginals' fenced enclosure. The station was self-supporting with vegetable gardens at various locations.²¹⁷ The homestead still soars gallantly above its lesser buildings, suggesting the hierarchal system that once operated from there. The layout of Liveringa during the 1960s was not unlike cattle station buildings in the Northern Territory during the same era, as described by Ann McGrath in *Born in the Cattle*.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Carol-Ann Jones, "Liveringa's Heritage - a Window on to the Past," (Kimberley Society, Incorporated, 1992).

²¹⁷ June Gooch, 1st September 2003.

²¹⁸ McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*. p.28.



Front: Aboriginal's camp with Nissen Hut (arched roof).

Left middle: Shearer's quarters

Middle: Blacksmith's workshop – garage behind

Right middle: Shearing Shed

Rear: Homestead

Center rear: Kitchen and meat house

Right rear: Stables & hay shed

Very Far left: Cottages 3 (obscured), 2 & 1

Background: Billabong & flood plains

During the 1940s, Liveringa's progressive building program was influenced by a labour shortage and the fear of Aboriginals walking out in protest at the lack of wages and poor conditions as had happened in the Pilbara.²¹⁹ As reported by the District Officer (DO) from the Department of Native Affairs following his routine station patrol, on the 3rd of May 1946, Kim Rose had complained to him that the numbers of Aboriginal people had declined over the last few years. Now only 40 people lived there, whereas previously there were up 100. Rose cited a couple of reasons for the drop that included an increase in deaths over births for some time, and also to the relocation of people to the Leprosarium. But to attract more Aboriginals to Liveringa,

²¹⁹ Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003). p.143

he was reluctant to offer wages for fear that it would upset the labour balance at other stations that were not as financially secure as Liveringa. He was, on the other hand, prepared to pay wages and offer comfortable living conditions to half-caste people who were prepared to relocate to Liveringa. He claimed that the labour shortage did not have anything to do with the employment conditions which were quite good. He had at times resorted to recruiting people from further away, but they rarely stayed because it was not their tribal country. He acknowledged that the time was approaching where they would have to offer cash wages and employ more white people.²²⁰ In contrast to Liveringa, the District Officer reported that at nearby Noonkanbah Station, there was no labour shortage. About 100 people lived there, of whom 60% were employable. The manager, Mr. Henwood, did not think it would be good practice for Rose to introduce cash wages, because then the other stations would be forced to do the same. The wage incentive would only encourage Aboriginals, who had gone to Liveringa, to return to their own country and Rose would still be short of labour.²²¹

Kim Rose was a well liked and respected manager in the region, although he was treated with some scepticism by the Department of Native Affairs' officers. While primarily concerned with the profitability of the station, he always agreed to implement improvements in infrastructure and rations recommended by the Department. To this end, he was open to advice from the Department as to the best way of making change for the betterment of his Aboriginal community. The Department of Native Affairs' District Officer's travelled the circuit through the Kimberley at least twice a year. Following a routine visit to Liveringa Station on the 24th of July 1947, the Acting Inspector for the North West, Mr. T. E. Jensen, wrote to the Commissioner for Native Affairs in Perth commending the attitude of Rose and describing him as 'go ahead manager'. In turn, the Commissioner wrote to Rose suggesting he give favourable consideration to Jensen's recommendations, particularly in light of the recent unrest in the Pilbara. Not wanting any disturbances among the compliant, unpaid Aboriginal workers in the Kimberley, the Department was conscious of promoting adequate conditions for Aboriginals amongst station managers. A strike by Aboriginal pastoral workers in the Pilbara was one of the

²²⁰ Department of Native Affairs, "File 775/1938."

²²¹ Ibid.

longest campaigns by any workforce; it lasted for three years from 1946 to 1949.²²² The strikers were demanding better conditions and wages. Aside from better pay, they wanted to be treated with dignity and receive proper housing and freedom of movement that would enable them to work in their own country.²²³ In the West Kimberley, however, movement of Aboriginal workers was not a problem, as only few ever chose to move to other stations to work. Dave Pullen reported to his superior following a large gathering of some 500 Aboriginal people at Fitzroy Crossing in 1950 for the races, that some had approached him for permission to relocate to another station:

In each case I gathered together the owners and the natives but I found that the idea that a native is still bound body and soul to a particular Station dies hard – that allowing free movement will damn the whole country. But actually, the fact that there were only the movements abovementioned after such a large meeting of natives suggests that the employees are not yet steeped in revolutionary ideas and are remaining rather loyal to their old employers.²²⁴

Pullen again wrote to the Commissioner for Aboriginal Affairs on the 2nd of August 1949, noting improvements at Liveringa. The manager had intended to build a 'bad weather hut' and dining hut at the camp, and he conceded that wages were inevitable. Rose still expressed his desire to "... co-operate in every way possible".²²⁵ Work on improving accommodation in the Liveringa camp commenced in earnest on the 16th of October of 1950. Rodriguez was the station's builder and form layer and he built most buildings with the help of Aboriginal station hands. He made extensions to the top house, built the men's quarters, the three worker's cottages, the Aboriginals' Nissen hut, and the meat house.²²⁶ The Rodriguez and Ozies families lived in the first two cottages he built. The houses were relatively close together, while the third cottage he built was over the hill about one kilometre away, at the furthest point away from the Aboriginals' enclosure.

On the 9th of October 1950, Rodriguez received the plans for the Nissen hut and on Monday the 16th of October he commenced assembling the building. The Nissen hut (also known as Quonset hut) was about forty feet long and he found that it was

²²² Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*. p.143.

²²³ Bill Bunbury, *It's Not the Money It's the Land: Aboriginal Stockmen and the Equal Wages Case* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2002). p.55.

²²⁴ Department of Native Affairs, "File 719/50," (Perth: SROWA, 1950).

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Heritage Council of WA, "Register of Heritage Place." p.5.

smaller than on the plans; it was supposed to house about twenty people.²²⁷ These types of huts were basic structures noted for their curved, corrugated iron roof that was popular for use by the military and to house migrants to Australia during the 1940s and 1950s. Recently described as “. . . the simplest and most pragmatic form of architecture, and over generations they provided cheap, rough housing for migrants, defence force personnel and itinerant workers.”²²⁸ The Nissen hut was also considered suitable for Aboriginals' camps. People were expected to live together and sleep on long wire 'trays', but they preferred to sleep on the floor or outside. Rodriguez recalled that Daisy, Nancy and Topsy who worked in the top house were occupants. When it rained, they preferred to go and sleep in the shearing shed. And the toilets, Rodriguez decided, were nothing more than a novelty. He installed two small huts with cement floors as the toilets, but they were soon full of stones and bottles and they were never used. People preferred to use the bush.²²⁹ Lena Fraser's recollections of the camp delicately emphasise the lack of cultural knowledge by Gudia. The Nissen hut according to Lena was inappropriate because Aboriginal people had their own traditional cultural behaviours which meant they preferred to camp “. . . out under the open stars, until the rainy season, then they'd go inside”.²³⁰ There were marriage related taboos where women are not allowed to face the men; they avoided eye contact with sons-in-law and they had to walk away. According to Lena, the Gudias just did not understand why Aboriginals could not share that same one big shed.²³¹

It was not unusual for people to sleep in the shearing shed. Patsy Ginya Yambo's second child Magdalene was born in the shearing shed at Myroodah Station because it was raining at the time. It was holiday break and the family had walked to Myroodah from Liveringa, a distance of about twenty kilometres, carrying their food and swags. The Yambo's first born, Phillip, on the other hand, arrived in a small dry creek bed near the shearer's quarters at Liveringa. No Gudia folk were ever involved with the birth of the Aboriginal babies. Aboriginal midwives delivered the babies on the

²²⁷ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

²²⁸ Geraldine O'Brien, "Birthplace of Diversity Preserved Long after Jabber Leaves the Hut," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3rd July 2003.

²²⁹ Frank Rodriguez Snr, May 2003.

²³⁰ Lena Fraser, 30th August 2003.

²³¹ Ibid.

pastoral stations. It was not until the Yambos moved into Derby that their thirteen remaining babies were born in a hospital.²³²

According to Rodriguez's diary, the station was always busy with people coming and going:

26th June 1947: My wife arrived from Derby in the morning by plane, it was the first time she'd been on a plane. The Forrest son arrived from Perth on the same plane. William Watson arrived today. Clancy Docherty passed here with bullocks.

16th June 1949: Mother-in-law left for Derby. Father-in-law arrived today here and Norman Hansen arrived here today and two trucks brought rams. Don Sears also came over today.²³³

When Rodriguez erected his own buildings at Debesa, the Aboriginals' lodgings were again the furthest removed dwellings from the main building. Debesa consisted of much smaller buildings than on the bigger stations. There was the homestead, men's quarters, workshop, Aboriginals' quarters and the shearing shed to the side. The Aboriginals' accommodation had a small sleeping area with large shutters, a stove and outside a reasonably sized bough shed. Beyond that was the ablution block. While inferior dwellings for Aboriginals reflect the attitude of the day, these attitudes did not extend to interactions between the children. The Rodriguez children frequented the camp. They often spent time there enjoying the company of their Aboriginal friends, reading comics, listening to Slim Dusty, learning to play the guitar and sometimes indulging in the succulent delights of *barniy* and kangaroo and eating *kungaberries*, boab nuts and *magabala*.²³⁴ Even at Willumbah, the Aboriginal people lived away from the main house. There, a large shed housed the saddlery and on the side a big spinifex bough shed was erected as the Aboriginals' sleeping quarters. The Frasers lived in a large corrugated iron house, with kitchen, dining room and a bedroom.²³⁵ Fraser always provided food rations for everyone at Willumbah that included dried apricots and apples. A killer [sheep or bullock] was slaughtered and distributed to the workers, but all of the cooking at Willumbah was done in the

²³² Patsy Yambo, 1st September 2003.

²³³ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

²³⁴ Stokes, Johnston, and Marshall, "First Nyikina Dictionary."

²³⁵ Lena Fraser.

kitchen in Fraser's house. Patsy Yambo worked in the kitchen where they made bread as well. Today, she still makes bread and meals in a camp oven on the Town Reserve in Derby, because gas is too expensive.²³⁶ But despite having been allocated living quarters at Willumbah, Pat Bergmann recalls how people preferred to come closer to the main house to sleep:

But then they used to always come closer to camp, to sleep near the house. They used to bring their swags up on the road, and sleep there.²³⁷

One can only speculate why people did this, given that the phenomenon is a childhood recollection. Perhaps people wanted to be closer to the food source? But it is more feasible to suggest that this was a result of the disruption to the traditionally established socialisation of Aboriginal people. They may have been desert people like Patsy and Dickie Yambo, forced to live with people of other cultures in foreign country, by virtue of them all being Aboriginal. The *Roth Report* of 1904 into the treatment of Aboriginal people revealed pastoralists in neighbouring south east Kimberley had deliberately enticed Aboriginals from their homelands to live on their stations as stock workers. According to Pamela Smith, the strong and healthy were taken to work on the stations while the more vulnerable were left to fend for themselves, forcing them to follow their kin onto the stations:

Whether easy access to food and tobacco, curiosity or just fear of living in the bush account for why people moved to station camps, most Aboriginal people did move closer to the station camps in the first two decades following colonisation.²³⁸

At Liveringa, people received their rations from the 'workers' kitchen and did some cooking at the camp. "Meat, bread, tea, sugar, potatoes, onions and vegetables in season from garden. Fresh fruit for children, also tinned milk".²³⁹ According to Lena Fraser, most station managers knew that a lot of the Aboriginal men had promised wives and realised everyone was entitled to rations.²⁴⁰ It was not unusual for the

²³⁶ Patsy Yambo.

²³⁷ Pat Bergmann, 4th September 2003.

²³⁸ Pamela Smith, "Station Camps: Legislation, Labour Relations and Rations on Pastoral Leases in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia," *Aboriginal history*, Vol 24 p.75-97, (2000).

²³⁹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 775/1938."

²⁴⁰ Lena Fraser.

Fraser and Rodriguez families, along with some of their full-descent stations workers, to spend the night camped out, in the hope of getting a killer:

31st August 1952: this morning we went to Willumbah. Puertollano arrived with all the family. Katie and all the family we went to Erskine Hills and Jim Fraser and I climbed to the top of them, able to see a lot of country from the top of them. Tonight we all went out in hope to get a block [bullock] at one of the windmills.

1st September 1952: after all night trying to get a bullock we never succeeded. When we came back to Willumbah it was about 5 o'clock in the morning. Today finished the cement block for the compressor on the freezer.²⁴¹

Accommodation for full-descent people has always been problematic, largely due to systemic racist attitudes. Attitudes that dictated the type of dwelling like the Nissen hut deemed suitable for people of inferior status. A Nissen hut was also built by the Department for Native Affairs at Fitzroy Crossing for transients. But, whatever the type of building erected for bush people, they were always going to reject the structures in favour of living outdoors. Living outdoors and in 'disposable' humpies was a nomadic lifestyle they had lived over thousands of years. This was a way of life where living arrangements could be adhered to in accordance with customary law. In the 1960s, people moved off the stations and into dwellings that were mostly basic structures; there was no immediate accommodation available in the towns, given the Department of Native Affairs was in denial as far as their responsibility for people who were not 'transients' was concerned. Some mixed-descent people already squatting in the town had embraced innovative ways of putting together building materials. In her book *Full Circle*, author Edie Wright's sister Iris described their Grandmother's resourcefulness:

Garloo lived with us also and together him and Granny built the house on the marsh. The house was well designed and made from timber and corrugated iron and had steel poles, materials Granny had acquired from wheeling and dealing. It had a lot of louvres to control the amount of breeze, dust and rain that came into the house. In places the floor was made from wooden shipping pallets pushed together to make a raised floor and in other parts Granny had lino. She had a forty-four gallon drum in the kitchen that she'd fill every day

²⁴¹ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

with fresh water because we did not have kitchen traps and that was where we got water from.²⁴²

Rodriguez' diary shows the difficulty builders had in securing suitable materials in Derby. "All day working for Joe Smith, putting timbers and flooring in the kitchen. In the morning I went looking for boards and it looks very scarce".²⁴³ He explained that it was hard to always have enough materials, and to find good timber. When the state ships came, the timber was just dumped in the depot and you had to sort through it.²⁴⁴ He recalls building a house for H. M. Watt in 1947 and the timber quality was poor. It was old timber from the jetty that had been thrown out into the sea, and the tide had brought it back in; any 'good' pieces would be salvaged.²⁴⁵

The District Officer at the Native Affairs Department in 1949 was J. J. Rhatigan and he expressed frustration at finding suitable office space as well as suitable materials to build a Departmental office in the town. Entries in his work journal reveal a vexing time for authorities and builders in the region:

22nd Jan 1949: after numerous inquiries the only office available in Derby is in the old Court House Building which has been condemned for sometime, being ridden with white ants, however there is one room in the building which is reasonably safe to work in, so I am using it in the time being.

21st Feb 1949: there is no saleable timber in Derby which could be secured to erect an office, in the meantime I am making every effort to secure a suitable building which could be utilised as an office.

At the Derby Transients' Camp a building program to erect lean-to huts suitable for one or two transients was underway, but not without the problem of having suitable building materials. Building contractors of the time were people of mixed-descent who had grown up on missions and learned their trade from the missionaries. Vincent Martin and his brothers built lean-to huts on the reserve, while Jerome Manado was employed to build the Native Affairs office. The huts were eventually built from local timber, described as 'too hard to work with' by Martin.²⁴⁶ Builders on the

²⁴² Wright, *Full Circle*. p.221.

²⁴³ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

²⁴⁴ Frank Rodriguez Snr.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Department of Native Affairs, "File 179/49."

stations and missions had always improvised with local materials in the region. Stones and timber were used extensively earlier in the century as illustrated by Jim Anderson's description of the construction of the Liveringa homestead:

"The rock used in the construction is believed to have been quarried at the site and probably squared and worked before the actual building work was begun. Crushed anthill and mud appears to have been extensively used as the bedding to bind the stone courses while an outer finish was provided by a mortar mix of sand and locally built timber".²⁴⁷

Many of the people who moved into Derby were the relatives of mixed-descent people already living there and they were accommodated in relatives' backyards, probably because they were not eligible to squat in the transients' reserve. Cyril Puertollano recalls:

A lot of people had Blackfullas living in their backyards working for them. We did. Dad built the hut for them. Then there were people who lived down on the marsh where the caravan park is now. It was called Indian Territory. That was before the reserve.²⁴⁸

Puertollano's mother Aggie added:

People lived in our backyard; Andy and his wife, Donald, Ada, Aunty Maggie, Kakarra Koonamurra and Tony. They'd help around the yard cleaning up. We'd feed them and give them clothes. They stayed here possibly because they knew us.²⁴⁹

Relatives of the Frasers, Patsy and Dickie Yambo, lived behind Fulgentius and Phillipena's home in Derby and they worked for the Catholic Church where Fr. Peile the parish priest gave them flour, tea, sugar and meat in kind and their children attended the Holy Rosary School. Later, the Yambos lived on the native reserve in a tent for about two years before they were allocated a house.²⁵⁰ The Yambos were introduced to Catholicism by Fraser. Aside from his stock work, the old man immersed himself in voluntary lay missionary work, encouraging many Aboriginal

²⁴⁷ Jim Anderson, "Liveringa Homestead Group," in *Register of Heritage Places*, ed. Suba Tanya and Taylor John (1997).

²⁴⁸ Cyril Puertollano.

²⁴⁹ Aggie Puertollano.

²⁵⁰ Patsy Yambo.

people to join the Catholic Church. Patsy and Dickie Yambo and Aunty Maggie, Fraser's full-descent relatives were all brought to the Church by him and baptised in Derby.

Derby Reserve

The atrocious situation on the Derby Native reserve over the years is likely to have been replicated in other towns in Western Australia. The overriding mentality was that 'it doesn't really matter when it comes to Aborigines'. Apart from the District Officers of the Department of Native Affairs, who lived in the town, the bureaucrats based in Perth had no notion of the urgent accommodation needs of disadvantaged human beings, who, like displaced victims of war, had moved to the towns when they could no longer stay on pastoral properties in the 1960s. The exodus of Aboriginal people from pastoral properties created a social disorder that still has ramifications today. The Australian "Blackfullas" were classed as inferior and treated with contempt. To be living as a full-descent Aboriginal person on the Derby Reserve under West Australian government policies, was to live in squalor and the most degrading standards any human beings could be forced to endure. As mixed-descent people, we can be thankful that we were not despised to the extent that our full-descent contemporaries were. As per the *Native Welfare (Act) No. 79 of 1963* already mentioned, we were not even allowed onto the reserve to visit or live. The Department of Native Welfare journal is full of bureaucratic bungling and delays by both the Public Works Department in Derby during the 1950s and 60s, and the Department of Native Welfare in Perth. A series of Department of Native Welfare District Officers in Derby worked hard to solve the problem created by the town's growing Aboriginal population, but they consistently came up against bad public service management. In 1961 the Department of Native Welfare in Perth refused to acknowledge that the increasing numbers of Aboriginal people in the towns was its responsibility. The Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs continued to claim that the Department only had transient Aborigines to worry about. He saw the problem of housing as the responsibility of employers to provide. This, he decided, equated to the Department having only a few people to worry about who were transients.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 1188/61," (Perth: SROWA, 1961).

Progress was slow on the Derby Reserve. In the late 1950s, the West Kimberley Road Board, acting as the Local Health Authority, wrote to the Department asking them to deal with the unsanitary conditions on the reserve. The board also requested that more accommodation be made available. It claimed the buildings were sub-standard and it was in no financial position to assist given the rate at which the population had increased. It further suggested that as the Department was going to spend money upgrading the camp's accommodation, they might consider moving the reserve further from town to enable the Aboriginals to be "... situated in the environs they are more commonly used to".²⁵² The Department ignored this request and proceeded with plans to improve the site for transients only, despite the fact that more and more people were permanently settling on the reserve. The Ration Camp is situated along Panton Street in Derby, and extends onto the marsh. Plans for additional accommodation on the reserve were drawn up and costed at £8,200 in 1959 for the benefit of people who had been discharged from the Regional and Native Hospitals.²⁵³ On the 11th March, 1960, the Commissioner of Native Welfare approved the buildings in a statement to the Under Secretary for Works at the Public Works Department in Perth and instructed them to commence work. The accommodation would include staff rooms, store, kitchen and dining room for medical outpatients and kitchen and dining hall building and 2 x 4 compartment sheds (without fireplace).²⁵⁴ On the 5th of April 1960, District Officer Tilbrook wrote to the Commissioner, drawing to his attention, that the specifications were unsatisfactory and not suitable for human habitation by current standards. The commissioner responded in August 1961, obviously infuriated by Tilbrook's criticisms of the plans and he instructed the District Officer to proceed immediately with the buildings without further protracted, irritating correspondence and delays:

The work on this project will proceed according to plan and approved expenditure and the only notice taken of obstructive and delaying tactics will be hostile in character insofar as the writer is concerned with it. The contractor's plans and specifications are returned herewith.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Department of Native Affairs, "File 1243/61," (SROWA, 1960).

²⁵⁴ Department of Native Affairs, "File 1188/61."

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Building commenced on the 28th Sept 1961. Tilbrook again made recommendations to the Commissioner in January 1962 that the kitchen should feed 24 pensioners living on the reserve as well as the original estimated 12 ex-patients. By mid 1962, the buildings were completed and Fulgentius Fraser was employed as the cook on the reserve. Six months later, on the 5th of January 1963, the main building suffered storm damage and in his report Tilbrook wrote. "This report shows why this building was the only one affected on the Derby Reserve. Perhaps the PWD AD may care to comment on this."²⁵⁶ Again, it took months for repairs to commence. Problems associated with poor maintenance and the supply of proper waste facilities was ongoing. By May 1964, it would appear that the Ration Camp was no longer considered just a camp for transients. The State Housing Commission was building on the Reserve and in the town. Houses on reserves in other Kimberley towns were also under construction. In Derby, a population survey of both reserves was made in September of 1964 with the following results:

Reserve #5292 – (Pension Reserve). Population 100 persons – this includes an allowance for 12 transients such as hospital out patients.

Reserve #13980. Population 207 persons in approximately 30 camps.²⁵⁷

Effectively, there were now 307 people living on the Derby Reserves. The ongoing problem of proper effluent disposal persisted and created another problem. An outbreak of hookworm among Derby Aboriginals had the Commissioner for Public Health, W. S. Davison, seek urgent measures to eradicate the fresh outbreak on both reserves. He reported to the Principal Architect at the Public Works Department in Perth:

There have recently been several cases of Hookworm infection in Derby natives. This disease has been absent from Derby for many years and I am anxious to eradicate this fresh outbreak. Because of the contamination of the soil in the Reserves, control measures are made very difficult. I would, therefore, urge that plans for effluent disposal be expedited and the work started with as little delay as possible.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *ibid.* (Report to Commissioner of Native Welfare Perth 7/9/1964. from G. E. Cornish. Divisional Superintendent – Northern).

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*

Hookworm in the region had been prominent in the decade 1910-20 and was reported as having affected 50 to 90 percent of West Australian Aboriginals, mostly in the north of the State.²⁵⁹ The poor sanitary conditions at reserves and camps in the Kimberley were ideal breeding grounds for the disease. Furthermore, since Aboriginals generally wore no shoes, they were susceptible to being infected by hookworm, a disease that attacks the wall of the intestine.²⁶⁰ Problems at the Derby Reserve were unhygienic because of:

1. Lack of operational sullage disposal from laundry and ablution blocks. This resulted in large quantities of foul water lying on the ground, being a potential breeding place for intro gastrinal [sic] diseases and hook worm. This latter disease is peculiar to the tropics and breeds in damp ground, normally being transmitted through the soles of bare feet. It is a disease against which every precaution must be continually taken because of its insidious effects.
2. Insufficient operation of septic tanks.
3. Overall lack of reserve hygiene because of laziness and insufficient toilet facilities.
4. Insufficient rubbish removal services.
5. Areas are continually damp ground around each stand tap providing perfect hook worm breeding grounds.²⁶¹

Today, there are many government assisted programs that aim to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal Australians. The State Health Department in Western Australia, in keeping with the World Health Organisation's *Ottawa Charter* on Health Promotion, works towards empowering Aboriginal people to take responsibility for their own communities.²⁶² Moreover, better planning is given to building houses. Geographic locations, people's movements for cultural commitments and family and kinship structures are considered. Unlike the Nissen hut at Liveringa, cultural traits such as avoidance behaviour between people, and the need to vacate a house following a death, are no longer dismissed.²⁶³ Despite these improvements however, according to Shelter WA, a community-based consumer advocacy service in Western Australia, 80% of Aboriginal people in Derby rely on Government housing, while

²⁵⁹ Briscoe, *Counting, Health and Identity*.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p.127

²⁶¹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 1188/61."

²⁶² Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, "Regional Report of Inquiry into Underlying Issues in Western Australia - 14.4 Aboriginal Health Workers and Employment," (Reconciliation and Social Justice Library, 1991)

²⁶³ Sue Ellington and Laura Smith, "The Design and Construction of Indigenous Housing: The Challenge Ahead," (Australian Bureau of Statistics, This document published 27 February 2004 and last updated 25 August 2004)

Gudia were “. . . less than half as likely as Indigenous people to reside in rental housing in any given area”.²⁶⁴

Accommodation is still indicative of its dwellers. Those who can afford better homes will generally make that a priority and generally live in the more affluent and elite suburbs or streets of country towns. Society’s mindset is that Gudia, by virtue of their ethnicity, should live in good accommodation; while mixed and full-descent people should be content in less prestigious homes. In the ensuing years the Derby reserve has improved in both quality of buildings and environmental health, but only slightly. Most people who live there are of low-socio economic status rely on welfare for an income. While the Yambos are comfortable living amongst other full-descent people, they do not enjoy the comforts of a home that Gudia and mixed-descent people enjoy. Nevertheless, they travel regularly to Looma and Jarlmadangah Communities and keep their culture strong within their own sphere.



Phillip, Dickie, Lisa, Melissa & Patsy Yambo with Aggie Puortollano.

Derby Reserve August 2003

²⁶⁴ Shelter WA, "Community Forum: Housing Indigenous People in Regional Wa," (Shelter WA, 2003).

Travel

Station people during the middle of the last century were incessantly on the move and their mode of transport suggested their status. The extended Fraser family would get together as often as they possibly could and they travelled in old vehicles or horse and cart or they hitched a ride to windmills, the river and town. For Rodriguez and his family, having a reliable vehicle was always a struggle, unlike the managers of larger stations who journeyed to neighbouring stations and Derby in good quality vehicles and by plane south to Perth for holidays. Kim Rose was often privileged to fly around the Kimberley, courtesy of his friend, Essington Lewis, the Managing Director of Broken Hill P/L at Cockatoo Island.²⁶⁵ Managers would sometimes give a lift to the Aboriginal workers while full-descent Aboriginals moved about their country on foot. They walked long distances and probably took walking for granted. Aboriginals went 'walkabout' during the wet season for traditional lore purposes. They congregated at culturally significant sites in their region. As already stated, holiday time was a compromise with the station manager, who agreed to 'walkabout' time occurring during the wet when there was little work on the stations.²⁶⁶ Mixed-descent people occasionally travelled to the stations and to Broome by taxi.²⁶⁷

Many of the interviewees, both mixed-descent and Gudia, recalled that as children they would walk with the Aboriginals to go fishing, to catch *jarrambas*,²⁶⁸ to swim, gather bush foods and to learn survival skills. But the difference was that, while these children walked as part of their holiday activities, full-descent people did it as a normal part of their lives. Family commitments were a priority for the Frasers, but most travelling was done for work purposes. As a builder Rodriguez at times worked away from Liveringa, and he arranged his own transport. He could never afford a new vehicle and was always patching up old motors,

14th November 1950 The two new cars arrived, and they looked very nice. The boss says that he is going to sell me the Luligui truck. Today I took the radiator from the truck and sent it to Paradise. It was very hot all day, with no sign of rain.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁵ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

²⁶⁶ McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*, p.105.

²⁶⁷ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

²⁶⁸ Stokes, Johnston, and Marshall. "First Nyikina Dictionary."

²⁶⁹ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

With the shortage of builders in the region, station managers were not only possessive of their Aboriginal labour, but of employees with trades too. Rodriguez recalls Mrs. Rose saying to him that her husband was not too keen to sell him the truck, because Rose was concerned with his new found independence, Rodriguez would move on. But Rodriguez said he was tired of having to rely on other people for transport and he desperately wanted to be self-reliant.²⁷⁰ Even when Rodriguez did purchase his own station, he furnished it with second hand machinery like land rovers and bulldozers.²⁷¹ In the 1960s and into the 1970s, conventional motor cars were a common sight on the gravel roads of the Kimberley. People who could afford a vehicle, (whether new or second-hand) bought two-wheel drive cars and treated them like four-wheel drive vehicles. Rodriguez invested in second-hand land rovers for station use and later he and Frank Junior both bought second-hand Holden EH sedans for driving to and from town. Towards the end of his time at Debesa, Rodriguez bought two second-hand Holden Utes for the station. People travelled all over the countryside in their cars. Cyril Puertollano had a variety of conventional cars: a trusty little Volkswagen, a Monaro and an HE Holden. He travelled regularly to Debesa on weekends, and to nearby Willumbah and Camballin to hunt kangaroo and turkey.²⁷²

Religion

The influence of the missionaries at Beagle Bay and Kalumburu left an indelible impression on the lives of the Fraser family. It is unlikely that they fully realised the intricacies of their ancestors' Aboriginal religion, just a moment in time before them as they succumbed to institutionalisation. Nevertheless, it is probable that as the seeds of Christianity were sown among children taken to Beagle Bay and Pago through the 1900s, the introduced Christian traits complemented the established Indigenous belief systems.²⁷³ The depth of meaning in religious practices among indigenous people throughout the world is complex, with analogies to western belief systems. Anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt in *The First Australians*, a

²⁷⁰ Frank Rodriguez Snr.

²⁷¹ Frank Rodriguez Jnr.

²⁷² Cyril Puertollano.

²⁷³ Peter Willis, "Riders in the Chariot: Aboriginal Conversion to Christianity at Kununurra," in *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies*, ed. Swain & Rose (Bedford Park: Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions, 1988). p.311.

study of traditional Aboriginal cultures, eloquently describe the meaning of symbols among Aboriginal people prior to contact. Their interpretation clearly indicates a similar use of religious symbols to Christianity:

The postulant in front of his ceremonial emblems feels himself very close to the 'divine' presence, to the Ancestral Being associated with them. The religious symbol is something very sacred. It is personalized, because its roots are firmly set in the mythological doctrine; it has meaning, and it emanates power.²⁷⁴

Christians' whole approach to performing ceremonies is not dissimilar to indigenous people's traditional way. Catholic venerations are dominated by men, and their chanting and worship of spiritual beings is akin to corroborees. The use of garments and materialistic objects resembles Aboriginal people's use of body paint and nature symbols. Christian cathedrals and churches are on a par to sacred sites like Uluru in the Northern Territory and Mount Augustus in Western Australia. In the West Kimberley, the region is known as the 'Land of the Wandjina.' *Wandjina* means a group of ancestral beings 'who come out of the sky and the sea to control the elements and maintain fertility in humans and other natural species'.²⁷⁵ The defining difference between western and indigenous religions is that Christianity is one aspect of culture whereas in traditional Aboriginal way, religion is incorporated into all aspects of life. Aboriginal religion has been described as the 'Trinity of Being', a holistic view that connects Aboriginals to the land and to the ancestral world.²⁷⁶ They believed in being born of the land and in death, they return to the land. There is no heaven and hell.

The biographies of Beagle Bay people in *This is your Place* indicate there was an initial suspicion of the missionaries' motives, before they accepted and liked the missionaries.²⁷⁷ But, according to Elkin, it is the children of this first generation of mission inmates who passively questioned the intentions of government and missionaries:

²⁷⁴ R M & C H Berndt, *The First Australians* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1952). p.80.

²⁷⁵ Wally Caruana, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993). p.157.

²⁷⁶ Patricia Baines, *Semester 2* 1993.

²⁷⁷ Huegal, *This Is Your Place*.

. . . they realised that his was a world different from their own, that they were not being admitted to it, and that they were not sure that they wanted to become part of it.

As a reaction, there was a definite move to strengthen, or to recapture, at least some of the social and spiritual elements of the Aboriginal past.²⁷⁸

Aboriginal traits and customs were an integral component of the Fraser's culture. They did not and could not completely detach themselves from their Aboriginal heritage. Their very existence on the land and their connection to spiritual sites and nature icons has always been evident. Aggie Puertollano recalls fishing and hunting, and the family eating together:

Fishing at Uralla and Snake Creeks. Barramundi, cat fish, *jarrambas*, shark, stingray, swordfish caught with fishing line. Grilled the fish; fried the barramundi and made soup with the heads. The *jarrambas* were boiled up with plenty salt. We'd all go. Patsy, Dickie, their kids. Mum [Katie] too. Dad used to take us with horse and cart. We'd go to Mt. Wynne too. All around we'd get turkeys and goanna near Moolamon Hill and in the creek. We stay all day; swimming too.²⁷⁹

Frank Rodriguez Junior recalls learning about survival techniques:

I'd go and have a look, and there were 'planting' trees, in that same sort of area of direction they would have been going in, that you would find some of these things. Now, this is in an area of pindan country, with sand, with no rock, anywhere in sight, and yet these utensils, these spearheads and that were there . . . they pointed out all the different types of fruits that you could eat and what you could not eat. They even showed me how to get water, where to look for water; look for the bird life in the trees or insects or mosquitoes hanging around up in the boab trees, that meant there was water up there.²⁸⁰

The Fraser children were raised as firm Catholics while Rodriguez came from a land that was steeped in medieval religious practice; and it was Frank and Katie's shared belief in Catholicism that brought them together. For the Frasers, Catholicism was practised in a familiar Aboriginal environment at various locations in the West Kimberley. Mission Aboriginals incorporated new traits and materialistic icons such as Rosary beads and statues into their lifestyles, a common process of adaptation in

²⁷⁸ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*. p.376.

²⁷⁹ Aggie Puertollano.

²⁸⁰ Frank Rodriguez Jnr.

any cultural change. It is 'popular history' to say that missionaries totally destroyed Aboriginal people's way of life. Michael Alroe in his article *A Pygmalion Complex among Missionaries* may have failed to see any analogy between Aboriginal religion and Christianity, but he did emphasize the bond Aboriginal people had to their religion as being indestructible:

There is something perverse in the role they have taken up . . . What the missionaries strove to create, those ideal communities of docile black Catholics presided over by loving white fathers and nuns, never materialised.²⁸¹

Rodriguez had immediately felt comfortable in the company of the Fraser family. Katie's sister, Gertie Ahmat, was working at the Port Hotel in Derby as a housemaid when she first saw him. "I hadn't met him yet, but I saw a picture of Mary, or some saint he had in his room and I realised he was Catholic".²⁸² Gertie was impressed by this man. He had inadvertently gained her approval should he ever venture into the lives of the Fraser clan; especially, the life of her surrogate mother, Katie. Fulgentius Fraser had equally impressed Rodriguez when they met, given his ability to speak some Spanish, which he had learned from the Benedictine monks at Pago:

I had met Fulgentius Fraser in the Liveringa blacksmith's shop about a week before Katie arrived. He told me he could speak a bit of Spanish; he told me later that his daughter would be coming to work in Liveringa. He said that he had learned some Spanish on the mission at Kalumburu. He 'recited' what he had learned from Brother Vincent at Kalumburu "*donde yo soy hay muchas castañas*" which means— "where I come from there are a lot of chestnuts". He knew a lot of other words and phrases too.²⁸³

As this study repeatedly highlights, Catholicism was a significant part of the Rodriguez and Fraser families' psyche. The Fraser siblings are all devout Catholics, as is Rodriguez. Fraser had been raised primarily by the Benedictine monks at Pago where he was considered a 'good' stock boy.²⁸⁴ In 1909, he and several other mixed-descent boys were sent to Pago to assist the Benedictines in establishing the

²⁸¹ Michael Alroe, "A Pygmalion Complex among Missionaries: The Catholic Case in the Kimberley," in *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies*, ed. Deborah Bird Rose & Tony Swain (Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1988), p.41.

²⁸² Gertie Ahmat, 21st August 2003.

²⁸³ Frank Rodriguez Snr.

²⁸⁴ Choo, *Mission Girls*. p.169.

mission.²⁸⁵ Later, while working for Liveringa Station and when living in Derby, Fraser was not only a practising Catholic himself, but he encouraged many full-descent people to convert to Catholicism. Rodriguez's diary is littered with references to God and his loyalty to the church. He built the first Catholic Church in Derby in 1946 and the Catholic Hostel in 1958-59; both were later destroyed and replaced. Rodriguez recalls how the Church got its name:

About this time I was saying Holy Rosary with Fr. Albert, and we were discussing what to call the church. I suggested they name it the Holy Rosary, like the small church in Frexio; so it was decided to call the Derby church that I was building. Holy Rosary.²⁸⁶

In December of 1946, Frank Rodriguez married Katie Fraser in the Church he had just built and in May of the following year, she took him to visit her childhood home at Beagle Bay Mission. She had maintained strong attachments with the remaining Aboriginal nuns there. They accompanied the young couple on their honeymoon to the beach at Midligon, a nearby retreat for the missionaries.²⁸⁷

The Rosary, a recital to the Mother of God, Mary, has always been a salient part of Rodriguez's daily routine. His children grew up saying the Rosary every day at home and at boarding school, as had the Fraser children who grew up on the mission at Beagle Bay. The Rodriguez family attended Mass and confession as often as practicable. It was not unusual for the family to travel to Derby from Debesa early in the morning to attend Holy Mass on the first Friday of the month. On other occasions, travelling clergy would visit station parishioners to offer Holy Mass in their homes.²⁸⁸ Rodriguez was twice recognised by the Church for his dedication and services. In 1954, he received the ultimate recompense from the Holy Pope in Rome and, again in 1958, both he and his brother-in-law, Tom Puertollano, received awards for services to the Catholic Church. On the recommendation of the Bishop for Kimberley, Bishop Raible, the earlier award was a certificate signed and blessed by His Holiness, Pope Pius XII. It meant that at their time of death should any member

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 70.

²⁸⁶ Frank Rodriguez Snr.

²⁸⁷ Midligon today is commonly known as "Middle Lagoon" a popular tourist resort on the coast near Beagle Bay.

²⁸⁸ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

of the Rodriguez family not be in a position to receive their last rites, they would be conditionally sanctified. The inscription on the document is titled 'Most Holy Father':

23rd July 1949 Francis Rodriguez and Family Derby humbly beg the Apostolic Blessing and a Plenary Indulgence at the hour of death on condition that being truly sorry for their sins but unable to receive the last Sacraments they shall at least invoke with their lips and heart the Holy Name of Jesus.²⁸⁹

Full-descent people, like many mixed-descent embraced various Christian denominations but it is not clear if there was ever any contention between them. Gudia zealots, on the other hand, were in competition for the full-descent's soul.²⁹⁰ Protestant evangelists, concerned for the spiritual welfare of Aboriginal station workers, often visited the stations and the pastoralists did not interfere with them, as they were no threat to their industry; but they may well have encouraged Aboriginal people to become Christians. Towards the end of the research period in the East Kimberley, Peter Willis the parish priest in Kununurra in 1969, noted when he visited Roman Catholic pastoralists to say 'Mass' that practically the whole station attended. Perhaps the pastoralists and the zealots were in cohorts to satisfy their own objectives. Willis suggested that it was pioneering pastoralists who raised people '... under the cattle station regime which intruded upon and controlled the activities of Aboriginal workers and 'encouraged' them to be monogamous and to become docile and obedient workers'.²⁹¹ Today, Catholic missionaries in particular have moved on and do not condemn traditional indigenous practices, but rather they "encourage Aboriginal people to meet with God through the practice of their own traditions".²⁹²

Discrimination against Black people presented itself in many forums, and death was no exception. Full-descent people from the native hospital were not buried in the cemetery in Derby. It seems this was not because they were not Christians, but rather, because they were Black. In 1944, correspondence about a separate burial site for Aboriginals developed between the Solicitor General, the Commissioner for Native Affairs and W. G. Trigg of the Derby Native Hospital. Aboriginals from the hospital

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Willis, "Riders in the Chariot." p.311.

²⁹² Heather McDonald, *Blood, Bones and Spirit. Aboriginal Christianity in an East Kimberley Town* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001). p.167.

were being buried "... in part of the bush behind the white cemetery. . ." and Mr. Trigg was anxious to secure an area for natives. The Commissioner wrote:

Mr. Trigg is at present burying natives in the part of the bush behind the white cemetery, but the natives' burial place is not a continuation of the white cemetery. If we have no native reserve for a cemetery at Derby, I should be glad if you would obtain a litho showing the white cemetery and I shall then take action to secure a small reservation of three to five acres for a native cemetery. Mr. Trigg is anxious to include the present site which could be fenced off in order to protect it from straying cattle. When labour is available, arrangements could then be made for a number of graves to be dug in anticipation of deaths as it sometimes happens that straying cattle fall into the open graves and destroy them.²⁹³

Relationships

Fulgentius and Phillipena Fraser had been taken from their Nygkina homelands as children in the early 1900s to Beagle Bay. Government policy recommended the collection of full and part Aboriginal children, who appeared to have been neglected by their fathers.²⁹⁴ Fraser was sent to Pago [Drysdale River Mission]²⁹⁵ in 1909. He returned to Beagle Bay in 1919 with the other young men, to find a wife.²⁹⁶ Although there was no law against a mixed-descent person marrying a full-descent partner, they were encouraged to take only mixed-descent partners. The idea of mixed-descent girls marrying Gudia men appears not to have been contemplated at that time.²⁹⁷ Fulgentius and Phillipena met and married and had their first child Katie, at Beagle Bay. Fraser then moved with his family back to Pago where the second child, Aggie, was born. They then decided to return to Beagle Bay for their children's schooling, where the rest of the children were born.

Couples and their younger children lived in the 'colony' at Beagle Bay, in small homes built especially for them from mud brick and paperbark, while the older children lived in the dormitory. Children born in Beagle Bay grew up knowing the local language Nyulnyulan, rather than Nygkina, but English had become their first

²⁹³ Department of Native Affairs, "File 378/44," (Perth: SROWA, 1944).

²⁹⁴ Zucker, *From Patrons to Partners*. p.62.

²⁹⁵ K R Wilson, "The Foundation and Development of the Drysdale River Mission," in *Typescript: Baiye Library LISWA* (Perth: 1960).

²⁹⁶ Choo, *Mission Girls*. p.83.

²⁹⁷ Zucker, *From Patrons to Partners*. p.66.

language.²⁹⁸ As families grew, the mission could not support the growing population, and husbands left the mission to find work outside. During the 1930s, Fraser worked as a stockman droving cattle from Broome to Geraldton and Fremantle, for Streeter and Male. On his return to Beagle Bay, the children were always excited to have him home:

Before Sheep Camp, he used to be with the 'plant'; droving cattle from Anna Plains, through Meekatharra to Fremantle. He'd be away for up to nine months at a time. He was in charge of the droving plant. We were still at Beagle Bay then. He had to go away from the mission to support his family. This was before roads. I remember when he'd come home; we'd go half way to the Bay to meet him. We'd cry when we saw him, then we'd cry when he left. He always brought us goodies, like big tins of minties and fancy biscuits; little bloomers and dresses. We were in our glory. But as soon as the work was impending, he'd go again.²⁹⁹

Lifelong friendships between the extended Fraser clan and people on the missions and on pastoral stations were firmly cemented. Religion was a factor in determining friendships and other relationships and those people who grew up as Roman Catholics continued to associate with each other. Yet the family mixed mostly with Aboriginal people while Gudia were pretty much on the periphery of their relationships, unless they were married into Aboriginal families as was the case with Rodriguez. Aboriginal women could not cohabit with Gudia under the *Aborigines Protection Act* 1905 and the *Native Welfare Act* 1936. The law had been intended to stop miscegenation from "... casual sexual intercourse and long-term de-facto relationships between Aboriginal and 'half-caste' women and non-Aboriginal men".³⁰⁰ But a lenient attitude was taken towards casual relationships in the north of the state because sex was seen as a 'necessary evil' for Gudia men.³⁰¹ By the time Katie married, she had an exemption from the *Native Welfare Act* 1936 so she did not need to seek permission to marry a non-Aboriginal man.

²⁹⁸ Edna Fraser.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Haebich, *For Their Own Good* p.116.

³⁰¹ Ibid. p.116.



Frank & Katie – Derby: 8th December 1946

When the Fraser offspring moved away from mission life, they and their extended families came more into contact with Gudia people. Generally, they fitted quite nicely into the mainstream, but some were conscious of being rejected because of their Aboriginality. At face value, the Frasers appeared to want to impress the Gudia. Pat Bergmann remembers our Granny always had the china cups out when the Roses came to Willumbah.³⁰² And Rodriguez recalls a time when Kim Rose had to stay the night at Willumbah after his vehicle became bogged. “I remember Kim Rose having to sleep at Willumbah, a bit below his dignity, but they [Fulgentius and Phillipena] gave him clean sheets, whereas I only got a canvas to sleep on”.³⁰³ Even though Rodriguez was a Gudia, he was now part of the Fraser family and was not afforded

³⁰² Pat Bergmann.

³⁰³ Frank Rodriguez Snr.

any special attention by his in-laws. On the contrary, it was Rodriguez who often helped Fulgentius when needed.

The second and third generations appeared to have reacted to the rejection by Gudia from different ends of the spectrum. They either engaged in ploys to integrate with the Gudia, or they deliberately distanced themselves. Physical appearance played a significant part in the reaction the groups had to each other. For people who were noticeably Aboriginal, it was often difficult to integrate into the mainstream, despite the government's assimilation policies introduced in the 1960s. As already mentioned, Pepita Pregelj found it easier not to identify as Aboriginal in a boarding school which was predominately for white girls and a long way away from any family support. Rodriguez Junior had a similar experience at the boarding school he attended, St. Patrick's Christian Brother's College in Geraldton; he spoke candidly about his experience:

It was a little hard because I was torn between two worlds. When I was at home around Aboriginal people, that was not a problem. My biggest problem was when I went away, to boarding school. You would get called names and I found that very hard at times and I was always aware that for me to get anywhere, I really had to disguise what I was. So most of the time among my peers I was Spanish, because if I was labelled Aboriginal, I would get a lot of racism; but I still got that anyway. I coped with it through my instincts; I learned how to cope with life. You need to not get too uptight about things.³⁰⁴

This was a pragmatic response to racial discrimination in a non-Aboriginal environment, and not a crisis in identity. Frank junior felt quite at ease at home among his own in the Kimberley. The experience for third generation Frasers living in the West Kimberley region was that young people accepted each other regardless of colour. While some mixed-descent youth were aware of subtle racism in the shadows of their lives, generally their relationships were affable and they were only vaguely aware of their differences. At boarding school, Cyril Puertollano came up against little racism, and mostly he found he was accepted as his own person.³⁰⁵ Yet, away from the confines of the college life, he was not comfortable with Gudia.

³⁰⁴ Frank Rodriguez Jnr.

³⁰⁵ Cyril Puertollano.

The overriding characteristic in the Fraser siblings' marriages was Catholicism. Only two of the eight children married non-Catholic partners. Four of the women married Aboriginal men of mixed-descent, three married Gudia men while Jim married a Filipino woman. The mixed marriages trend continued onto the Fraser's grandchildren, but the choice of a Catholic partner was no longer prominent. Nevertheless, partners of the grandchildren have supported their spouses by marrying in Catholic churches, allowing their children to be baptised as Catholics and to attend Catholic schools where practicable. However, with the great-grandchildren, the trends have moved almost completely away from the family finding Aboriginal partners and embracing Catholicism. It is likely that several factors contribute to this shift, but perhaps none more than the fact that Indigenous Australians are only two percent of the population; most of the great-grandchildren no longer live in areas where there are high percentages of Aboriginal people; and Aboriginal people are no longer confined to Aboriginal institutions. Further, many Aboriginal parents have been concerned that potential Indigenous partners may well be related to their families. Under the shifting policies of protection and assimilation, in the first half of the twentieth century, many descendants of children who had been removed from their homelands have traced their families and returned to their country. The shift from Catholicism is not easy to gauge, other than the fact that only twenty-seven percent of Australians are Catholic³⁰⁶, and perhaps even less practising.

³⁰⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Year Book Australia. Culture and Recreation. Religion," (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

Chapter Five: Employment - workers, bureaucrats and managers

The pastoral industry was dependent on Aboriginal labour until the late 1960s.

Rowley, when writing about colonisation in Australia, commented that it was the white frontiersmen who were depicted as the skilled experts and the Aboriginals as the apprentices. But in the early years he suggested that it must have been the reverse as a matter of survival in the Australian bush:

Perhaps too little has been made of the Aboriginal contribution to what makes us 'Australian' . . . it is impossible to deny that general Australian culture owes a good deal to the Aboriginal.³⁰⁷

The working conditions were exploitative of Aboriginal labour but the relationships between workers and management were more complex than often presented. Experienced Aboriginal stockmen not only trained the Aboriginal workforce, but also future Gudia managers. The men were generally multi-skilled while the women worked as domestics. Researchers have found that, elsewhere in the pastoral industry, Aboriginal women worked with stock,³⁰⁸ but no evidence of female stock workers was found on sheep stations in the West Kimberley. Women worked as domestics, and sometimes, as gardeners. The men did building and maintenance work as well as working with stock.³⁰⁹

The employment of Aboriginal people debated by authorities and pastoralists resulted in legislation being implemented and amended over the years. Initially, the Pastoralists' lobby strongly influenced government decisions that reflected their own need for Aboriginal labour. Aboriginal people were further isolated in the employment stakes because Unions registered with the Arbitration Courts of Australia had barred people of Asiatic and Aboriginal descent from becoming members.³¹⁰ Legislation passed in Western Australia in 1905 required station owners and boat owners to hold permits to employ Aboriginal people; but by 1949 the Native Welfare

³⁰⁷ Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*. pp.140-141.

³⁰⁸ McGrath, *Born in the Cattle.*; Mary Anne Jebb, "Emerarra: A Man of Merarra / Morndi Munro Talks with Daisy Angajit [Et Al.]," (Broome: Magabala Books, 1996).; Noel Olive, "Karijini Mirlimirl: Aboriginal Histories from the Pilbara," (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997).

³⁰⁹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 239/1930."

³¹⁰ B Nailon, *Nothing Is Wasted in the Household of God: Vincent Pallotti's Vision in Australia* (Richmond: Spectrum Publications, 2001). p.151.

Administration had introduced a new wage scheme for pastoral workers in the Kimberley based on caste.³¹¹ The permit system enabled pastoralists to manage a cohort of workers rather than having to individually identify employees.³¹² The legislation had no precise conditions and was open to manipulation. Permits implied that the holder was "... a man of suitable character who has the confidence of the government in dealing with those under protection ...".³¹³ The 1939-1940 Liveringa 'letter book' illustrates the laxity of the Act in a letter from Kim Rose to R. Monger who was the agent for Kimberley Pastoral Company in Derby:

Re 'permits'. We wish to advise you that the number of natives on Lulugui is the same as last year and you can take the permit out accordingly. Yours faithfully, K.C. Rose.³¹⁴

At Liveringa, while most of those working on the station during the research period report a fulfilling and satisfying lifestyle within their own sphere, the lifestyle there during the fifties and sixties was described by one outside observer, as feudal.³¹⁵ Kim Rose, as station manager, was responsible for directing the work of the station. The stock work was delegated to the men, while the women undertook domestic work. Rose was employed by the Kimberley Pastoral Company and he was held in high esteem by many people, as evidenced in the files and by recollections of Aboriginal people who worked for the family. He is credited with being an excellent station manager, and one who pulled Liveringa from the doldrums after years of overstocking and mis-management. His obituary from the Scotch College Year Book³¹⁶, 1993 revealed that:

... under his imaginative and enthusiastic leadership and progressive management practices, particularly in the field of station improvements, Liveringa once more began to thrive ... When Kim retired in 1961 after 31 years of faithful service, the Kimberley Pastoral Co (Liveringa) had an Australia-wide reputation as a highly-improved sheep station. An additional half-million acres had been developed for stocking during his managership.³¹⁷

³¹¹ Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare. A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers*. p.228.

³¹² *Ibid.* p.160.

³¹³ Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*. p.196.

³¹⁴ Kim Rose, "Letter to R. Monger," in *Liveringa Letter Book* (Perth: 1939-1940).

³¹⁵ Brian Shoesmith, 12th September 2003.

³¹⁶ Scotch College, Swanbourne, Perth WA

³¹⁷ Scotch College, "Kim Rose - Obituary," *Clan (Scotch College)*, May 1993. p.21.

The pastoral industry in the Kimberley was flourishing during the 1940s and 50s and according to Tony Smith, well into the 1960s. It even suffered a labour shortage before being hit with a downturn in global commodity prices for livestock in the late 1960s and the decision to pay Aboriginal stock workers the award rate.³¹⁸ Aboriginal labour was crucial to the pastoral industry, and at times station managers were concerned that they did not have enough labour. The following statistics are indicative of Aboriginal employment in the research area during the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Most of the Department of Native Welfare reports identified the Aboriginals' caste status, where most Aboriginal employees up until the early 1960s were identified as being full blood (FB):

STATION	YEAR	LABOUR	DEPENDENT ADULTS	CHILDREN	TOTAL
Ellendale	1943 – Sept	15	<i>Not Available</i>	3	18 ³¹⁹
Liveringa	<i>Pre 1946</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	100 approx ³²⁰
Liveringa	1946	N/A	N/A	N/A	40 approx ³²¹
Liveringa	1947	14 – M	N/A	N/A	49 ³²²
Liveringa	1949	14 – M 12 – F	8 – pensioners 5 – indigents	1 – M	41 ³²³
Noonkanbah	1946	50 approx	N/A	N/A	100 approx ³²⁴
Roebuck Plains	1951	N/A	N/A	N/A	30 (20 – M 10 – F) ³²⁵
Manguel Creek	1951	N/A	N/A	2	15 (7 – M 6 – F)
Myroodah	1959	17 – M 12 – F	2 – F	4 – M 7 – F	42 ³²⁶
Noonkanbah	1959	29 – M 28 – F	2 – M 4 – F	12 – M 4 – F	79 ³²⁷

³¹⁸ Tony Smith, "Aboriginal Labour and the Pastoral Industry in the Kimberley Division of Western Australia: 1960-1975," *Journal of Agrarian Change* (2003). p.552.

³¹⁹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 304/1930," (Perth: SROWA, 1930).

³²⁰ Department of Native Affairs, "File 775/1938."

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² Department of Native Affairs, "File 733/1947," (Perth: SROWA, 1947).

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ Department of Native Affairs, "File 775/1938."

³²⁵ Department of Native Affairs, "File 719/50."

³²⁶ Department of Native Affairs, "File 739/1948."

Ellendale	1959	4 – M 1 – F	1 – M 1 – F	2	9 ³²⁸
Liveringa	1962 May	9 – M 11 – F	3 – F	2 – M 5 – F	30 ³²⁹
Liveringa	1962 Sept	11 – M 12 – F	1 – M 2 – F	1 – M 4 – F	31 ³³⁰
Mt. Anderson	1959 April	7 – M 5 – F	3 – M 4 – F	2 – F	21 ³³¹
Paradise	1959 April	8 – M 5 – F	1 – F	1 – M 8 – F	23 ³³²
Paradise	1962 May	1 – HC/M 2 – FB/M 1 – HC/F 4 – FB/F		3 – M/HC 1 – F/HC	12 ³³³
Christmas Creek					120 approx ³³⁴

All females above were identified as domestics and most males as rural labour.

The Department of Native Welfare Paradise Station Report for May 1962 shows the employees 'caste' and their position and wage. It was interesting to note that the female employees who received Child Endowment (CE) it would seem were either not entitled to a wage or very little. Employees were paid monthly:

Paradise Station 1962.

- Male – 1 HC (general mechanic £13.0.0 – 4 children.)
 - Male – 2 FB (stockman £6 & general hand £12).
 - Female domestic – 1 HC (nil wages receives CE. 4 children)
 - Female domestic – 4 FB (domestic £1.0.0 – receives CE 2 children; domestic £2.10.0; carap cook £4.0.0; & domestic £4.0.0)
 - Male children – 3 HC
 - Female children – 1 HC
 - Male children – 1 FB
 - Female children – 1 FB
- TOTAL = 14³³⁵

³²⁷ Department of Native Affairs, "File 1733/1938," (Perth: SROWA, 1938).

³²⁸ Department of Native Affairs, "File 304/1930."

³²⁹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 733/1947."

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 239/1930."

³³² Department of Native Affairs, "File 1733 16-56," (Perth: SROWA, n.d.).

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Smith, "Aboriginal Labour."

³³⁵ Department of Native Affairs, "File 1733 16-56."

The following statistics do not distinguish between male and female. All are from Liveringa, post Rose management era. The station was then owned and managed by the Northern Developments Company:

Liveringa	1967	13	6	7	26 ³³⁶
Liveringa	1968	2	6		8 ³³⁷
Liveringa	1969	31	9 – pensions	22	79 ³³⁸
			17 – others		

Kim Rose's entries in the Liveringa work diary provide a succinct account of the station's daily activities. As already indicated by Rodriguez, Liveringa was a bustling hive of activity. An array of characters including station workers, dignitaries, general visitors, and mailmen to a fanfare of visitors were coming and going each day. By contrast to the Native Affairs file, Rose kept a clear record of his paid staff as listed in the 1939 – 1940 Station year book seen below. Unlike the Native Affairs Department, he doesn't appear to have kept a record of the names of the full-descent workers; there is only the number of full-descent workers on the permit application and he does mention visiting camps to "ration natives".

LIVERINGA:

K.C. Rose	Manager
W.L. Nichols	Book Keeper
T. Hanson	Windmill Man
D. Hanson	Windmill assistant
J. D'Antoine	Carpenter

OUTCAMPS:

Paradise	D. Sears; J. Gill & A. Butcher.
Willumbah	E. Hunter
Camballin	J. Hampden
Erskine	H. Nichols

LULUGUI:

L. G. LeLievre	Head Stockman
S. Senior	General

KALYEEDA:

W. Roberts	Stockman
D'Antoine	Stockman
J. Marshall	General

³³⁶ Department of Native Affairs, "File 733/1947."

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

In Derby, permits to employ Aboriginal people on an individual basis were obtained from the Department of Native Affairs or the Police Station. People of mixed-descent who had Citizenship Rights were also required to secure permits to employ Aboriginals. Both Mrs [Aggie] Puertollano and Mrs Coleman approached the Department to employ an Aboriginal girl to work for them respectively on the 28th of April 1950.³³⁹ On the 3rd of January 1951, Tom Puertollano applied to employ a "... native on walkabout from a station" while Aggie, on the 4th of April 1951, applied to have Ada to work for her:

Visited by Mrs. Puertollano re permit for Ida [sic] who was lolling around Transient camp when C.N.A. in Derby, she is apparently quite capable of working and is doing a good job for Mrs. Puertollano.³⁴⁰

Ada was not only an employee of Aggie Puertollano, but a relative.³⁴¹ Aggie had applied to have her work for her so she could care for Ada. This was not an unusual ploy by people of mixed-descent, who were treated differently to their full-descent relatives, and given some of the same privileges as white people in the Kimberley. At just 12 years of age Ada had been admitted to the Native Hospital in Derby and then left to fend for herself in the transient camp. She had lost the ability to speak and was suffering a post trauma incident. The young Aggie Puertollano, an astute woman, would have had her family interests at the very front of her motive for taking out any permit. Ada not only worked for the Puertollanos until her recent death, but she lived with the family where she remained loyal to Aggie, and she was a loved and respected woman by her extended Fraser family. The Puertollanos had several full-descent people living in the backyard and doing odd jobs for the family prior to the Reserve offering accommodation.³⁴²

On the stations, potential young Gudia managers were sent to out-camps like Willumbah to become skilled in the running of stations. Their instructors were Aboriginal stockmen, like Fraser and Ozies, not teachers from their own social class. The Aboriginal stock instructors were highly skilled. They had grown up learning the

³³⁹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 179/49."

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Aggie Puertollano.

³⁴² Cyril Puertollano.

intricacies of the trade from other experienced Aboriginal stockmen.³⁴³ The young Gudia men had been educated academically, but it was the Aboriginal stockmen who were entrusted to teach them stock work. For Aboriginal people, stock work had become a way of life. Henry Gooch was sent by his parents to train at Liveringa. His family were pastoralists and he had completed his formal education at Scotch College in Perth, before taking up a stockman's position on Liveringa. He later married Rose's younger daughter, June. Gooch recalls spending a lot of time with Fraser in the stock camp, and to a lesser extent with Ozies, learning how to erect windmills, to put in troughs and to run fences.³⁴⁴ He recalls working with Aboriginal people as being some of the happiest times of his life. He would go out with Fraser, who usually had a couple of stock camps to manage, and often he would be the only Gudia there. Gooch cannot recall ever having had an argument, and he describes the Aboriginals as wonderful people; it was that sort of work. Everyone was happy. When the Goochs left Liveringa in 1963 to take up their own property at nearby Blina Station, some of the Aboriginals went with them, voluntarily. June Gooch did not think any of them would leave since they lived in a lovely location next to the billabong at Liveringa. Later, more Aboriginal stock workers joined the Goochs at Blina, even though it was not their country. The couple worked in the stock camp together and took their two children with them; they could never have accomplished this feat without the help of the Aboriginal women who cared for the Gooch children. This was at a time when stations started to trap sheep near their water holes, rather than mustering, thus reducing their dependence on Aboriginal stockmen.³⁴⁵

Employment in the Kimberley for Rodriguez was never a problem, given his trade as a builder. He had taught himself the craft, and gained his qualifications through correspondence studies at Stotts College and the International Correspondence School³⁴⁶ (ICS) during the 1940s.³⁴⁷ He was employed by Rose at Liveringa as a builder and form worker during the 1950s and 1960s. At times Rose was generous with his workers and they received a bonus if the wool prices were good.³⁴⁸

Establishing his own sheep station was not going to be easy for Rodriguez, but he was

³⁴³ McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*, p.36.

³⁴⁴ Henry Gooch, 1st September 2003.

³⁴⁵ Henry Gooch & June Gooch, 1st September 2003.

³⁴⁶ Both Stotts College and ICS are in Sydney and Rodriguez studied externally through both.

³⁴⁷ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

determined, despite being advised by the Kimberley Pastoral Company Board from whom he bought the lease that the land was not recommended for grazing. It eventually proved inappropriate for sheep grazing. The end of Rodriguez' dream at Debesa was the culmination of falling wool prices, expensive overheads, but ultimately the non viability of sheep in the region, largely due to introduced weeds. Introduced weeds known as 'gallon's curse',³⁴⁹ and corkscrew grass played havoc with sheep in the area. Not only did weeds easily lodge in the sheep's fleece and ruin good quality wool, but they pieced the sheep's eye, blinding the animal that sometimes would have to be put down. The more lethal menace of the two however, was the corkscrew grass. It had a very sharp point and when the wool was wet, or damp it had the potential to penetrate the sheep's wool and into the heart:

We went [with] the boss and myself to see my Father-in-law about some sheep, because we found many dying with the grass [corkscrew grass].³⁵⁰

On Debesa, Rodriguez would shear the sheep in the first or second week in March, soon after the wet and before the seed had grown to a stage where it became lethal. Sometimes the sheep was in lamb and too weak to give birth because of the damage from the corkscrew grass. Rodriguez recalls helping the ewe to give birth before having to destroy the animal. The lambs more often than not, became the Rodriguez children's family pets. Given the financial struggle, he worked hard to supplement his income and he travelled between Debesa, Liveringa, Camballin and Derby during the 1950s and 1960s, erecting buildings for pastoralists, the Catholic Church, Kim Durack at Camballin and the Country Women's Association cottage in Derby. Buildings that stand testimony today to his style in the region:

Much of Liveringa's building program during this period [1950s] was carried out by Spanish migrant Frank Rodriguez [sic], a skilled carpenter and stonemason. Assisted by a number of station aborigines, Rodriguez also built the meat house and station cottages situated to the west and north of the homestead. Rodriguez was responsible for construction work on other stations including the present Camballin Homestead and the Inkata stockyards offices.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ R J Petheram, "The Kimberley Scene," in *Plants of the Kimberley Region of Western Australia*, ed. R.J. Petheram and B. Kok (Perth: UWA Press, 1983), p.43.

³⁵⁰ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

³⁵¹ Public library files Derby, "Liveringa: A Historical and Heritage Perspective 1994," in *Register of heritage places* (Perth: 1994).

The homestead at Camballin was built by Rodriguez for Kim Durack, the brother of writer Mary Durack, with the assistance of his young brother in law, Jim Fraser.³⁵² Rodriguez taught Fraser how to make bricks with a small hand-mixer and Fraser said he made almost every brick for that building.³⁵³ Even today, it is an imposing, climatically practical structure, with white washed roman pillars supporting wide, sweeping verandas. The Camballin experience was difficult financially for Durack too. Rodriguez was never fully reimbursed for this work and he articulated the financial struggle he and others found themselves in while trying to establish their properties:

Kim Durack was in a similar situation to me, trying to develop our places. Kim never paid me fully for building the stone-house, his money had simply dried up and so that was it. I was supposed to have received £13,000 at the end. He was paying me £100 a month and I had to pay Uncle Jim out of that too.³⁵⁴



Camballin. The house that Frank built. 2003

Station workers were resolute as they found ways of boosting their income by trapping stock predators like dingos and wedge-tailed eagles. The local Shire had offered a generous bounty that stimulated the workers into creating innovative ways of trapping animals. Fraser and Rodriguez were always in competition with one

³⁵² Frank Rodriguez Snr.

³⁵³ Jim Fraser, 20th August 2003.

³⁵⁴ Frank Rodriguez Snr.

another in their exploits and, occasionally, Rose would boost Rodriguez's tally with a few eagles on the quiet, as Rodriguez had less opportunity to catch them than his father in law.³⁵⁵ But it was Ozies who reminisced with delight about his craftiness against the dingo and being rewarded handsomely for his efforts:

Chicken Hawks were worth 5 shillings. I caught about 300 over ten years. Dingoes paid one pound ten, and I caught about 100 one year. I caught the one that was killing the sheep at Mt. Anderson and Liveringa and Myroodah, "Stumpy". 70 quid for whoever could catch him. I put a trap and bait with strychnine to catch the prize dingo "S'umpy". You could see the dingo's track where he crept up to the trap; you could see what the dingo was thinking. He avoided the poisoned bait and scratched around until he found what he thought was "good" meat. You could see him start to wobble. In the end, the three managers, Godbehere and the two Roses and the Shire all paid me 70 quid, each!³⁵⁶

Tony Ozies was of mixed-descent. His Aboriginal heritage is both *Djugun* from the Dampier Peninsula region and *Gidja* from Flora Valley in the East Kimberley. He lived at Liveringa from about 1953 to 1963, working as a station-hand and windmill mechanic. He travelled regularly to the neighbouring properties to service the windmills and was responsible for the maintenance of 76 windmills on Liveringa, fifteen on Lulugui, and five on Kalyeeda. Born in 1928, he always considered himself as Aboriginal, and resented having to take out citizenship. In the West Kimberley, he felt sorry for the Aboriginal people on the stations where he worked and believed they were treated like 'rubbish' by the station managers. Because they had to have limited rations, whenever he went out to fix windmills and troughs, Ozies would take tobacco and other hand outs.³⁵⁷

He had grown up on Beagle Bay where he learned carpentry. In 1943 he left Beagle Bay and wanted to join the army, but was 'man-powered',³⁵⁸ so he worked on the wharf in Broome. On the pastoral leases, he worked with a bore drilling contractor, Leo Gugeri, and unlike the full-descent workers who only received rations as payment for work, he received a wage. Ozies received £3.10 a week from Gugeri when he was

³⁵⁵ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

³⁵⁶ Tony Ozies.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ 'man-powered' referred to people who were not permitted to join the army and were told some men were needed to remain in Australia. Rodriguez too, was given this reason why he was not permitted to join the army; he worked in Donnybrook.

a single man, and £7.10 a week when he married a mixed-descent woman, Helen Rose. He recalls that the full-descent people were allowed to move from station to station, but most stock boys chose to stay on stations that they were familiar with. During the wet season, they could go on ceremonies because this did not interfere with the station manager's interests.³⁵⁹ Mary Anne Jebb agrees with Ozies that relationships between full-descent Aboriginal workers and station managers in the northern Kimberley were one's of convenience:

The reward for complying with pastoral work requirements could mean a secure source of rations for small groups of men, women, old people and children, and a degree of independence at work and on 'holiday' in the bush. 'Holidays' relieved managers from rationing Aboriginal people for periods throughout the year and during the wet season, while food gathering from the bush and nearby waterholes supplemented everyone's diet, including the stockmen's and managers.³⁶⁰

This view is supported too by Cyril Puertollano who commented on Fraser's commitment to ensuring that additional food rations were made available to Aboriginal workers at 'walkabout' time:

Grandpa, he knew when those things were going to happen and he was always letting them know, [to] come in get their rations and that and they were going to be away for a while, so he'd give them extra rations. They mainly went to another station; they went across to Liveringa, or they went across to Mt. Anderson.³⁶¹

Twenty years before black Australians in the pastoral industry became eligible for award wages, station managers and local business people were concerned for the Aboriginals; at least in their rhetoric to the Department of Native Affairs. According to the 1949 Department's District Officer's (DO) journal, most accepted that award wages for their station workers was inevitable, but they felt that the Aboriginals would regret it. Mr. Henwood at Noonkanbah believed Aboriginals were happier in their own environment and having money would mean they would spend it on alcohol that would lead to health problems. Mr. J. H Rose at Quanbun Downs was concerned for the "hangers on" and who would support them when they had to leave the stations.

³⁵⁹ Tony Ozies.

³⁶⁰ Jebb, *Blood, Sweat and Welfare. A History of White Bosses and Aboriginal Pastoral Workers.* p.168.

³⁶¹ Cyril Puertollano.

At Mount House, the District Officer noted Mr. Blythe as being "... of the opinion that natives on stations along the river in the Derby district, should receive wages, but not those over the range who are less civilised". Mount House is over the Leopold Range. Blythe and Kim Rose felt that there should be more done for the natives. Rose was concerned for people who had not yet moved onto settled communities; or "... bush natives who did not come in contact with civilisation" as he described Gudia society; while Blythe said more should be done for natives from a medical aspect.³⁶² On their rounds, it seems that the Native Welfare District Officers came in for plenty of suggestions from the local Gudia about what would be best for Aboriginal people. Something that is still very much at the forefront of Australian opinion today:

Discussed native matters with Mr. R. Rowell JP Principal of the firm of Rowell Co. and a partner in Tableland and Momington Stations. Mr. Rowell expressed his opinion to the effect that a union for half-castes should be formed in the north. This union to be for half-castes only, and should entitle them to a reasonable wage, but would not entitle them to District allowances, which a number are at present receiving as members of the A.W.U. Mr. Rowell is of the opinion that the average half-caste family is not under as heavy an expense as the average white family, as it is necessary, from a health angle, for the latter to have a change from the North, at least every two years, whereas the half-caste family are able to stand the trying conditions of the north on indefinite period.³⁶³

Jim Fraser had finished schooling when he was fourteen and joined his father, Fulgentius, at Willumbah during the 1950s, to learn to handle sheep. He recalls that during the flood season he camped out with six or eight other Aboriginal boys up in the sand hills, mustering the sheep up from the wetlands to prevent them from drowning. They would stay there for a couple of weeks until the waters subsided. At Debesa, Fulgentius sometimes helped with mustering as his detennined son-in-law developed the lease.³⁶⁴ The long grass on the station added to Rodriguez's problems. It was difficult to find the sheep, let alone muster them in that country. Initially Rodriguez had to borrow equipment from the bigger stations, like the shearing machine. He engaged in a form of bartering with Kim Rose; he borrowed the machine on the understanding that he would do £20 of work for Rose. But the sheep

³⁶² Department of Native Affairs, "File 179/49."

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

industry was proving not viable in the Kimberley and by the middle 1960s Rodriguez Senior could not afford to keep his children at school. He had accrued a lot of debt as a result of falling wool prices and did not have the capital needed to inject into his station. He and Katie decided to bring their eldest son home to help out. Frank Rodriguez Junior, while still at school in the 1960s, learned the rigours of running a station. On his school breaks, he was taught to run fence lines, pull windmills, service the vehicles, muster sheep, lamb-tailing, marking and even to shear sheep. Now, while Rodriguez went to work on neighbouring stations, Rodriguez Junior at the age of seventeen found himself managing a sheep station with the support of Aboriginal station hands.³⁶⁵

It is well documented that Aboriginal women, outside of the West Kimberley sheep properties, played an integral role in developing the Australian pastoral industry. Many mixed-descent women worked as domestics and stock workers on pastoral leases. They had been trained in household duties on missions, while full-descent women learned skills on the job. Mabel Tommy, a *Yinhawangka*³⁶⁶ woman in the Pilbara, reminisced about her work experiences over many years, herding sheep, mustering cattle and as a station cook. In the traditional way, Mabel's husband was much older than she and they had four children. When time came for the children to attend school, her elderly husband chose to remain in Onslow while the children were put into the hostel there and Mabel continued to live and work on stations in the Pilbara. She loved the lifestyle and was known for her strong work ethic that meant she was always employable.³⁶⁷ All of the Fraser women were employed as domestic workers, either on stations or in the hotels and hospitals of West Kimberley towns. Aggie Puertollano and Frances Ward recalled their experiences at Sheep Camp near Broome and at Myroodah in the 1930s. At Sheep Camp, which was run by their father, Fulgentius, they were happy. Frances looked after the sheep and she and younger sister Edna did the wool classing. Fraser had taught them how to class wool, and then to press the wool into the bags.³⁶⁸ Later Frances and her sister Aggie worked at Myroodah Station while their parents worked at Currigan, Myroodah's out-camp.

³⁶⁵ Frank Rodriguez Jnr.

³⁶⁶ Olive, "Karijini Mirlimirli." p.17.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. pp.59-60.

³⁶⁸ Frances Ward.

They found the work very hard, and they were lonely away from the comfort and support of their family:

I was working in Myroodah as the cook for 17 people where my father got a job for me and Frances. At 14, I was the head cook and I had no experience. Frances was working in the house for Mrs. Godbehere and Dad was at an out-camp called Currigan, about thirty miles from Myroodah. When we had a chance we'd visit them. We stayed for three years. I got fed up with the place, it was too long. We were on our own now; it was hard without family. We decided to just leave and get away from Myroodah. We did not walk on the road, just the spinifex and we hid under a *kungaberry* tree.³⁶⁹ I heard Mr. Godbehere saying "can you see tracks" and the Aboriginal boy saying "no boss, no boss".³⁷⁰

The experience of these two young girls was typical of many girls sent away to work for the Gudia. Dora Hunter grew up in Derby, and worked at Mt. Anderson Station where her father, William Watson, had found work for her with Joan and Canny Rose (the brother of Kim). She worked in the staff kitchen in sub-standard conditions. She slept on a cyclone bed and mattress on a cement floor that was primarily for hay. The girls had to make their own dresses, have a shower before work and were never allowed to enter the boss's house. The first time Dora entered the Mt. Anderson [Jarlmadanga] homestead was when her brothers John and Harry Watson took over the property under the Aboriginal homeland movement in the 1980s. By contrast, Dora's later experience at nearby Ellendale Station when she was nineteen is memorable. The Bells who ran this property treated everyone the same. Everyone ate at the same table and Dora even shared a bedroom with Mrs. Bell.³⁷¹ Dora's comments are supported by the District Officer's visit to Ellendale in 1953. The following comments are found on his report:

Two latrines, normal laundry facilities available . . . meals prepared and issued from homestead kitchen and are of normal European foodstuffs . . . natives appear healthy and well nourished . . . the natives at this station are happy, receive the same meals as are prepared for the owner and manager.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Low shrub with little, sweet black berries.

³⁷⁰ Aggie Puertollano.

³⁷¹ Dora Hunter, 21st August 2003.

³⁷² Department of Native Affairs, "File 304/1930."

Earlier, during the 1900s Dora's grandmother, Nanny, had worked at Mt. Anderson and she relocated to Perth with George Rose, the father of Kim to work as a domestic for this family, but was later sent home to her mother at Yeeda Station because she was pregnant with William.³⁷³ Lena, the youngest of the Fraser children, has happy memories of growing up around her parents, mostly on Willumbah where she learnt to do stock work.³⁷⁴ She and Jim learned to muster and do lamb marking and tailing and, when they were older, they went mustering with the camp crew.

Women who were trained on the missions and had gained some formal education were better placed to secure work in the towns, usually as domestics. Edna Fraser however, went to work for the Post Master General (PMG) in Derby in the 1940s. She worked on the switchboard and handled telegrams for a week's pay of £2.10.³⁷⁵ She was the first Aboriginal woman to be employed by the PMG in the town although she was required to have an exemption from the Aborigines Act.³⁷⁶ Later, she moved to Perth to work with a family who needed a housemaid, as did two of her sisters Frances and Gertie. Edna relished the experience:

Mrs. O'Hara who had once lived in Broome, wrote to Fr. Francis for domestic help. She had seven boys to bring up. I was quite excited at the prospect and I said, yes, because I wanted to go and see, and Frances was already down there. They paid my fare. I helped her with the children and cleaning. She did most of the cooking. I kept the floors nicely polished. I had my own room, and sat at the same table. I was not treated any differently. We said the Rosary every night. I really enjoyed this experience . . . in the '80s sometime during the Shinju Festival [in Broome], Bernie O'Hara looked me up. I hadn't seen him since he was little. It was an emotional meeting.³⁷⁷

Technological improvements in the 1960s reduced the need to employ Aboriginal stock workers and were a factor in forcing Aboriginal people to abandon stations for the towns. With no formal education or skills they could use to seek employment in urban areas, they lived in appalling conditions on reserves, discussed in Chapter Four.³⁷⁸ Rose retired to the south in 1961. Some of their Aboriginal workers such as Patsy and Dickie Yambo left Liveringa at the same time, suggesting it was their

³⁷³ Dora Hunter.

³⁷⁴ Lena Fraser.

³⁷⁵ Edna Fraser.

³⁷⁶ See appendix 3

³⁷⁷ Edna Fraser.

³⁷⁸ Refer to Living Arrangements.

attachment to the Rose family that kept them at the station.³⁷⁹ Affection between Rose and his employees was demonstrated in the Kimberley Pastoral Company's Board minutes of 1955. Fraser had been sent to Perth for medical treatment, and the company elected to care for his needs:

The Chairperson explained that this man had had to come to Perth for an urgent and serious operation. In view of his long and loyal service to the company it was resolved that Fraser's travelling expenses should be paid by the company and that every endeavour should be made to see that he received the best medical attention and that any extra costs should be paid by the company.³⁸⁰

There is little doubt that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people coexisted and together developed the pastoral industry throughout Australia. In the late 1960s Aboriginal workers were awarded equal wages, at a time when there was less demand for their labour as stock workers. John Watson, a Nygkina man of mixed-descent, believes that with the departure of Aboriginal stockmen went the essence of quality workers and the stations became rundown from the labour shortage.³⁸¹ His brother, Ivan Watson, on his return to Mt. Anderson in the West Kimberley some twenty-four years after leaving, puts John's comments into perspective:

When I left Mt Anderson in 1956, I left the place with 3,000 head of cattle, 26,000 head of sheep, and all the horses they needed . . . the workshop was spick and span. All the materials we needed were stored on racks and we had all the equipment for jobs such as fixing the bores . . . but when we took over Mt Anderson around Christmas '84, we took over a run down joint, a dirty handkerchief as I call it.³⁸²

Education

Schooling for station children was by correspondence and often under the supervision of the manager's wife. At Liveringa, Pat Rose had taught her own children by correspondence in the top house, while later the Aboriginal children were taught by

³⁷⁹ Dickie Yambo, 1st September 2003.

³⁸⁰ Kimberley Pastoral Company, "Kimberley Pastoral Company : Board Minutes," (Perth: KPC, 25/6/1952).

³⁸¹ Marshall, *Raparapa*.

³⁸² *Ibid.* p.151.

her daughters Audrey and June in one of the cottages.³⁸³ June remembers teaching the Ozies children until Tony Ozies decided to leave the station in the early 1960s so his children could be educated in Derby.³⁸⁴ The Rose girls took on the role of teaching when they had finished their Year 12 schooling in Perth until a primary school was established at Camballin in 1961. The first principal of the school, Brian Shoesmith, taught in an old house that doubled as his accommodation. The young graduate teacher was sent to the remote community to set up a one-teacher school. It was intended that, by having a school, more workers would be attracted to work on the farming development. There were approximately six white children, six mixed-descent children and the rest were full-descent. Shoesmith had also met Fraser, who at that time was working at Paradise Station. Fraser would bring children in from Paradise Station for school and Shoesmith remembers him as being very supportive of the Camballin School.³⁸⁵

Into the 1960s and 1970s, while some Gudia and mixed-descent children were being sent away to boarding school, other mixed-descent and full-descent station and mission children were sent to hostels in Kimberley towns. In Derby, two hostels of the United Aborigines Mission (UAM) and St. Josephs Hostel run by the Pallottines were built in the late fifties. Rodriguez was the leading hand on the St. Joseph's building. The Catholic hostel took in children from Catholic missions while the UAM took the remainder, including those from the East Kimberley.³⁸⁶ Rodriguez Junior's first stint away from home was at St. Joseph's:

I remember very much the schooling in Derby with the nuns. I remember getting into trouble a lot with Sister Ignatius. I guess at times I felt quite proud of the fact that I could become an altar boy and to be part of what we were being taught. But it was also a big get together for everyone at the hostel. It was great to all get in the back of the truck and go down to the church. I remember it was great times because of the interaction, a lot were Aboriginal children.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ June Gooch.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Brian Shoesmith.

³⁸⁶ Valerie Martin, "The Development of Derby and the Fitzroy Basin" (MA, Teachers College Claremont, 1958), p.19.

³⁸⁷ Frank Rodriguez Jnr.

Following the example of Gudia people in the region, especially those on pastoral properties, Fraser's grandchildren were eventually sent south to complete their schooling. The Rodriguez and Puertollano children were sent to colleges in Geraldton and Perth while other grandchildren were sent to hostels in Perth, at Applecross and Rossmoyne from where they attended private and government colleges. Lena's children went to the Pallottine Mission at Tardun near Geraldton. Fraser sent his granddaughter, Kerry, to the Pallottine Hostel at Rossmoyne with financial assistance from the 'Left-hand Club' on Koolan Island. The social club had offered to help underprivileged children receive a good education, and Kerry had been recommended for the grant.³⁸⁸ Some of the grandchildren learned to play music and all excelled in sport.

Rodriguez Junior's initial reaction to being sent to Geraldton was not as happy as his experience at the hostel. He was ten years old when he first went to St. Patrick's and he found it tough academically, possibly because he was so frightened of the cultural change:

I was very scared at being away from home. It was one of the reasons that I could not comprehend anything; it was too much. I repeated one year twice. All that strictness, all the discipline, all the things that went with going away to college, I don't think I was comprehending anything. Spelling, arithmetic, algebra and Latin, you name it. We hadn't come with a great deal of education other than what the nuns had taught us; we were thrown in at the deep end so we had to learn quickly. I used to love doing cross-country because on the station we'd run a lot, chasing sheep. I found running through the sand hills down there exhilarating . . . sport was one area that I could excel in. But I don't think it took too much to convince me not to go back.³⁸⁹

Gudia children's boarding school experiences are similar to that of the mixed-descent kids. June Gooch resented being sent away to boarding school at St. Hilda's in Perth:

I remember how shocking it was, thought I'd die down there. Yes, I thought it was the end of the world. From Mum teaching us correspondence to going into a big classroom with girls, it was really very traumatic.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Kerry McCarthy, 31st December 2003.

³⁸⁹ Frank Rodriguez Jnr.

³⁹⁰ June Gooch.

As for the writer, I constantly protested at having to be sent away. I spent one year at St. Joseph's before being sent to Geraldton at the age of seven. I would hang my head as I walked to the DC3 plane at Derby airport, dressed in a school tunic, hat and gloves too big for me with tears in my eyes and refusing to look back at my parents. Rodriguez paid for his children's return airfares three times a year and there were only a couple of occasions in the nine years that I spent at boarding school that I did not come home at holiday time. The Rodriguez children just took it for granted that they would be going home each holiday. Assistance for Aboriginal children schooling away from home was introduced after the three older children had completed their schooling, so Rodriguez never benefited by it. There was a slight reprieve for the fourth child, but he had almost finished schooling when the scheme came in.

Chapter Six: The West Kimberley's two identities, Aboriginal and Gudia, a continued coexistence.

This thesis has investigated the social and economic interactions of people living in the West Kimberley between 1944 and 1969. These interactions were determined by membership of social groups which were defined by racial characteristics: Aboriginal people of full-descent, Aboriginal people of mixed-descent and Gudia people. Membership of a group determined how people lived, worked, their education and training, their religion and how they moved about the countryside. Thirty-five years later, Aboriginal identity is one entity comprising full-descent and mixed-descent people, rather than there being two separate Aboriginal caste groups; Gudia stand alone.

The division of Aboriginal people into two 'castes' was the result of government policies which separated people on the basis of racial inheritance. Full-descent people were considered inferior to mixed-descent people and were treated accordingly. Mixed-descent people were thought to be more able to assimilate to white values, therefore they were taken from their full-descent mothers and educated, housed and made eligible to be Australian citizens on the basis of racial identity.³⁹¹ These different legal identities were mirrored in the treatment of Aboriginal people by pastoralists and those with power and authority, so they became a separate social group from their full-descent relatives. This caste system has not previously been analysed in any depth, nor have the implications for individual lives been investigated. In this study of a family I illustrate the meaning of this caste system for individuals.

In undertaking the research I have attempted to analyse the impact of foreigners in the region and how government policies determined the lives of people of Aboriginal descent. The newcomers migrated to the region as pastoralists, missionaries and government officials, respectively. They infiltrated West Kimberley Aboriginal societies with conflicting interests at stake. While government authorities and the missionaries became concerned for the welfare of the natives, the atrocities committed

³⁹¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, "Bringing Them Home."

by the pastoralists were often hidden and denied.³⁹² "For much of the century our people have not been free. Under various state welfare regimes our freedom of movement was taken away".³⁹³ A government policy of assimilation had been introduced, intended to teach Aboriginal people to adopt Western values, but it succeeded only in part. There has, nevertheless, been a process of adaptation and an exchange of traits that is a common process when different societies co-exist. The mixed-descent Aboriginals were encouraged to take out Citizenship Rights, deny their Aboriginal identity and not practise Indigenous traits. The research findings in this study have concluded that in the history of contact between Nygkina and Gudia, their interaction and reliance on one another for survival was the determining factor in an obligatory coexistence.

Earlier in the century Nygkina people were forced to share their country with uncompromising, dominant trespassers who considered the land as *terra nullius* as they realized the potential for a pastoral industry. The land was divided up and pastoralists moved into the area to develop huge leases, on which to run live stock. Because labour was essential to the industry, the trespassers activated an untapped human resource as they coerced Aboriginals to become their station workers. Camps of Aboriginal people were formed on the leases as they became servile to and reliant on Gudia. Through punitive measures Nygkina along with hundreds of other Aboriginal groups throughout Australia were stopped from hunting on their land. Initially, the pastoralists' use of Aboriginal labour was exploitative, but as government policies in the best interests of the Aboriginals were introduced, missionaries and government officials became the next wave of foreigners into the region. Their aim was to counteract the destructive impact pastoralists were having on Aboriginal populations and ensure just and proper treatment was enforced. The missionaries set up communities and cared for mostly mixed-descent people. Children born as mixed-descent were usually fathered by Gudia men and removed from their Aboriginal mothers and sent to missions. They received little formal education and were trained to be domestics and labourers to serve the Gudias. Government officials became a force in the interests of the full-descent Aboriginals who had largely remained on the stations as illiterate peoples until the 1960s. There

³⁹² Peter Yu, "Kimberley Land Council Visit UK," (Whoseland.com, 1998).

³⁹³ Ibid.

was no love lost between the station managers and Department of Native Affairs' officials. The public servants from the Department were sceptical of the pastoralists; while the pastoralists found both the government officials and the missionaries tiresome and interfering. But the station managers accepted that it was in their best interests to provide for the Aboriginals if they were to maintain their unpaid workforce. The Department of Native Affairs was required to provide for Aboriginal people who lived in the towns.

The policies impact on the mixed-descent group is demonstrated here by the eldest and the youngest Fraser siblings, Katie and Lena, respectively. If they ever thought they would have total equal rights under the *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944* that assumed they could 'enjoy' more privileged positions in the wider society, they were misled. In reality, they were still subjected to discriminatory behaviour by Gudja. They may have no longer needed permission from the government to marry a Gudja, but the stigmatized mindset towards Aboriginal people as being subordinate, was evident. Rodriguez' first employer in the Kimberley, the Millards of Gogo Station, expressed concerns about his decision to marry Katie.

23rd September 1946: Making small preparations to start work on the church and it's the last day of the races. Had a small conversation with Arthur Millard and his wife. They were not pleased with the idea about my oncoming marriage. God have mercy on me.³⁹⁴

In 1962 Lena Fraser lived with her husband and their four children at Paradise Station. In the Native Welfare files she is listed as a half-caste domestic who did not receive a wage because she received Child Endowment. But Lena says while living at Paradise she never worked, and neither did she ever receive Child Endowment. She also recalls a lot more people living there than are listed on the file. As her revelation warrants further investigation but it will not be undertaken in the scope of this thesis, she is now left wondering what became of the welfare payment. As the station mechanic, her husband also of mixed-descent, received £13.0.0 per month to support his family.³⁹⁵ Aboriginal Australians lower educational status led to low ranked jobs and less financial gains under Government policies during the mid twentieth century that set the cycle for many Aboriginals to live in low-socio economic settings today.

³⁹⁴ Rodriguez Snr, "Diary."

³⁹⁵ Department of Native Affairs, "File 1733 16-56."

However, while the caste system is not as blatant today as during the last century, the inequalities between the three groups are still obvious. Full-descent people often live in communities akin to third world countries, while mixed-descent people generally enjoy a better quality of life in the towns and cities. Mixed-descent people have found themselves more acceptable to white Australia.

Because of the past discriminatory practices by Gudia towards families of mixed-descent, the Fraser siblings and their partners were determined their children would not be disadvantaged. Most of the second generation Fraser children reached high school and some gained professional qualifications upon leaving school, while the third generation have gained professional status, attended universities and secured employment in well paid main stream positions. Most, however, have secured professional jobs working for the advancement of Indigenous Australians.

The present

The West Kimberley / Derby region comprises 102,700 square kilometres and has two main towns, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. Today the region has a population of 9,138 people; 4,127 of whom are of Aboriginal descent.³⁹⁶ Over eighteen percent of West Kimberley / Derby people speak an Aboriginal language as their first language.³⁹⁶ Aboriginal people belong to several distinct languages groups. Customary law is practised and it “. . . is based on a celebration of the land and the many sacred sites that were created by Dreamtime ancestors”.³⁹⁷ Unlike Gudia, who use land for economic purposes, Nygkina and others also have a sacred, religious attachment to country.

It is conceivable that in the future Gudia will be seen as a transient population in the West Kimberley. Gudia's coexistence with the local Aboriginal populations is not established through kinship and inheritance in the same manner with Nygkina. They coexist alongside Nygkina while living in the region, and then they 'move on', while the local Aboriginal people remain in their homelands where they have had to endure

³⁹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "A Snapshot of Derby-West Kimberley (S)," (ABS, 2002).

³⁹⁷ Yu, "Kimberley Land Council Visit Uk."

the floating Gudia population since colonisation. On completion of their tour of duty in the region, many Gudia retire to the south of the country to where their families and close ties reside. Those who have chosen to remain in the region are relative newcomers. It would be difficult to find a third or fourth generation Gudia in the Kimberley. Local Nygkina people on the other hand have lived in the region since time immemorial and they continue to be linked, both spiritually and physically, to their native homelands.

I have built on Maureen Tehan's notion of coexistence to analyse the way in which people in the Kimberley relate to each other. Coexistence for Indigenous Australians was never 'granted' as described by Tehan; they have had to struggle to maintain connection with their land that they risked losing to the foreigners.³⁹⁸ During the early 1970s, when many people moved to Derby and Fitzroy Crossing, the Nygkina people living at Liveringa Station refused to leave. In the post-Rose and Gooch era on the property, the living conditions deteriorated for the local Nygkina people. Under new management, they were despised and not wanted on the station. Despite being treated with contempt by management during the 1970s a large group of Nygkina people stood firm and continued to coexist on Liveringa Station. In an attempt to subtly disperse the group, the owners razed their deteriorating camp site to the ground, with promises of new accommodation for their employees. But this never eventuated.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, the company that owned Liveringa ignored instructions from the Department of Native Welfare to provide a list of employees at Liveringa that led the authorities to believe the station did not employ any Aboriginal people. They believed the management was embarrassed at not being financially able to support Aboriginal workers; nor to provide adequate accommodation. However, the Department of Native Welfare supported the Aboriginal's stance and ensured that adequate food supplies were provided. In a letter to the Commissioner in March of 1972, Kevin Johnson District Officer of the Department of Native Welfare in Derby provided an encouraging report. Johnson stated that the department along with the Medical Department maintained regular visit to the community. Appropriate resources, food and shelter, were being supplied and the unemployed were receiving benefits cheques. Approximately 60 people were living at the site. They pooled their

³⁹⁸ Tehan, "Co-Existence."

³⁹⁹ Department of Native Affairs, "File 733/1947."

welfare cheques, spent it wisely and ensured children were delivered every day to Camballin for school.⁴⁰⁰

In the ensuing years the group was relocated to Looma two kilometres from the Liveringa homestead. Visitors to Looma Aboriginal Community today discover an unbroken proud community⁴⁰¹ with a population of some 300 people.⁴⁰² But, as a legacy of the traumas of ongoing slow, readjustment measures by the authorities over the years, and because of poor diet, obesity and diabetes due to a sedentary lifestyle, Looma residents like other communities worldwide, despite being a “dry” community, is not without health issues.⁴⁰³ To combat the problems, the Looma community has made a concerted effort by entering the state’s tidy town competition. In 2004, Looma is the only Aboriginal community in the competition. Joe Killer was one of the leaders in the group’s refusal to leave Liveringa in 1972, and 32 years later he is confident of his community making the finals. He is reported in the West Australian saying, “we like to be winners”.⁴⁰⁴

As for the main characters in this research project, most continue to live in the Kimberley. Frank Rodriguez (83) moves between Kununurra and Broome, Frances Ward (78) lives in Broome and Aggie Puertollano (80) resides in Derby. All three live with one of their children, and lead active lives within their means. The remainder of the siblings live independently in their respective localities. Edna Fraser (72) and Lena Fraser-Buckle (60) both live in Derby, while Jim Fraser (62) and Gertie Ahmat (70), remains in Darwin. The Fraser siblings regularly visit each other while Aggie, Edna and Lena are actively involved in Nygkina issues in the region. The family are respected Elders of both the Aboriginal and Gudja communities in the West Kimberley.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Musica Viva Australia, "Across the Top," (Musica Viva Australia, 2004).

⁴⁰² Margaret Rice, "Caritas Contributes to Improving Aboriginal Health," (Caritas Australia, 2004).

⁴⁰³ David Bruce, "Making Better Choices," (Monash Centre for Population Health and Nutrition, 1999).

⁴⁰⁴ Kim MacDonald, "Tidy Town Is Healthier, Too: Clean-up Gives Community a New Lease of Life and Its Residents a Boost in Self-Esteem," *The West Australian*, 28th August 2004.

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- Key:** AIATSIS – Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
- BLWAH – Battye Library Western Australia History
- DOLA – Department of Land Administration (WA)
- SROWA – State Records Office of Western Australia

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APPENDIX 1

Catherine Rodriguez's Citizenship application form and statutory declaration, 30th June 1948.
Department of Native Affairs, "Certificate of Citizenship File 945/40," (Perth: 1940).



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WESTERN AUSTRALIA.
DEPARTMENT OF NATIVE AFFAIRS.

Place Perth.
Date 30th June 1948.

NATIVES (CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS) ACT, 1944.

REPORT ON APPLICANT FOR CERTIFICATE OF CITIZENSHIP.

1. Full name of applicant Catherine Rodriguez
2. Alias (if any) _____
3. Age 27 yrs or date of birth 24th Nov. 1920.
4. Parentage—Mother's name Philipene Carson Caste Half.
Father's name Salgentino Carson Caste Half.
5. Are parents living? yes. If so, where? Leveing Station, Perth.
6. Has the applicant ever served in the Armed Forces of the Commonwealth?
No
7. Has the applicant dissolved tribal and native association for two years, except with respect to lineal descendants or native relations of the first degree? Yes.
8. Has the applicant adopted the manner and habits of civilised life? If so, for how long to your knowledge? Yes,
9. Where has he been domiciled within the last two years? at Perth.
10. Does applicant live according to white standards? Yes.
11. How does the applicant earn his living and what wage does he usually earn?
Home Outing
12. Is the applicant married? Yes. Is it a tribal or legal marriage? Legal
If legal, please give date and place of marriage. 8th December 1946. Perth.
13. If married, give maiden name and caste of wife Catherine Carson
14. Who are parents of wife and what is their caste? _____
15. Does applicant or his wife consort with natives? No
16. Does applicant or his wife visit the camps of native relatives, or do the relatives visit them?
No.

6 20401/48

79/43

17. Give names and ages of the children of applicant and his wife

Nil

Do these children live with him? *—*

Do they associate with natives? *—*

Do they attend school? *—*

Has applicant's wife any other children? *No*

18. Are any of the applicant's children married or living with natives? *—*

19. What type of dwelling do applicant and his family occupy?

Good dwelling adjacent to Police Station

20. What is applicant's character? *Good*

(A separate report would be appreciated.)

21. Has applicant been known to take intoxicating liquor? *No*

If so, is he addicted to it? *—*

22. Is applicant likely to secure intoxicating liquor for other natives? *No*

23. Do you consider the full rights of citizenship are desirable for and likely to be conducive to the welfare of the applicant? *Yes*

24. Is the applicant able to speak and understand the English language? *Yes*

25. Is the applicant of industrious habits and of good behaviour and reputation? *Yes*

26. Do you consider ^{him} reasonably capable of managing ^{his} own affairs? *Yes*

27. The applicant has submitted references as to his character from the undermentioned:—

R. M. Rowell J.P. Agent Derby.

Albert Schelzinger, Priest

G. H. King, 29/1/36
Protector.

N.B.—As the fullest information is desired in respect to applicants for Certificates of Citizenship, please supply all relevant particulars in furtherance or support of this application. Confirmation of the correctness of applicant's own statements should be sought.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA.
NATIVES (CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS) ACT, 1944, REGULATIONS.
FORM 2.

STATUTORY DECLARATION.

I, Catherine Rodriguez (Full name.)

of Perth (Address.)

Housewife (Occupation.) DO SOLEMNLY AND SINCERELY

DECLARE as follows:—

- 1. I am a native within the meaning of the Native Administration Act, 1905-1941, and am of the full age of twenty-one years or over.
- 2. I wish to become a citizen of the State of Western Australia in accordance with the provisions of the Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944.
- 3. For the two years prior to the date hereof I have dissolved tribal and native association except with respect to lineal descendants or native relations of the first degree.
- 4. * (a) I have served in the Naval, or Military, or Air Force of the Commonwealth of Australia (particulars relating to my enlistment being as follow:—Unit _____ No. _____ Rank _____) and have received (or am entitled to receive) an honourable discharge; or
 * (b) being of good character and industrious habits I am a fit and proper person to obtain a Certificate of Citizenship.

AND I make this solemn declaration by virtue of Section 106 of the Evidence Act, 1906.

DECLARED at Perth
this 30th day of June
1948.

C. Rodriguez

Before me:—

G. H. King Sgt 1366

(This Declaration may be made before a Justice of the Peace, Commissioner for Declarations, Town Clerk, Road Board Secretary, Electoral Registrar, Postmaster, Classified Officer in the State or Commonwealth Public Service, Classified State School Teacher, or member of the Police Force.)

* Delete whichever is not applicable.

APPENDIX 2

FRASER FAMILY TREE:

