

## 'From the Influence of Their Parents': Aboriginal Child Separations and Removals in Early Melbourne and Adelaide

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Barry Patton

This paper considers the separation and removal of Aboriginal children from their people as practised at missionary and other schools in early colonial Melbourne and Adelaide in the 1840s and early 1850s. It traces the increasing degree of separation employed by colonial humanitarians - from day school to boarding school and then to child removal - to counter the continued failure of their attempts to 'civilise' and Christianise. It identifies that indigenous children and adults influenced the manner of attempts at Europeanisation through their agency and culture and that, in regard to localised separations, they ultimately determined what was an acceptable level of separation of children from their kin and culture. With regard to more distant removal, it identifies that missionaries exploited aspects of Aboriginal culture and law - notably Aboriginal territoriality - in their attempts to keep removed youths on the mission and prevent them from returning to their people and country, while maintaining that they were not held by coercive means. It contends that, in these cases, attempts to 'civilise' and Christianise were culturally hybridised: that separation and removal for Europeanisation involved important engagements with Aboriginal people's culture and agency.

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## 'FROM THE INFLUENCE OF THEIR PARENTS': ABORIGINAL CHILD SEPARATIONS AND REMOVALS IN EARLY MELBOURNE AND ADELAIDE<sup>1</sup>

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Barry Patton

Little historical research has been conducted into the separation and removal of Aboriginal children from their people by missionaries in colonial Australia.<sup>2</sup> Accounts of early missions and missionaries have largely overlooked this important aspect of many mission operations.<sup>3</sup> Where early colonial separations have been noted, there has been some tendency to consider them simply in reference to or as an undifferentiated progenitor of the child removals of the twentieth century, obscuring their particularities.<sup>4</sup> This has left a significant lacuna in our understanding both of the mission past and of the origins of Indigenous child removals in Australia.

Child separation was practised at New South Wales' first school for Indigenous children, the Native Institution at Parramatta (1815-23), which set the standard for mission schools in the Australian colonies over coming decades. Even before it opened, its founder, missionary William Shelley, anticipated that Aboriginal adults would impede its civilising and Christianising efforts by their example of 'uncivilised' life and that the children should be distanced from them. He expected that 'The chief difficulty appeared to me to be the Separation of the Children from their Parents'.<sup>5</sup> Shelley and his wife Elizabeth struggled to obtain an initial eight pupils to board there. Kin apparently feared the children would be taken by force; others, told they could see their children only once a year and could not withdraw them, would not let them go. Governor Lachlan Macquarie, however, won over some kin with annual banquets. Press reports indicate the main inducement for school attendance was that children were well fed, at a time when dispossession and land clearance had reduced traditional food sources. Nonetheless, numbers of children absconded, 'decoyed' away by relatives.<sup>6</sup>

Much of the experience of this first school was repeated at later missions, with child separation a common feature. Most missionaries, feeling they could do little to civilise Indigenous adults, focused their efforts on children.<sup>7</sup> Typically, children were separated temporarily from kin and culture, often by dormitory boarding; they received secular and religious instruction and in some cases training for labour; and attendance was often irregular. This was the case at the Wellington Valley mission in NSW (1832-43), Melbourne's Yarra Village Mission (1837-39), Brisbane's Moreton Bay mission (1838-43), the Swan River mission in Western Australia (1840-55), and at Melbourne's Merri Creek mission school and Adelaide's Location school and Native School (discussed in detail below).<sup>8</sup> The initial enticement for attendance was principally food.<sup>9</sup> Detailed accounts

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of how students were obtained or kept, however, generally remain scant. Several missions recorded that, after some years of schooling, pupils regularly rejoined their people, typically in their teens for marriage or initiation into adulthood.<sup>10</sup> Irregular attendance and departures to return to traditional life were frequently ascribed to adults' continued contact with and influence on their children, despite separation.<sup>11</sup> Missionaries had no authority to prevent such contact, enforce attendance or halt departures, and repeatedly confronted the same dilemma: how to civilise and Christianise without employing uncivilised and unChristian means such as force.

Struggling to keep up attendances and produce lasting results of 'civilisation', some humanitarians employed other means to ensure separation. On Flinders Island, about twenty children were temporarily removed to Hobart's Orphan School in 1834.<sup>12</sup> At Wellington Valley, one missionary tried taking children by force, but this proved counterproductive.<sup>13</sup> And at Swan River, pupils were persuaded to marry each other to keep them on the mission, with impermanent success.<sup>14</sup>

By the time Aboriginal schools opened in Melbourne and Adelaide from the late 1830s, child separation was well established as an important instrument in missionaries' Europeanising efforts, albeit of limited effectiveness but with no obvious viable alternative. The following examination of the operations of the Melbourne and Adelaide schools affords an insight into some of the intricacies of these early child separations and removals, revealing the significant influence of Aboriginal people's culture and agency on separation practice.

### **Separations 'only by their goodwill'**

The Merri Creek Aboriginal mission school (1846-51) stood on a government reserve on Wurundjeri land in what is now Yarra Bend Park, Fairfield. The Baptist-run day school evolved from Sunday school classes that late in 1845 had drawn Aboriginal children, largely because they supplied ample food.<sup>15</sup> Settlers' rapidly widening occupation of land had, even within ten years of Port Phillip's founding, made traditional foods scarce and impeded Indigenous people's access to find food, camp and hold gatherings.<sup>16</sup> Protectorate rations and 'flour-bag Christianity' then became a significant part of Aboriginal people's early contact economy, as territorial colonisation laid the basis for cultural colonisation. With 'three good meals per day of the best food'<sup>17</sup> for pupils at Merri Creek, the Baptist chapel found that 'Their parents have willingly confided them to our charge, being (we learn) fully satisfied that they will be taken care of, and well provided for in their absence'.<sup>18</sup>

Teacher Edward Peacock's six-day-a-week classes drew a regular twenty-plus children throughout 1846. Pupils - girls aged eight to ten and boys eight to thirteen - were mainly from Woiwurrung and some Daungwurrung clans.<sup>19</sup> Tuition included reading, writing, arithmetic, religious instruction, needlework for girls and, later, agricultural training for boys.<sup>20</sup>

The mission's four-room wattle-and-daub hut housed Peacock's family quarters, a schoolroom and a kitchen that doubled as a 'barrack' for the children. A separate schoolhouse with a larger dormitory was built in 1847.<sup>21</sup> The barrack and later dormi-

tory point to a significant aspect of the school's operation: the desire and ability to separate children from their people for longer than the school day, in keeping with a boarding school. This occurred despite the fact that relatives permanently maintained camps within a mile or so of the school throughout its first two years.<sup>22</sup> Separation developed gradually. In the school's early months, girls lived at the camps but slept in the Peacocks' parlour when it rained, and some boys slept occasionally in the schoolhouse. But by late 1846 apparently all children slept principally at the mission.<sup>23</sup>

The intention to separate children from kin dated from the inception of the school. Referring to the success of the earlier Sunday school in attracting Aboriginal children, the Baptist school committee reported: 'Finding that the children were anxious to receive instruction, and to remain with us, we began seriously to think of taking them entirely from their parents'.<sup>24</sup> Aboriginal adults were considered not only unresponsive themselves to the Europeanising message but an uncivilising influence that had to be marginalised.

Amid this greater separation, Assistant Protector William Thomas discouraged adults from going near the school grounds.<sup>25</sup> Kin nonetheless retained contact and significant influence. School attendance varied as relatives temporarily withdrew children to travel or participate in ceremonies, or pupils played truant to be with family and friends. As they reached puberty, children were withdrawn permanently: girls to marry and boys for initiation to manhood.<sup>26</sup> Absenteeism for such social and cultural reasons and the declining roll as older pupils left ran counter to the school's Europeanising aim, but the Baptist committee well knew that the children could not be restrained and stayed 'only by their goodwill'.<sup>27</sup> The temporary and permanent withdrawals demonstrated relatives' concealed power in the school: they could take children away, so their consent or acquiescence was needed for children to stay. Kin were thus important agents for and against their children's separation and Europeanisation. This imposed competing pressure on the school's civilising ambition: while humanitarians sought to limit relatives' influence on the children, they dared not alienate them. Relatives' desire or demand for access or temporary release of children could not be wholly ignored.

This implicit power contest came into the open in September 1847 when, in a prelude to a mass withdrawal, adults asserted their claim over the children. Thomas found himself 'regularly beset by men and women with heavy complaints about their children at School, that they would take them all away'.<sup>28</sup> Peacock then permitted three boys to leave temporarily, although he perhaps had little option under the tense circumstances.<sup>29</sup> It is evident from this episode that the children were living quite separately at the mission, that there was considerable tension among kin over their reduced access and that they had to assert themselves forcefully to redress it by affirming their ultimate control over the children.

Days later, the adults abandoned the camps they had occupied for two years near the school and quit the Melbourne area for the ranges. The principal reason was a devastating influenza outbreak, which claimed many Aboriginal lives over following months.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, the adults left without their children, suggesting their reduced control and the limits to their power to claim them. However, two 'old men' stayed be-

hind to keep watch on the pupils. In November, while Thomas was away, they took seven of the fourteen children from the school, and others soon followed.<sup>31</sup> The adults had exercised their ultimate sanction over the civilising project. Having decided to leave, they would not allow prolonged separation from their children; and having withdrawn their acceptance of separation, there would be no Europeanisation.

Aboriginal schools operating in the new South Australian colony's capital of Adelaide in the same period encountered broadly similar issues to those at the Merri Creek school. In 1839 Lutheran missionaries Christian Teichelmann and Clamor Schurmann began working at the Native Location, a reserve for the Kurna people across the River Torrens from the town.<sup>32</sup> Kurna adults, they found, 'express themselves perfectly satisfied with the tradition of their forefathers', so the missionaries focused their Christianising efforts on the children.<sup>33</sup> At the Location school (1839-45) they taught reading, writing and religion. Schurmann noted that attendance was 'if not solely at least chiefly on account of the food' they distributed.<sup>34</sup> After classes, pupils returned to their people's camps in the Location to share their rations of rice and sugar, bringing the school into the wider Kurna economy.<sup>35</sup> The day school averaged about a dozen pupils, although numbers fluctuated because of seasonal movements, hunting trips and social and cultural activities.<sup>36</sup> Children's 'irregular attendance ... and their frequent absence of whole weeks' impeded their Europeanisation, for which the missionaries blamed the relatives.<sup>37</sup>

Less than a year into the school's operation, the missionaries and the Protector of Aborigines, Matthew Moorhouse, began considering greater separation from kin and culture. The press reported:

The chief hope of these gentlemen is, we find, decidedly in the children of the natives, and complete success as far as regards their education and civilization would be before them, if it were possible to remove the children from the influence of their parents.<sup>38</sup>

By late 1841, the three-room school's dayroom/kitchen also served as a bedroom for six children.<sup>39</sup> Several months later Moorhouse began advocating coercive measures to overcome difficulties in securing children's attendance:

I can see no means, but those of compulsion on the part of the Government, that would, at present, be likely to succeed ... The parents are great hindrances to the improvement of the children, and will continue to be so for several generations unless some decisive measures are adopted to separate in a degree, the one from the other.<sup>40</sup>

In June 1843, the Location school began operating as a boarding school, reducing access for kin, although they retained considerable influence over the children. There were reportedly no inducements for parents to give up their children to board at the school and most submitted against their wishes.<sup>41</sup> Moorhouse likely exercised the authority of his position to press for attendance, as humanitarians generally opposed

forced separation.<sup>42</sup> When four new pupils were sent voluntarily in 1843, he regarded this as noteworthy 'for all the children that had previously been received had to be taken almost in direct opposition to the wish of the parents'.<sup>43</sup>

The next year, a second school opened at Walkerville (1844-45), two miles upstream from the Location, for Meru children from the Murray region, who now lived in Adelaide for part of the year because of its novelties and economic attractions.<sup>44</sup> The Meru significantly outnumbered the local Kurna, and animosity between them and their different languages necessitated separate schools for their children. Walkerville operated in a similar fashion to the Location school: both were boarding schools, supplying students with food and following comparable curriculums.<sup>45</sup>

The two schools were consolidated in July 1845 into one institution, the Native School Establishment. The cost of its expansive buildings and its location on the northern edge of town, beside the governor's residence, demonstrated a heightened official determination to move the children closer to European society and away from their people's influence.<sup>46</sup> When completed, the government-run school - the biggest of its kind in Australia - comprised more than twenty rooms, including four classrooms, five dormitories, a mess hall, chapel and hospital. It could board as many as 150 children, but usually averaged less than half that number.<sup>47</sup>

The greater separation intended by the new premises did not halt relatives' contact or guarantee children's attendance. In the warmer months, children left with kin for other areas, continuing traditional seasonal movements, and returned to Adelaide for winter, where menial work supplemented their people's economy and students received regular food.<sup>48</sup> If Moorhouse initially used pressure to obtain pupils, he also used enticements to try to keep them. After one winter, with children anxious to leave with their kin, he requested a doll each for thirty girls 'as an inducement to remain in the School'.<sup>49</sup> When pupils who had stayed for a summer repeatedly bathed in the river, offending the townsfolk, he refused to punish them in case it drove them away.<sup>50</sup> However, most children left when kin decided. As in Melbourne, Aboriginal adults still determined withdrawal or attendance, and so were important agents in their children's separation.

Most students returned permanently to traditional life once they reached their teens: girls from age twelve to fourteen to marry, and boys from fourteen to sixteen 'to be initiated into the secrets of manhood'.<sup>51</sup> Particularly galling to humanitarians was that 'those most inclined to leave for the bush, are the most advanced in age and learning', abandoning prospects for 'civilisation'.<sup>52</sup> To counter this, Moorhouse proposed marrying students to each other to keep them within Christian settler society. He observed that boys wanted to marry from the age of fourteen 'but their wishes are always opposed by the older men' until they reached their twenties.<sup>53</sup> His plan sought to exploit this tension inherent in traditional delayed marriage. By 'holding out a distant hope, that they might possibly be able to procure some of the older girls for wives', he induced several boys to stay at the school rather than return to their people.<sup>54</sup> The expectation was that the boys would persuade girls to marry and they would then live at the Native School Establishment.<sup>55</sup> However, Moorhouse could not implement his plan: unbap-

tised, the youths could not marry by Christian rite and, as minors, there could be no civil marriage without parental consent.<sup>56</sup>

Several years later a similar marriage plan was developed, this time with the couples sent to a mission hundreds of miles away (discussed below). When relatives learned of the scheme late in 1850, they withdrew from the Native School those girls old enough to marry and therefore most at risk of removal. Moorhouse had long known that attendance ultimately depended on kin's approval or acquiescence. Now student numbers plunged, from a roll generally averaging more than fifty before removals began, to just seventeen in the months after.<sup>57</sup> Moorhouse explained that 'the decrease is accounted for in eleven being sent to the Training Institution at Port Lincoln, and the adults using greater efforts to persuade the girls not to come in, lest the boys should persuade them to go over to the Training Institution'.<sup>58</sup> Attendances rose as usual over the winter months of 1851, but the proportion of female students – previously about half the male roll – remained noticeably low, with barely any older girls in the higher grades. By year's end there were left at the school only four girls too young to marry, and numbers continued to fall. The combination of withdrawals and removals ended the school's operation in March 1852, by which time about fifty students had been sent to the mission.<sup>59</sup> As with the Merri Creek withdrawal, relatives' reaction showed their role in defining the acceptable level of separation, their ability to dramatically influence the civilising project, but also the limits of their power.

### **Child separation as asymmetrical negotiation**

Despite their Europeanising intentions, the Melbourne and Adelaide missionaries initially worked within Indigenous cultural structures. They located schools according to Aboriginal territorial or political boundaries, teaching mainly Woiwurrung children in Woiwurrung country in Melbourne and establishing separate schools for Kurna and Meru in Adelaide. Time and again, humanitarians yielded to absenteeism for traditional economic, social and cultural purposes, such as hunting, travel and ceremonies. Indeed, the schools were unlikely to have functioned for long without accommodating, at least initially, some aspects of the culture they sought to supplant.

The humanitarians increased separation in an escalation of reaction against traditional society's enduring influences. As day schools became boarding schools, kin lost day-to-day control over their children, but retained ultimate control over attendance. Relatives' ability to withdraw children temporarily or permanently indicates that their consent or acquiescence was necessary for children to remain. Indigenous adults were then important agents for and against their children's separation and Europeanisation.

These localised separations involved an asymmetrical negotiation of control over children and of personal, social and cultural access to them. Amid widening dispossession and reducing food availability, Aboriginal people may not have had sufficient economic or political strength to resist entirely humanitarians' pressure to Europeanise their children. Yet shifting between acquiescence and resistance, they defined the acceptable level of separation. Kin acceded more willingly to local, short-term separation under which they could maintain contact with their children, but when separation

threatened to become prolonged or permanent (at Merri Creek in 1847 and amid transfers from Adelaide in 1850), they withdrew their children. In this, however, their ultimate power had significant limitations.

### **Removals: 'As long as the terror lasted'**

The mass withdrawal at Merri Creek initiated a new phase for the school from 1848. Unable to minister to Woiwurrung children, the humanitarians sought students from beyond Woiwurrung territory. The Baptist mission committee, supported by Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson, appealed to Superintendent Charles La Trobe, arguing that by 'diligent means ... at the command of government, and not within the reach of the Committee, a number of children especially orphans, and half castes, could be brought together from the different tribes'.<sup>60</sup> There followed an escalation in the separation policy, from short-term, short-distance separation of local children from kin and culture, to removing more distant youngsters completely from their territory, culture and relatives' reach. 'Diligent means' involved the greater participation of government agencies, notably the Native Police, in channelling recruits to the school. Overseeing this were the Protectors.

The bulk of the students for the duration of the school's existence were *mainmeet* or foreigners to the area. Two students left at the end of 1847, Big Tommy and Jemmy, who had been brought to Melbourne from the Western District to stand trial for theft, and afterwards were transferred to the school rather than repatriated.<sup>61</sup> Three youths - two from Gippsland and one from the Wimmera - arrived at the school through the Native Police in June 1848. Another from Gippsland, the only female resident in this period, came with her two small sons late in 1848 via the Native Police.<sup>62</sup> Of the school's nine boarders in 1848, eight were foreigners - to the Woiwurrung, to settlers and mostly to each other.

The missionaries and Protectors continued to lobby La Trobe to expand removals to consolidate the viability of what was then Port Phillip's only Aboriginal school.<sup>63</sup> However, La Trobe, a longtime supporter, had lost faith in its civilising ability. He wrote that 'neither entreaty nor example nor cajolery' had succeeded in making 'the savage ... a willing participant in the advantages held out to him', and put the alternative case for 'vigorous coercion'.<sup>64</sup> For children:

nothing short of an actual and total separation, from their parents, and natural associates, and Education, at a distance from the haunts and beyond the influence of the habits and example of their tribe would hold out a reasonable hope of their ultimate civilization and Christianization.<sup>65</sup>

His argument illustrated the impossibilities of the missionary task: 'actual coercive measures have never been tried', he proposed, but acknowledged this was 'not consistent with the spirit of the age'.<sup>66</sup> In short, La Trobe argued that forcible removal was necessary to civilise Aboriginal children but, being an uncivilized practice itself, was unacceptable.

Coercive measures, however, were already crucial to the Merri Creek mission's recruitment and operation. First, the bulk of the students from 1848 had been delivered through the agencies of colonial state power, particularly the Native Police. Then, once at the school, the students, although not overtly held against their will, were not free to leave. As *mainmeet*, without traditional owners' permission to enter their territory, they were intruders on Wurundjeri land. Such an incursion could, in Aboriginal society, be severely punished, even by death – a fact of which the students were highly conscious.<sup>67</sup> As long as they stayed with Europeans, however, they were reasonably assured of safety: the mission and town served as a sanctuary in seemingly hostile territory.<sup>68</sup> But should they have tried to return to their country, there was a real or perceived danger in any number of the Aboriginal territories they would cross. The effect was to bind the *mainmeet* to the school and to Europeanisation. Removed students were therefore free but unfree, confined without appearing to be confined. Fear was their invisible restraint and Aboriginal law the unseen authority that enforced their removals.

This is illustrated in the cases of Big Tommy and Jemmy, the original pair of *mainmeet* students. Tommy became 'greatly frightened, sick with fear' after seeing a Woiwurrung man watching him from behind a tree.<sup>69</sup> The daughter of new schoolmaster, Francis Edgar, wrote:

Papa always took advantage of such circumstances to impress upon the boys the folly of running away to the bush again ... He entreated them to stay under white men's protection, and make civilised society their friend. He warned them not to go off alone...for fear of what might befall [sic] them. And as long as the terror lasted, the boys shunned the bush altogether.<sup>70</sup>

Edgar clearly understood, exploited and indeed heightened this fear to keep students removed for Europeanisation. Soon after, in October 1848, Tommy disappeared and was presumed murdered. Assistant Protector Thomas was told he had been lured from the mission by local Aboriginal youths, killed and his body thrown into the Yarra. The belief that he had been murdered caused alarm among the other *mainmeet*.<sup>71</sup> Tommy's kinsman, Jemmy, then repeatedly expressed his wish to return to the Western District. He eventually found a settler willing to take him, and Edgar acceded: 'It was thought desirable to allow him to go, or probably he would have made a renewed attempt to reach there and perhaps got murdered by the blacks in crossing the country'.<sup>72</sup> Edgar in effect admitted he had no way of stopping Jemmy, and made no active attempt to help him or constrain him. Verbal persuasion aside, distance and fear of crossing foreign territory were the only real power Edgar had for keeping his *mainmeet* students in school, and therefore for pursuing his civilising and Christianising aims. Once the pupil believed he could travel safely, the missionary was powerless to hold him.

The fear that held foreign students at Merri Creek reveals the narrowness of colonial discourse on the coercion employed in child removals. Authorities such as La Trobe framed coercion in terms of a demonstrable *act* of force, obscuring the enduring coercion in the *state* of removal. Delivering students through the agencies of colonial law invested the visible act of removal with a semblance of legitimacy, as part of legal process

rather than the unreasonable restraint of a free subject. Once this initial act of removal had been normalised, the coercion underlying the state of removal could be ignored. Importantly, Aboriginal people self-enforced their restriction of movement: it could then be construed as free choice or an *inter se* cultural matter rather than restraint.

Officials and missionaries nonetheless recognised and exploited the coercive possibilities of Aboriginal territoriality to pursue their civilising aims. It was well known that Aboriginal intruders into another people's country risked severe punishment.<sup>73</sup> The humanitarians also understood that territoriality presented a substantial obstacle to dislocated individuals' repatriation, and used this knowledge when lobbying for pupils from distant regions.<sup>74</sup> By using removed youths' 'terror' of punishment for trespass to bind them to the school, the humanitarians exploited their Aboriginal enculturation – their acceptance of territoriality upheld by Indigenous law – as a means to restrain them for cultural de-Aboriginalisation. This was possible only where and while territoriality remained strongly upheld, through severe enforcement by those maintaining traditional lifestyles and laws, and through fear of retribution among those who transgressed them. The distinctive feature of these early removals – enforcement through Aboriginal law – could not have been possible, say, in Victoria from the 1860s, once greater dispossession had irreparably ruptured traditional life.<sup>75</sup>

The students had a range of responses to overcome their dislocation. The sole girl eventually left the mission and joined a Woiwurrung group living traditionally – an option not available to *mainmeet* males, who could not have joined another patrilineal group.<sup>76</sup> For male students, travelling with bullock drivers was reputedly the favoured means of returning home under European protection. One tried to establish a place for himself in settler society.<sup>77</sup> Despite their differences, all the departures involved a strategy that minimised the risk of punishment for territorial trespass. Those who attempted repatriation did so without humanitarians' help.<sup>78</sup>

As they left, the students were not replaced. The school's last intake had been in April 1849. That year the Protectorate system was abolished, dismantling the structure that had championed and overseen *mainmeet* youths' removal to Merri Creek. Early in 1851, with no pupils, the school closed.

In South Australia, preparations began in 1849 to send students from Adelaide's Native School to a mission hundreds of miles from their kin and country. Protector Matthew Moorhouse sent five student couples – one married by a bishop in the presence of the governor – as servants to settlers at Port Lincoln, on the Eyre Peninsula, as a trial of marriage and removal 'from the influence of parents and friends'.<sup>79</sup> They were then ready to join missionary Matthew Hale's 'training institution' Poonindie, near Port Lincoln, when it opened in September 1850. Moorhouse endorsed the project because integration schemes in Adelaide, such as apprenticeships, had failed due to enticements from kin. He wrote:

it is my decided opinion that every attempt will fail unless the children are removed from the influence of parents and friends. This Training Institution would accomplish a separation ... None would be taken against their wishes,

but I am of opinion, when the institution is formed, the difficulty of procuring volunteers will be overcome when they find that marriage will be allowed.<sup>80</sup>

Early marriage, Moorhouse accurately predicted, was the key to secure willing removal from kin and country, neatly overcoming humanitarians' longstanding objection to coercive removal.

Hale, an Anglican archdeacon, publicly announced his Poonindie settlement in August 1850. Its initial residents were the five couples and one boy, with other students to follow. He envisaged the mission as supplementing the Native School's teaching with agricultural learning while continuing 'religious instruction and moral training'.<sup>81</sup> Importantly, it was two hundred miles from Adelaide by sea and about four hundred by land, across the territories of several Indigenous peoples. Its residents went there willingly, Hale assured Adelaide residents, but he explained:

it is known from experience that natives who have been brought up as strangers to each other are by no means forward to associate together in the wild state. There is therefore scarcely any reason to fear that our people will ever wish to forsake the institution with a view to join the Port Lincoln natives in their bush life. It is hoped also that they may be prevented from making any attempt to return to this part of the colony overland: the fear which they have of the Port Lincoln natives on account of their wilder and more daring character will go far in deterring them from making this experiment.<sup>82</sup>

Through Poonindie's distant location, Hale (like the Port Phillip humanitarians) deliberately engaged Indigenous territoriality, enforced by fear of violence, as the coercive means to prevent removed youths quitting the mission. They may have gone there willingly but could not so willingly leave. The emphasis that Moorhouse and Hale attached to the students' relocation being consensual further illustrates the narrow consideration of coercion as a demonstrable act of force, as seen at Port Phillip. Having normalised the *act* of removal as voluntary, it was possible to ignore the coercive nature of the *state* of removal.<sup>83</sup>

Doubts must remain about the ethics and legitimacy of an agreement by adolescents, without adult consent, to what would generally be a long-term or permanent commitment to mission life and severance from kin and country.<sup>84</sup> The students may also not have understood or accepted the permanence of their removal, raising queries about how well informed was their consent. In Poonindie's first months, the initial inmates asked to visit friends in Adelaide. Hale granted permission, as long as they reimbursed him the fare. He could be confident they would return. For one reason, they would almost certainly be under Moorhouse's supervision in Adelaide.<sup>85</sup> Also, their visits were in summer, so relatives were less likely to be in town to encourage them to abscond. Most importantly, no couple travelled together: four boys visited Adelaide early in 1851 while the partner of each remained behind, then their partners visited in November-December.<sup>86</sup> With their reason for relocation – sexual/marriage partners – still in Poonindie, they remained bound to the mission. Moorhouse wrote of one group:

'They left their wives behind and after being a fortnight in town, they expressed anxiety to return'.<sup>87</sup> The visits, outwardly showing the removed youths' freedom to travel, in fact masked restraint of their movement: distance and fear of punishment under Aboriginal law prevented independent travel by land; they had to sail, requiring an authority's money and permission to board ship; they were most likely supervised; and their partners remained as surety for their return. Their visit, like their removal, was both negotiated and coercively restricted.

Nonetheless, one absconded. Others, however, persuaded friends to join them at Poonindie.<sup>88</sup> The visits thus served as a recruitment device for removal, satisfying Moorhouse's hope that more students would join the mission 'when they hear favourable accounts of those already there'.<sup>89</sup> For many, going to Poonindie was motivated by a desire to be with their people – partners, young relatives, friends – rather than separated from them. In all, fifty-one youths and children were sent from the Native School to Poonindie.

### **Child removal and cultural hybridity**

The Melbourne and Adelaide cases reveal early colonial child removals to have been culturally hybridised, even though they were instigated and enacted by Europeans intent on Europeanisation. Frustrated in their attempts to civilise and Christianise, missionaries sought greater separation and ultimately removal of Indigenous children from kin, but lacked the capacity for compulsion. Instead they had the support of like-minded protectors able to exercise the persuasive power of the colonial state, and progressively the state's hand weighed more towards subtle coercion. With separations, it had been the authority of the position of Protector that had allowed Moorhouse to obtain pupils 'almost in direct opposition to the wish of the parents'; and that the Woiwurrung had evaded by reclaiming their children at Merri Creek in Thomas's absence. Now with removals, it was again government that commanded the 'diligent means' to orchestrate the act of removal sought by the Melbourne Baptists and that administered the transfer of students to South Australia's Poonindie mission.

In this, however, Indigenous people were not simply passive 'victims' or vigorous 'resisters', but were integrally engaged through their culture and agency. Localised separations, as we have seen, operated within Indigenous cultural structures and were heavily reliant on Indigenous people's agency in an asymmetrical negotiation. Subsequent removals were not simply separations of greater distance but dislocation from kin and country, imposing culturally concealed coercion – fear of punishment for trespass under Aboriginal law – to enforce a state of removal to uphold mission attendance. Removal tactics also engaged individual agency at interstices of apparent tension in traditional cultural structures: humanitarians' marriage plans played on frustration inherent in delayed traditional marriage; and enforcement of dislocation exploited fear from the threat of violence that maintained territorial stability. Removal from Indigenous cultural influences was paradoxically pervaded by them.

This is not to suggest that Aboriginal people were responsible for child separations and removals. They could not fully resist pressure from missionaries and, more particu-

larly, colonial authorities to civilise and Christianise their children, yet they and their culture helped shape the manner of their cultural colonisation. In the campaign to persuade Indigenous people of the superiority of the coloniser's way of life, the colonised's way of life was acknowledged and accommodated, enlisted and exploited.

## Endnotes

1 'Separation', as used here, refers to the temporary and permeable distancing of children physically, and therefore culturally, from their kin – such as at a local boarding school allowing parental access. 'Removal' here refers to long-term or permanent transfer to a distant location where relatives had no contact. Such a distinction, however, was not necessarily used during the period under discussion, a point that should be borne in mind when reading excerpts quoted here from contemporary documents.

2 Exceptions include Anna Haebich, *Broken Circles: Fragmenting Indigenous Families 1800-2000* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000), although her primary example, the Flinders Island settlement in the 1830s, involves comparatively little discussion of separation and removal; and Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), which in part considers separation and removal on a Victorian mission from the 1860s. Brief accounts also appear in Peter Read, *A Rape of the Soul so Profound* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 18-23; Tikka Jan Wilson and Link-Up, *In the Best Interest of the Child?* (Canberra: Aboriginal History, 1997), 49-50; Andrew Hall, *A Brief History of the Laws, Policies and Practices in South Australia which led to the Removal of Many Aboriginal Children* (Adelaide: SA Department of Family and Community Services, 1997), 3-9.

3 Among examples encountered during this research, William McNair and Hilary Rumley, *Pioneer Aboriginal Mission: The Work of Wesleyan Missionary John Smithies in the Swan River Colony 1840-1855* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1981) do not identify the issue. John Harris, *One Blood: 200 Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope* (Sutherland, NSW: Albatross Books, 1990) mentions abduction at a NSW mission in the 1830s. J. Brook and J.L. Kohen, *The Parramatta Native Institution and the Black Town: A History* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1991) note child separation as an issue but do not explore it. Likewise, Peggy Brock and Doreen Kartinyeri, *Poonindie: The Rise and Destruction of an Aboriginal Agricultural Community* (Adelaide: South Australian Government Printer, 1989) discuss relocation from Adelaide without interrogating it. In fairness, these works predate the rise in awareness in the 1990s of the issue of child removal.

4 Read, *A Rape of the Soul*, 18-20; Wilson and Link-Up, *In the Best Interest of the Child?*, 49-50.

5 Shelley to Macquarie, 8 April 1814, HRA I: 8, 370-71.

6 Brook and Kohen, *The Parramatta Native Institution*, 60-68.

7 A notable exception was Lancelot Threlkeld who worked principally with Aboriginal adults at Lake Macquarie mission (1826-41): Harris, *One Blood*, 55-58.

8 On Wellington Valley, see Harris, *One Blood*, 61-74; J.J. Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous: A History of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales* (Sydney: Southwood Press, 1989), 24-26. On the Yarra Village Mission, see G.M. Langhorne to CS, monthly reports, 1837-39, HRV 2A, 208-236 passim; Edmund J.B. Foxcroft, *Australian Native Policy: Its History, Especially in Victoria* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1941), 39-49; On Moreton Bay, see Harris, *One Blood*, 106-14. On Swan River, see McNair and Rumley, *Pioneer Aboriginal Mission*, 42-49, 85-86; Harris, *One Blood*, 270-78.

9 This was the case at the Parramatta Native Institution, the Melbourne and Adelaide schools, Wellington Valley and Moreton Bay. Lack of food was the specific reason that prevented a school opening at Stradbroke Island mission (1843-47). On these last three, see Harris, *One Blood*, 62-63, 111-12, 117-18.

10 As well as the Melbourne and Adelaide schools, this was so at Wellington Valley and Swan River. See John Ferry, 'The Failure of the New South Wales Missions to the Aborigines before 1845', *Aboriginal History* 3, no. 1 (1979), 29; Harris, *One Blood*, 273, 276.

11 As well as in Melbourne and Adelaide, this occurred at Wellington Valley and Swan River. See Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous*, 25; Ferry, 'The Failure of the New South Wales Missions', 28-29; McNair and Rumley, *Pioneer Aboriginal Mission*, 95-96, 103-04, 112.

12 N.J.B. Plomley, *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1987), 96-97, 619-620; Haebich, *Broken Circles*, 104-10.

13 Harris, *One Blood*, 68-69; Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous*, 24-25; Read, *A Rape of the Soul*, 18-20; Ferry, 'The Failure of the New South Wales Missions', 29.

14 McNair and Rumley, *Pioneer Aboriginal Mission*, 110-12, 125-26, 131-42; Harris, *One Blood*, 277-78.

15 Rev. John Ham, John Lush and Robert Kerr to C.J. LaTrobe, 6 November 1845, and W. Thomas to LaTrobe, 12 November 1845, Public Record Office Victoria (hereafter PROV) VPRS 19, unit 86, item 46/1632.

16 Assistant Protector William Thomas was repeatedly called on to remove Aboriginal people who camped and sought food on what was by then deemed private land. See Thomas to Robinson, 12 March 1841, PROV VPRS 11, unit 7, item 375; 29 November 1841 and 10 October 1842, PROV VPRS 11, unit 8, items 413 and 462. The land boom from 1838 that alienated large areas around the Merri Creek reserve and beyond is detailed in Andrew Lemon, *The Northcote Side of the River* (North Melbourne: Hargreen, 1983), 6-12.

17 Thomas to LaTrobe, 5 May 1846, PROV VPRS 19, unit 86, item 46/1632.

18 'Report of the Aboriginal Mission at the Merri Creek', *Port Phillip Patriot* (hereafter PPP), 14 May 1846, 4.

19 The Woiwurrung language group (called the 'Yarra tribe' or 'Melbourne tribe' by early settlers) comprises several clans, including the Wurundjeri willam, traditional owners of the area around central Melbourne and to its north and east, including the Merri Creek school site. Clans of the Daungwurrung or Taungurong language group (the 'Goulburn tribe'), their northern neighbours, had close relations with the Woiwurrung. Diane E. Barwick, 'Mapping the Past: An Atlas of Victorian Clans 1835-1904', *Aboriginal History* 8, no. 2 (1984); Ian D. Clark, *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: An Historical Atlas of Western and Central Victoria, 1800-1900* (Melbourne: Department of Geography and Environmental Science, Monash University, 1990), 364-86.

20 On pupils' people, ages and numbers: Thomas to LaTrobe, 5 May 1846; Thomas, quarterly report, 1 September 1846, PROV VPRS 4410, unit 3, item 89. On school operations: 'Report of the Aboriginal Mission at the Merri Creek'; 'The Yarra Aboriginal School', PPP, 20 November 1846, 2; 'Yarra Aboriginal Mission', *Port Phillip Gazette* (hereafter PPG), 26 May 1847, 2.

21 Lucy Anna Edgar, *Among the Black Boys: Being the History of an Attempt at Civilising Some Young Aborigines of Australia* (London: Emily Faithfull, 1865), 2-3; 'Aboriginal school on the Merri Creek', PPG, 18 March 1846, 2; Ian Clark and Toby Heydon, *A Bend in the Yarra: A History of the Merri Creek Protectorate Station and Merri Creek Aboriginal School 1841-1851* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 60.

22 Thomas, journal of proceedings, 1 December 1847, PROV VPRS 4410, unit 4, item 102.

23 'Aboriginal School on the Merri Creek'; Thomas to LaTrobe, 5 May 1846; Yarra Aboriginal Mission report, 5 November 1846, PROV VPRS 19, unit 86, item 46/1632.

24 'Report of the Aboriginal Mission at the Merri Creek'. Similarly, 'Aboriginal school on the Merri Creek'.

25 This also included reducing Aboriginal authority and activities around the school by forbidding 'law fights' (dispute resolution by conflict) in the area and trying to limit contact with the Native Police. Thomas, journal of proceedings, 31 May 1847 and 1 September 1847, PROV VPRS 4410, unit 4, items 97 and 99.

26 'Yarra Aboriginal Mission'; Thomas, 31 May 1847, 1 September 1847 and 1 December 1847.

27 Ibid.

28 Thomas, 1 December 1847.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid; Thomas, journal of proceedings, 31 May 1848, PROV VPRS 4410, unit 4, item 106.

31 Thomas, 1 December 1847; Thomas to Robinson, 27 December 1847, PROV VPRS 11, unit 10, item 680.

32 Clans of the Kurna language group (the 'Adelaide tribe') are traditional owners of the Adelaide plains, between the Gulf of St Vincent and the Adelaide Hills, as far north as Yorke Peninsula. See *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* vol.1, ed. David Horton (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1994), 539-40.

33 'Mission to the Aborigines', *Southern Australian*, 7 June 1842, 3.

34 C. Schurmann to G.F. Angas, 3 April 1840, in Edwin A. Schurmann, *I'd Rather Dig Potatoes: Clamor Schurmann and the Aborigines of South Australia 1838-1853* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1987), 92-98.

35 Moorhouse, June 1843 quarterly report, State Records of South Australia (hereafter SRSA) GRG 24/6/1843/812.

36 Schurmann to Angas, 3 April 1840; Schurmann, diary entries, December 1839 - January 1840, in E.A. Schurmann, 80-84; Christian Teichelmann, *Aborigines of South Australia: Illustrative and Explanatory Notes of the Manners, Customs, Habits and Superstitions of the Natives of South Australia* (Adelaide: Committee of the South Australian Wesleyan Methodist Auxiliary Society, 1841 [facsimile edition: Adelaide: Public Library of South Australia, 1962]), 7; Moorhouse, report, March 1843, SRSA GRG 24/6/1843/315.

37 Schurmann to Angas, 3 April 1840.

38 'The Natives', *Southern Australian*, 14 August 1840, 3.

39 'The Natives and the Native Location', *Southern Australian*, 9 November 1841, 4.

40 Moorhouse to CS, 10 February 1842, SRSA GRG 24/6/1842/32.

41 Edward John Eyre, *Journals of Expedition of Discovery into Central Australia* vol.2 (London: T & W Boone, 1845 [facsimile edition: Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964]), 436-38. Later, in annual celebrations of the queen's birthday each May, parents were rewarded with a blanket if their child attended the Native School.

42 'Suggestions for the Christianization of the Aborigines', *The Southern Australian*, 29 November 1842, 2.

43 Moorhouse, December 1843 quarterly report, SRSA GRG 24/6/1844/20.

44 Passing references in Moorhouse's reports indicate the country of the 'Murray tribe' corresponds to that of the Meru language group - land around the Murray River upstream from Lake Alexandrina to east of Lake Bonney.

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- 45 Moorhouse, March 1843 quarterly report, SRSA GRG 24/6/1843/495; June 1844 quarterly report, SRSA GRG 24/6/1844/712; September 1845 quarterly report, SRSA GRG 24/6/1845/1247; Eyre, 432-433.
- 46 Robert Foster, 'The Aborigines Location in Adelaide: South Australia's First "Mission" to the Aborigines', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia* 28, no. 1 (December 1990): 11.
- 47 Moorhouse, September 1845 quarterly report; 'Native Sunday School Report', 22 April 1847, *South Australian Government Gazette* (hereafter SAGG), 27 May 1847; Moorhouse, 31 January 1849, letterbook, SRSA GRG 52/7/1.
- 48 Moorhouse, September 1846 quarterly report, SRSA GRG 24/6/1846/1223; Moorhouse to Robinson, 10 April 1849, in *Documents in the History of Aboriginal Education in New South Wales*, ed. J.J. Fletcher (Sydney: Southwood Press, 1989), 37-38.
- 49 Moorhouse to CS, 3 September 1846, SRSA GRG 24/6/1846/1068.
- 50 Moorhouse, 18 February 1846, letterbook, SRSA GRG 52/7/1.
- 51 Moorhouse to Robinson, 10 April 1849.
- 52 Moorhouse, December 1846 quarterly report, SRSA GRG 24/6/1847/125½.
- 53 Moorhouse, September 1846 quarterly report.
- 54 Moorhouse, December 1846 quarterly report.
- 55 Moorhouse to Robinson, 10 April 1849.
- 56 Advocate General to CS, 7 May 1846, SRSA GRG 24/6/1846/567; Moorhouse, December 1846 quarterly report; Moorhouse to Robinson, 10 April 1849; Jennifer Hunt, 'Schools for Aboriginal children in the Adelaide district 1836-1852' (BA Honours, University of Adelaide, 1971), 61-62.
- 57 Moorhouse, quarterly reports for June 1849; September 1849, December 1849 and March 1850, SRSA GRG 24/6/1849/1907½, 24/6/1850/82½ and 24/6/1850/820; June 1850, SAGG, 18 July 1850; September 1850, SRSA GRG 24/6/1850/2257; December 1850, SAGG, 30 January 1851; March 1851, SRSA GRG 24/6/1851/1180.
- 58 Moorhouse, December 1850 quarterly report.
- 59 Moorhouse, quarterly reports for June 1851 to June 1852, SRSA GRG 24/6/1851/2182, 24/6/1851/3163, 24/6/1852/275, 24/6/1852/1711, 24/6/1852/1950; Hale, report, 1 December 1851, SRSA GRG 24/6/1851/3684.
- 60 Reported in Robinson, 1847 and 1848 annual reports, in *The Papers of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate* vol.4, ed. Ian D. Clark (Ballarat: Heritage Matters, 2001), 124, 144.
- 61 Thomas, journal of proceedings, 1 September 1847.
- 62 Thomas to Robinson, 12 June 1848, PROV VPRS 11, unit 11, item 696; Edgar, *Among the Black Boys*, 35-38.
- 63 Robinson to LaTrobe, 23 January 1849, and Rev. A.H. Ramsay to LaTrobe, 23 January 1849, PROV VPRS 44/P, unit 669, items 49/208 and 49/209; Robinson, 1848 annual report.
- 64 LaTrobe to CS, 18 November 1848, in Appendix to the Report from the Select Committee on the Aborigines and Protectorate, NSW V&P, 1849, Vol.2.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Clark, *Aboriginal Languages and Clans*, 10-14.
- 68 Edgar, *Among the Black Boys*, 36.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid. Big Tommy should not be confused with younger Thomas Bungalene, also then at Merri Creek.

71 Thomas to Robinson, 31 October 1848 and 11 November 1848, PROV VPRS 11, unit 11, items 707 and 708; F.S. Edgar, report, 1 January 1849, PROV VPRS 44/P, unit 669, item 49/209; L.A. Edgar, 65-71.

72 F.S. Edgar, report, 1 January 1849.

73 Robinson, for example, wrote in his early months in Port Phillip of violence towards Indigenous trespassers: see Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 49-52. The Baptist mission committee had also acknowledged the danger of hostility towards students imported from far afield: see 'Yarra Aboriginal Mission'. La Trobe also spoke of these dangers to Thomas, and Thomas repeatedly warned Woiwurrung and Bunwurrung groups against harming released *mainmeet* prisoners at Merri Creek, including Tommy and Jemmy after their arrival at the school: see Thomas, journal of proceedings, 5 June 1843, PROV VPRS 4410, unit 3, item 76; Thomas, 1 September 1847.

74 For example, Edgar referred explicitly to the dangers of travel in Tommy's and Jemmy's cases. Thomas also reported of the fear of freed *mainmeet* prisoners Warree and Koort Kirrup after local Aboriginal people expressed hostility towards them and of the difficulties this posed to their returning home. See Thomas, 5 June 1843; Thomas, monthly reports for March and June 1846, PROV VPRS 4410, unit 3, items 85 and 87.

75 Michael Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1979), 171-72.

76 In patrilineal groups such as the Kulin peoples (including the Woiwurrung), women married exogamously while men lived with the clan into which they were born. For males to join another group would have threatened patriliney and patrilineal transmission of land, resources and religious knowledge. See A.W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1904 [facsimile edition: Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1996]), 252-57.

77 L.A. Edgar, *Among the Black Boys*, 51, 90-96, 101, 109; Marie Hansen Fels, *Good Men and True: The Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District 1837-1853* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), 90, 210.

78 Most left secretly in the night. See Edgar, *Among the Black Boys*, 51, 101-04.

79 Moorhouse, December 1849 quarterly report. Similarly, Matthew Hale to Governor E.H.F. Young, 17 August 1850, in Hale, *The Aborigines of Australia, Being an Account of the Institution for their Education at Poonindie, in South Australia* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889), 5-8.

80 Moorhouse to CS, 26 June 1850, SRSA GRG 24/6/1850/1346.

81 Hale, 'Prospectus of an institution about to be formed at Port Lincoln for the religious instruction and moral training of Aboriginal natives' *Adelaide Observer*, 31 August 1850, 4; Hale, report, 26 June 1851, SRSA GRG 24/6/1851/1924; Hale, 1 December 1851.

82 Hale, 'Prospectus'. Such fear appears justified: some months later, three Aboriginal men from Yorke Peninsula were convicted of the murder of an Aboriginal man travelling overland from Adelaide to Port Lincoln. See Moorhouse, June 1851 quarterly report.

83 The anticipated threat of violent enforcement of territoriality that underpinned this coercion may have passed within a few years of Poonindie's opening, as local Indigenous people began joining the mission from 1853 and mission residents took outside work. See Brock and Kartinyeri, *Poonindie*, 9-30 passim. Nonetheless, the initial intention was to restrict movement from the mission.

84 Only four of the youths sent from Adelaide were discharged or absconded. Most others lived at Poonindie until their death - about half its residents died in the late 1850s from illness - although records from 1871 onwards indicate the population by then was more mobile. *Ibid*, 23-38.

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85 Moorhouse, December 1850 quarterly report. Moorhouse's reports show he was clearly in contact with the youths during the visits, suggesting they were under his care, most likely staying at the Native School Establishment where he had his office, where there was ample accommodation and where they had contact with students whom they recruited to Poonindie (discussed below).

86 Moorhouse, March 1851 quarterly report; Hale, 1 December 1851.

87 Moorhouse, March 1851 quarterly report.

88 Hale, 26 June 1851; Hale, 1 December 1851; Hale, *Aborigines of Australia*, 28.

89 Moorhouse, December 1849 quarterly report.