conversations

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Summer 2006

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Introduction to Conversations

The Summer 2006 issue of *Conversations* is a truly international volume with work by authors whose backgrounds and themes cross borders between Australia, Asia and Europe. Using both personal and public voices, the writers gathered here look to the past, present and future in their engagement with local and global issues. For the reader, the result is a collection that entertains and inspires.

Two poems excerpted from accomplished poet Adrian Caesar's forthcoming collection *High Wire* (Pandanus Books, 2006) give readers an opportunity to experience the work of a mature and assured writer implementing a witty and moving observational tone. New work by Anita Patel and Carol Jenkins further indicate that the poetic voice is alive and well in Australia.

In 'How to Survive', the highly regarded oral historian Diana Giese provides a compelling oral history account of Sorathy Pouk Michell's experiences in 1970s Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. Concluding with the anguish of displacement through immigration, this memoir asks important questions about the meaning of home and family.

'How to Survive' is followed by a series of original, amusing and thought-provoking articles by the late Minoru Hokari. The articles describe the social, cultural and ritual life of the Gurindji of the Northern Territory and place that ancient culture in the context of a rapidly changing modern world. Translated from the Japanese and originally written for a Japanese audience, these articles provide a compelling insight into Japanese perceptions of Australia and are a powerful introduction to the thought of an exceptional historian and social commentator.

Jan Borrie's evocative and sensual piece 'Snow' provides a layered environment in which to expose the senses and Subhash Jaireth's short fiction 'Cricket Ball', reminds us why we love summer and, more fundamentally, why cricket is important.

In this issue, we are also delighted to present the second in a series of remarkable lectures, *The Allen Martin Memorial Lecture*. The 2005 lecture, delivered by Professor Catherine Hall of University College London, is informed by postcolonial, transnational and global perspectives. Exploring the writing of national histories in 19th-centry Britain, this essay focuses on Thomas Babington Macaulay, the most celebrated historian of 19th-centruy England.

Brij V. Lal
Ian Templeman

conversations *poetry*

Adrian Caesar

Night Sailing

When I was a child I made the bed
a rocking boat that would sail
through the night, and I so rapt
became a traveller to a place
where all was safe beyond the
clasp of fear's embrace.

But then as now the spell of sleep
was broken by insomnia
the shadow waves of wind tossed trees
stormed about my battered hull
and I was threatened by the ink
of death's commanding signature.

Daylight meant calm seas and green
relief to that young boy
but now by day or night the sailing
isn't plain. I dream or wake
to strange deeps of middle age
I don't know how to navigate.

Here there is no magic,
to dream of romance means
you're sadly immature
and hoping to be safe, the years
bring further fear not sapience:
the ship adrift on a dead lee shore.

And now it seems too late
to learn the mariner's skills
of binding knot and cunning steerage,
the grizzled wisdom that leads
to the Master's or the Pilot's ticket,
a store of moral stories.

The knowledge is missing;
there's no manual for deliverance:
the next port looks terminal.
My only plan to steady and trim,
plot a course as long as I can,
keep from capsize, sink or swim.

The Ageing Pedagogue

Surrounded by books and records
he sits in a haze of smoke and dust.
In the bathroom damp is rising
pipes are organs that groan with rust.

We listen to the latest rock bands,
classical vinyl too sad,
he says his long collection is evidence
of a life gone bad.

Even the car, he jokes, leaks water
sponging pools from the passenger seat;
the rear light is gone he says,
singing the darkness of his retreat.

The eminent scholar believing nothing
is the proper creed to teach,
finds a knee trembler in the doorway
preferable to articulate speech.

Is this what aging romance comes to
the stranded only son,
who boasts to erstwhile acolytes
he still weeps for his long-dead mum.

Anita Patel

Raising Ravana

for Dad

This poem refers to characters from the great Hindu epic the *Ramayana*. Ravana is the demon king of Alangka who captured Princess Sita from her husband Rama. Sita was rescued from the kingdom of Alangka (Sri Langka) by Rama with the help of the valiant monkey general Hanoman. In the final battle between good and evil Hanoman sets fire to Ravana's kingdom with his tail. Children in Hindu communities all over the world look forward to the annual festivals of Dasehra and Diwali. During Dasehra the *Ramayana* is acted publicly and the paper figure of the arch demon Ravana is destroyed in a bonfire. Good triumphs over evil and the return of Rama and Sita from exile is celebrated by Diwali, the festival of lights.

My father
raised Ravana
in papier mache glory —
gaudy painted
ten faced monster —
on guy ropes
in a Kenyan park

Ravana
three storeys tall
Ogre king of Alangka

and my father
a small boy — Hanoman
monkey smart and wily,
leaping from the walls of Langka
into the abyss of his future

setting fire to
his past with his tail.

Tsunami

Tsunami
such a pretty word
trips off
the tongue
saltily
in pleasing phonemes
(Japanese
— you know —
like *sakura* and
kimono).
Ink frilled waves
on fine rice paper:
an oriental image
as delicate as
porcelain
as elegant as
a tea ceremony.

Tsunami
a slash
of syllables
— tabloid terrible —
a crackle of images
ravage
our screens.

The land rips
like ink washed paper
(pulped and shredded
patterned with death)
lives shatter like
dropped teacups
spilling
precious liquid
in the sand.

Carol Jenkins

Nangaku's Portrait

In Nangaku's 'Portrait of
Six Poetesses' they all
seem to be talking or listening.

One's hand is so tiny
how could she write?

Another more rounded
in the face
is only lightly burdened
by a roll of straw.

Navy Divers

Straight ahead, past the rock platform

there is a flotilla of
small boats, with its swaying
company of men encased in obsidian rubber,
like basalt spurs
that have yet to settle, they rock about
in a geological sequence
sometimes a black figure
stands up, from here I see
glints of feldspar
and iron pyrites.
Then something volcanic
happens — the water seething white
the sail boats seem nervous and
the basalt moves off

I have never seen
basalt move so fast.

Mohan Ramanan

Interviews

The tentative peeping in
    And the shuffling sitting down,
The bird-like sharp glances at each one of us,
    The members of the Inquisition
    The reassurance after,
    And then the questions begin,
And what have we here —
    Only confusion
And shame-faced demurrals,
    A comprehensive demoralisation
And then the hasty and apologetic retreat

Canine piece

Have you seen the canine procession
    Precision marching
Through the streets — beats the soviets hollow
    In their speed —
Tongues out, salivating wondrously,
    Preoccupied Spinoza-like,
Progressing towards the consummation
    Either to that mother of all conclaves
Or to the nearest lamp-post
    Where each attains to the peace that passes all understanding

conversations *essay*

We are pleased to present here the text of the 2005 Allan Martin Lecture, delivered by Professor Catherine Hall under the auspices of the History Program, Research School of Social Sciences in the Coombs Lecture Theatre, The Australian National University on 5 April 2005.

The text is also available in booklet form from Pandanus Books.

Catherine Hall

Writing histories of difference: new histories of nation and culture

Let me first thank the Research School of Social Sciences for inviting me to be here at ANU this week and to give this lecture. It is a great honour and I much appreciate it. It is a pleasure to be back in Australia, and to visit Canberra for the first time.

My subject this evening is writing the history of difference. In the 1960s and 70s with the dominance of the Cold War and the influence of Marxist historiography many historians writing in Britain and the west were preoccupied with the dynamics of class as central to processes of historical change. The civil rights movement and the development of black power, the women's movement, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the spread of globalisation, the flowering of neo-conservatism and new forms of empire, the re-emergence of conflict between Christianity and Islam, have changed for ever our global world. Difference — the many axes of difference along which power relations are articulated in any given society, the many and varied constructions of 'us' and 'them', of 'we' and 'they', of those who are included and those who are not, of those with power and those without — seems critical to historical writing in a postcolonial and neo-colonial world. Those differences — of class and gender, of 'race' and ethnicity, of sexuality and generation — are all constitutive of the making of identities, of social order and forms of rule. All play their part in the complex tracing of patterns of historical change: there is no single logic.

Questions of difference, its definition and regulation, were (and are) central to the making of both nations and empires.

Allan Martin — in honour of whose memory this lecture is taking place — was a major contributor to the making of an Australian national historiography both in his two celebrated biographies, of Henry Parkes and Robert Menzies, which tell the stories of the delineation of distinctive Australian political traditions, and in his contribution to the making of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, a project which is in itself critical to nation building. In his biography of Parkes he was of course well aware of the significance of the imperial connection, stressing the ways in which Parkes built upon English radicalism and articulated it to a new colonial world, but questions of empire, race and ethnicity were not his primary focus. Yet the seeds of a different generation's sets of issues are usually to be found in work which has gone before. It is in this spirit that in my lecture this evening I want to elaborate on the webs of connection between Britain and its empire in the 19th century and argue that history writing in the 21st century needs to cross boundaries and be transnational if it is to respond to the challenges of the world we now all live in. I am well aware that there are historians in this room who are already doing that work — so I hope I will not be seen (in the proverbial English phrase) as bringing coals to Newcastle. But the multiple tasks of provincialising Europe (in Dipesh Chakrabarty's felicitous phrase), of de-centring Britain in relation to its empire, and of reconfiguring national historiographies, grasping the extent to which nations are made through the construction of boundaries, whether that of Australia, India, Jamaica or Britain, is going to take many hands and has to be a collaborative venture.

When I first came to Australia in the early 1990s, Australian national historiography was in full flower and questions of empire seriously out of fashion. Australia's postcolonial moment demanded both a national historiography and an engagement with 'the great Australian silence'. There was little space for reflecting back on

colonialism, empire and the 'mother country'. In Britain a new interest in empire developed in the 1990s. In the immediate aftermath of decolonisation, imperial history in Britain, which had for the most part celebrated the so called 'civilising mission', became a somewhat embarrassed subject — uncertain of its place and its future. Then came Britain's postcolonial moment in the 1980s. This was the moment associated, on the one hand, with the legacy of the loss of empire and with the decline of Britain's global power and, on the other hand, with the emergence of a multi-cultural society as it became clear that the new populations of colour who had come as migrants had in fact come to stay. Questions of nation and empire, of the 'mother country' and her colonies, of inclusion and exclusion, of Britain as a homogeneous white society, assumed new significance. Some historians turned to re-thinking the long established division between British history (that is domestic history) and imperial history.

In the Britain of New Labour, multiculturalism is an ambiguous phenomenon. Britain is officially lauded as a multicultural society yet racism flourishes and both Labour and Conservative politicians are currently using issues of race, immigration and asylum to win votes. Indeed our last Home Secretary, David Blunkett, spearheaded a return to the assimilationist policies of the 1960s. If you want to be British you must speak proper English and pass tests in British citizenship. In contemporary Britain the meanings of nation, of empire and of multiculturalism are all very contested, not least amongst historians. It is in this context that I focus on that iconic historian of the nation, Thomas Babington Macaulay. My intention is to unsettle his national story, which became *the* national story, and to open up different narratives. While my title puts the emphasis on the writing of new narratives I might equally have put the focus on the deconstruction of old narratives which has to take place if new ones are to be born. As Haitian historian Michel-Rolphe Trouillot argues: 'History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility:

the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots.'[1] Macaulay's power has been that *his* island story became the common sense; *his* narrative was naturalised. Before engaging with Macaulay, however, let me first return to Henry Parkes and to the web of imperial relations that we need to trace if we are to write histories of power, of inequality and of difference for the 21st century.

Allan Martin tells us that Henry Parkes was 'a man of 1832'.[2] The formative time and place for this man — five times Premier of New South Wales — was England, and indeed Birmingham, in 1832. The son of a Warwickshire tenant farmer who lost his livelihood in the economic disaster of 1825, Henry migrated with his family (when he was aged 10) to the nearby town of Birmingham — a major industrial centre for the metal industries. Plagued by debt Father Parkes was imprisoned for a year and Henry — the youngest of six siblings — had to contribute to the family's survival, first working in a brick pit and then apprenticed to an ivory turner. Ivory turning was essential to Birmingham's so-called toy trades — the production of buttons and jewellery. Life was hard in the house on Moseley St — close to the centre of the town — and Henry's fond childhood memories were concentrated on his mother who succoured him with stories of the adventures of that quintessential white imperial man — Robinson Crusoe.[3]

1829–33 were tempestuous years in Britain. Agitation for the rights of Catholics, for the reform of the parliamentary franchise, and for the abolition of slavery dominated the political agenda; there were major popular mobilisations around each of these issues. The rights of men (and I mean men) were at issue — whether in the United Kingdom or in the Empire. Did Irish Catholics have the same rights as English Protestants? Which subjects had the right to be political citizens? Were enslaved Africans in the Caribbean men and brothers? Who was free and who was not? What were the relative freedoms of men and women? What did freedom mean in these different contexts?[4] First there was the struggle over Catholic Emancipation in 1829 — the claim from Irish Catholics, in particular, for equal civil and political rights. 'We are men and

deserve to be free,'[5] they argued. Led by Daniel O'Connell, 'the Liberator' as he came to be called, they mobilised in their hundreds of thousands in the Catholic Association, eventually forcing the Tory government to grant emancipation rather than face civil war in Ireland. The example of O'Connell was not lost on Thomas Attwood, Birmingham banker and founder of the Birmingham Political Union. Birmingham, a town built on small workshop production and with a large proportion of skilled artisans, had suffered in the 1825 economic depression and Attwood and others became convinced that the town's lack of representation in the House of Commons had to change. Electoral reform was essential if the interests of both masters and men were to be heard. As E.P. Thompson argued so eloquently in *The Making of the English Working Class* the years leading up to 1830 saw the development of a radical movement that claimed the right of the people to elect MPs. In Birmingham that movement allied middle-class men and working-class men (women were allowed a place on the sidelines), and the Birmingham Political Union was its organisational expression.

The young Henry Parkes was an excited spectator of the turbulent political events of these years. He later recollected that as he had lacked formal education, the great orators whom he had heard in Birmingham had been his teachers. As Allan Martin tells us, 'he hung upon the voice of Daniel O'Connell with unspeakable interest'. 'The tones of that marvellous voice, and some of the Liberator's images, Parkes recorded, 'have never left my memory'.[6] He attended the meeting of a quarter of a million people held in Birmingham on the eve of the House of Lords' third consideration of the Reform Bill, when the country collectively held its breath as to whether their lordships would succumb to popular pressure. His friend J.G. Hornblower, who also emigrated to Australia, remembered that on this occasion the Council of the Birmingham Political Union had 'issued an edict that every member and every man who wished it should wear upon his heart the Union Jack of Old England', for the reformers saw themselves as the true patriots.

'Jewellers, silversmiths, and steel and gilt toy makers vied with each other in making these insignia of the people's will as pretty and attractive as possible.' Henry made one for himself, turning the ivory, carving and painting it, expressing through his craft his belief that the true Englishman was a radical.[7] Many of these radical patriots were also engaged in the struggle against slavery. 'I felt myself moulded like wax in the heat of the splendid declamations of George Thompson, the anti-slavery orator', wrote Parkes.[8] Birmingham in the early 1830s prided itself on its friendship for 'the negro'.[9] However, there were radicals who questioned the implications of such 'friendship'. Some distrusted hypocritical evangelicals who critiqued slavery in the empire while enslaving white workers at home; some were not convinced that Africans were men and brothers, seeing them rather as an inferior species. Friendship for 'the negro' rarely meant equality

The Reform Act that passed in 1832 was a deep disappointment to many radicals. The Whig government had come to the conclusion that the enfranchisement of middle-class men was a necessary concession — essential to the stability of the country and to the continued rule of the aristocracy. Working-class men, however, were not enfranchised. Women were explicitly excluded for the first time from political citizenship. Parkes and his friends were deeply disillusioned by the exclusion of working-class men. In 1837 the Birmingham Political Union was re-established, soon to become the Chartist movement, committed to manhood suffrage (and again that meant men). Parkes attended the great public meeting when the Charter was accepted by those in attendance but, soon after, he left Birmingham for the late 1830s was another period of economic depression. With Clarinda, who he had married in 1836, he set out for London in 1838 and then, in 1839, for Australia, hoping that the colonies would provide a better future. His two migrations, from the country to the town and from the metropole to the colony, meant that questions of home and belonging, of exile, diaspora and emigration were always critical to him.

The legacy of 1832 and of Birmingham radicalism stayed with Parkes and shaped the distinctive politics that he articulated in New South Wales from the late 1840s. The focus of Allan Martin's biography is the dynamic of class as it was lived in colonial society, and the ways in which a metropolitan radicalism was articulated to a particular site of empire. But Parkes also took with him the ethnicised, gendered and racialised language of freedom, of the rights of some men and not others. The conjuncture of 1832, in my analysis, was about race and empire, as much as it was about class and nation. Parkes translated anti-slavery into a critique of white slavery, of convictism and other states of unfreedom. 'The slave-masters of New South Wales,' he wrote in 1840, 'require their servants to work for them from sunrise to sunset, and will not allow them to have gardens, lest they should steal a half-hour's time to work in them'.[10] But at the same time he abhorred the attempts of the squatters to bring in cheap non-white foreign labour, (though as Martin tells us he was not above making use of it himself when the occasion offered). When the discovery of gold led to an increased labour shortage and attempts were made to bring in Chinese labour under bonded arrangements that were akin to slavery, Parkes opposed it, arguing that even convict labour would be preferable to 'yellow slaves from a land of lies, infanticide and heathenism'.[11] He stood for a free and prosperous society for white Australians. While 'universal liberty' was the watchword, liberty increasingly became the property of hard-working self-made white men such as himself. And those men could assume the support of their dependent wives, encircled in the smaller sphere of home. While exile from 'home' and from Birmingham had been terribly hard in the first few years, New South Wales became home, his second place of belonging. By the early 1840s he had decided to stay in Australia. It had 'afforded me a better home than my motherland, and I will love her with a patriot's love'.[12] By 1852 he looked forward to the day when Australia would separate from 'the old country peaceably, with all the sacred sympathies and beautiful affection of a child separating itself from its parent' and become independent.[13] Yet England would always be the place of kith and

kin and connections of 'race' and of culture were critical to his thinking. 'The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all,' as he famously put it many years later. 'We know that we represent a race … for the purposes of settling new colonies, which never had its equal on the face of the earth'.[14]

Parkes makes an interesting contrast with the man who is the subject of my current research — Thomas Babington Macaulay. Like Parkes, Macaulay was politically formed by the conjuncture of 1829–33. While Parkes started out a radical Macaulay was never that: both of them, however, contributed to a particular definition of race and nation, focused on the conception of 'one people'. Macaulay's *History* was to tell the story of a homogeneous nation and an imperial race born to conquer and to civilise. The origins of the two men were very different. Macaulay, 15 years older than Parkes and born in 1800, came from the heartlands of evangelical Toryism and his early years were spent in the secluded and domesticated world of the Clapham Sect — that extraordinarily powerful group of upper-middle class moralisers who lived around Clapham Common in the early 1800s.[15] His father, Zachary Macaulay, was the chief fact finder, speech writer and pamphleteer of the anti-slavery movement. Zachary spent his early manhood as an overseer on a Jamaican plantation and then became first the representative of the Sierra Leone Company, and then the Governor of that settlement. These experiences equipped him well for agitation against slavery. He was indefatigable in his search for evidence to support the campaigns against the slave trade and then the institution of slavery itself. Tom's mother, Selina, was almost an adopted daughter of Hannah More, one of the chief architects of the ideas of the 'separate spheres' of men and women, Tory evangelicalism and anti-slavery. Tom saw More as his second mother. He grew up surrounded by such powerful public men as: William Wilberforce, famed leader of the campaign against the slave trade and slavery; the banker Henry Thornton; John Venn, founder member of the Church Missionary Society; Charles Grant, chairman of the Court of Directors of the East India Company; and Lord Teignmouth, Governor-General of India from 1793–8.

His uncle Colin was a general in the Indian army who had fought at the famous siege of Seringapatan. Imperial connections were all around him.

Macaulay was considered a child prodigy from his earliest years. At the age of eight, his proud mother remarked on his 'uncommon genius'. She informed a correspondent that he had been writing a Compendium of Universal History, that he had been penning efforts to encourage the people of Travancore in India (where his uncle Colin was the Resident) to adopt the Christian religion, that he had composed a poem in six cantos in the style of Scott, that he had written a heroic poem about 'one of his race who had exerted himself for the deliverance of the wretched Africans', and that he had produced innumerable hymns.[16] As the oldest of a family of nine, he was 'the King of the mob' lording it not only over his siblings but also over the children of the other families living on the Common.[17] Much sociability was encouraged amongst these evangelical households and the novelist E.M. Forster's aunt — Marianne Thornton — has left a delightful account of her childhood there, casting doubt on the dour picture of sabbatarian gloom imagined by Thackeray and by other critics.[18] Macaulay's father, fearful that his son loved domesticity too much, insisted that he should go away to school. There, persecuted by homesickness and bullied by some of the older boys, he resorted to reading and writing as the main pleasures of his life — a pattern for the rest of his days.[19] School was followed by Trinity College Cambridge, a homosocial world that he learned to love, yet home and family remained at the centre of his emotional world.

Destined for the law, he found writing an infinitely more pleasurable pursuit. In the 1820s he began to make his name, and some money, as an essayist, penning a series of very successful pieces for the *Edinburgh Review*. Henry Brougham, one of the most influential of the Edinburgh reviewers, was devoted at this time to rescuing the Whigs from the political wilderness they had occupied for too long. He was attempting to modernise them while drawing

a clear blue line between themselves and the Philosophical Radicals, and took Tom under his wing. Tom became a polemical young Turk, attacking varied enemies with gusto, most notably James Mill's utilitarian creed in his *Essay on Government*.[20] In 1830 Macaulay was offered a seat in the House of Commons by the Whig peer Lord Lansdowne. He entered Parliament just as the great final struggle ensued over reform and he made his name as an orator — indeed, *the* orator of the moment. His brilliant rhetorical *tours de force* left the chamber transfixed and contributed significantly to the winning of the Whig Reform Bill.

Reform, he argued, was essential if revolution was to be avoided. His political arguments invariably drew on what he construed as the lessons of history. 1688 was his key date, the moment when the Catholic James II had been replaced by his Protestant daughter Anne and her consort William of Orange. A new political settlement had been made, limiting the power of the monarchy and increasing that of parliament. For Macaulay this was the genius of the English constitution — for the English, unlike the French, had the gift of reforming in order to preserve. In 1830 significant change was once again necessary, argued Macaulay, and the balance of the constitution must again be altered. France had once again had a revolution (that of 1830) — England would not follow that path. Propertied middle-class men must be brought into the political nation for it was the inclusion of 'the people' that made nations strong. Only through reform could the nation be stabilised and the mob held at bay.[21] 'We cannot be what our fathers were,' he insisted.[22] Macaulay himself played a critical part in demarcating the boundaries of who was to be included in the new political nation, that is, in deciding what level of property ownership made men safe to vote. This was the settlement that made Parkes despair.[23]

But 1833 was a critical time for the empire as well as for the nation. Macaulay was intimately involved in defining Ireland as different from England and in passing the Coercion Act of 1833

to ensure that the so-called 'sister kingdom' was subject to harsher forms of rule. At the same time the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean was finally going through parliament. Macaulay already had a rather different attitude to 'the poor negro' of the abolitionist imagination than that of his father. Although committed to emancipation and a lifelong opponent of slavery he had no time for Africans and assumed that they would need to stay in 'the waiting room of history', through their period of apprenticeship, education and civilisation, for the forseeable future. What he saw as the sentimentality of many abolitionists was not for him and he adopted a harsher racial rhetoric that contrasted with Zachary's evangelical discourse. Like his contemporary, Dickens, he both hated slavery and was contemptuous of Africans.

In recognition of his political services to the Whig government Macaulay was given a seat on the Board of Control for India — a post which carried a good salary. In 1833, together with Charles Grant, he designed the new Charter Act for India and steered it through the House of Commons. In another spectacular speech he explained why Europeans were suited to representative government while Indians, effeminate and fit only for conquest, must be subject to benevolent despotism. There was one rule for the empire — another for home.[24] Appointed as the first Lay Member to the Governor General's Council in India he set off for Calcutta in 1834 with one of his beloved sisters, Hannah. They stayed there for nearly four years — a time he regarded as the most appalling exile from the only place worth living in — England. India was for Macaulay a place without civilisation and he made no attempt to engage with its culture. On returning to England in 1838 he brought with him a fortune saved from his Indian salary, which he combined with a legacy from his Uncle Colin (the Indian general) to fund his literary career.

Macaulay had been interested for a long time in the idea of writing a history of England. Writing was for him a critical form of self-expression, a site of pleasure, a way of ensuring his place in history. In addition to being an essayist he was an assiduous letter writer,

periodically kept a journal, wrote government memoranda and drafted legislation, and alongside all this wrote a stream of doggerel poetry for the entertainment of himself and his family. Educated entirely through the classics and committed to a vision of European civilisation rooted in Greece and Rome he loved Herodotus, Thuycidides, Cicero and Tacitus. In the 1820s he published two essays on history, arguing that historians had become too preoccupied with reason and with the deduction of general principles from facts. Arguing that the art of narration was neglected, he evoked Walter Scott as a corrective exemplar. 'A truly great historian,' he suggested, 'would reclaim those materials which the novelist has appropriated': history should be 'a compound of poetry and philosophy'.[25] As he was to argue in the reform debates, history provided a way to think about politics and it was vital to learn from historical precedent and from experience.

While much of his political thinking was shaped by his engagement in these Whig projects of reform, Macaulay's emotional life was severely fractured in 1834. Just before leaving for India he suffered a trauma when his beloved sister Margaret married: an event which he experienced as a death. He had believed that his two favourite younger sisters — Margaret and Hannah — would be his companions for life. Hannah agreed to accompany him to Calcutta, acting as his consort. While in India, however, he suffered a further double trauma. First, he encountered the realities of racial difference. In 19th-century England, race was primarily lived through the imagination. 'A dozen half-naked blacks,' he wrote of his arrival in Madras, 'howling all the way the most dissonant song that you ever heard, rowed us with great skill to the shore'. His introduction 'to the people for whom he was appointed to legislate', was a boatman, who 'came on board with nothing on him but a pointed yellow cap, and walked among us with a self-possession and civility which, coupled with his colour and his nakedness, nearly made me die of laughing'. 'To be on land after three months at sea,' he continued:

> Is of itself a great change. But to be in such a land! The dark faces, with white turbans, the flowing robes: the trees not our trees: the very smell of the atmosphere that of a hot-house, and the architecture as strange as the vegetation.[26]

These people and places, smells and flavours, colours and shapes he found obnoxious: 'my tastes,' he concluded, 'are not oriental'.[27] The English, he reflected, were not like Indians. The Englishman 'comes from a land in which the spirit of the meanest rises up against the insolence or injustice of the richest and the most powerful. He finds himself in a land where the patience of the oppressed invites the oppressors to repeat his injuries'.[28] Once settled in Calcutta his contacts — apart from the 70 plus Indian servants employed — were almost entirely with the English and Anglo-Indians. He did not venture from his palatial residence into the city except in a palanquin. (And this was the man who had loved to walk daily in London for hours and who prided himself on his intimate knowledge of that city.) His relaxation was re-reading the classics and composing *The Lays of Ancient Rome* — a sequence of ballads telling the stories of Roman heroes. Macaulay found India a scary place — and the English were very vulnerable, he believed, for they were strangers in a foreign land, unable to distinguish friends from enemies. In Macaulay's mind the only hope for Indians was to become brown Englishmen.

His second trauma was much more personal. His sister Hannah left him. She too decided to marry a young civil servant working in India — Charles Trevelyan. For Macaulay this loss was horribly compounded by the news of Margaret's death from scarlet fever while Hannah and Charles were on their honeymoon. Macaulay was devastated: in a place he hated, surrounded by people he despised, and suffering from extreme grief, he withdrew into his books. At 34 he felt alone in the world, he had lost everything: 'My affections are shutting up and withering. My intellect remains and is likely, I sometimes think, to afford the whole man … Books are becoming everything to me … Literature has saved my life and

my reason … what a blessing it is to love books as I love them, to be able to converse with the dead and live with the unreal.'[29]

I argue that these traumatic experiences — the encounter with racial difference and the loss (as he felt it) of the two beloved sisters — were critical to the defensive and defended English identity that Macaulay constructed for himself and would construct for his readers, for the realm of the psyche is critical to the political imagination and the range of identifications that Macaulay constructed in his *History* is telling. His world diminished; its emotional possibilities closed down as he renounced exploration and refused to deal with difference. Only his own family was emotionally safe; only England was a place to live; only the English were really civilised people. Pondering his future whilst in India he decided that a literary life would suit him much better than would a political career and, on his return to the 'mother-country', he began to write history. First he penned two essays on India — on Clive and Hastings. Here he wrote the story of the conquest of India by the 'bold children of Europe' who found Indians a passive people, suited to conquest.[30] These 18th-century conquerors were, in his depiction, great but flawed men. They had prepared the way for the new generation of reformers, his own contemporaries, who could now rule India as benevolent despots and slowly introduce civilisation. His own contributions to this process was to codify the criminal law — for all British subjects should have access to the same legal system — and to insist in his infamous Minute on Education that English should be the medium of teaching for the elite. English, he insisted, 'stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the west,' and 'a single shelf of a good library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabic'. When it was possible to teach 'sound Philosophy and true History' why should we 'countenance … medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography made of seas of treacle and seas of butter'.[31]

Macaulay's essays on Clive and on Hastings were great successes — re-printed frequently throughout the century. In the wake of the Indian rebellion of 1857 the sale of 'Warren Hastings' doubled.[32] Having dealt with India he could clear the desk to write about England, silencing that larger world in his determination to focus on the peculiarities of the English. His direct encounter with India (if that it can be called) had made him aware of just what it was that he valued so much about the 'mother country'. He aimed to write a great panoramic canvas, to show how the English people had become what they were. He was a gifted story teller, and his *History* (the first two volumes of which were published in 1849, just after the European revolutions of 1848) was a publishing sensation. Its sales almost matched those of Dickens, the critics were for the most part very enthusiastic, and it has been in print ever since.

The *History* became the iconic national story, the commonsense of the nation's history. While Gibbon in the 18th century, had been preoccupied with Rome's decline and fall, Macaulay told a story of improvement and progress. His *History of England* was really a history of Britain, since Scotland and Ireland were included (Wales got little more than a brief mention). Macaulay's was a history of the nation, the first fully modern nation, the one that others would follow. It was also the history of an imperial race, but with very few pages devoted to anywhere outside of Europe: a dozen pages on the American colonies, a few on the East India Company, and a mere paragraph on the Caribbean telling of the earthquake that destroyed Port Royal in Jamaica. The nation was defined as intimately connected to continental Europe but the empire was outside of history. Macaulay articulated a model of centre and periphery, privileging the west and making history itself 'a sign of the modern'.[33] The empire would only be brought into history through imperial rule. Furthermore, it was England's history that marked the special place in the world of that small island.

At the heart of his narrative was the revolution of 1688 — a revolution which affirmed and secured already existing liberties.

The history of England was the history of a providentially favoured country, favoured by circumstances, by the spirit of its peoples and institutions from an early date, and by its history. For Macaulay England, in its constitutional essentials, 'was qualified to be the tutor of a more distracted world'.[34] The history of England was 'emphatically the history of progress'. Having become a nation in the 13th century, England's monarchy emerged as the best of the continental European monarchies. However, by the 17th century its constitution needed preservative innovation. 1688 was a liberating moment. James II was a tyrant, de-throned because of the people's growing spirit of liberty, independence and confidence. 'The people,' to Macaulay, meant the elite. Macaulay's story was also that of an imperial race. In the 13th century the old enmities of race were completely effaced. Hostile elements melted down and 'amalgamation' of races took place creating 'one homogeneous mass'.[35] The distinctions between Saxon, Norman and aboriginal Briton disappeared and the great English people was formed. National character emerged, what Macaulay defined as the peculiarities of the English. They were islanders with a free constitution, of English stock with English feelings, English institutions, stout English hearts. They valued the common law, limitations on absolutism, the freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and the making of an English Protestant empire. The conquest of Ireland and the union with Scotland — all of this was the history of England.

It was also a history of the doings of men. Men were at the heart of the narrative. 'I open a school for men,' he wrote, 'I teach the causes of national prosperity and decay'.[36] Despite Macaulay's earlier protestations that histories should be about the domestic as well as the public the *History* centres on 'the court, the camp and the senate'.[37] In the six volumes only four women have bit parts. The great antagonists at the centre are James II and Macaulay's hero, William of Orange. Here was a conundrum — that the hero of England's history could be a Dutchman. But William had all the characteristics of the rational, manly white European Protestant.

Continental Europe was critical to Macaulay's story: the absolutist Catholic Louis XIV, with his over zealous lieutenants, and the insidious Spanish marked the borders with the Protestant nations led by William. And the empire — the savage Indians of the North American colonies, the enslaved Africans of the Caribbean, the effete Indians increasingly subjected to the East India Company — these peoples marked the outer peripheries, the absent presences of the *History*, making possible the delineation of the English.

Much closer to home were the Scots and the Irish. Macaulay came from a Scottish family and his treatment of the Highlanders was seen by some contemporaries as a disgraceful betrayal. Macaulay wrote as the assimilated Englishman: he had been amalgamated, taken into England, become English. His narrative of Scotland was of the successful assimilation of its peoples. The lowlanders had seen the prosperity they could gain through union — they welcomed it and the country was transformed. Scotland became the civilised and industrious place it was and Anglo-Saxons and Celts became one people. But there was war in the Catholic Highlands for they supported the Stuarts. Macaulay evoked the clan system, its code of morality and honour, its acceptance of robbery, its dislike of steady industry, its expectation that the weaker sex would do the heaviest labour, its savage characteristics. Their furniture, food and clothing were rude, yet they had courage and an intense attachment to the patriarch and to the tribe, their notions of hospitality were heroic, their virtues and vices patrician. Lochiel, one of the clan leaders, is painted as the Ulysses of the Highlands (a tribute indeed to link him to the Greeks). He was a generous master, a trusty ally, a terrible enemy, a great warrior and hunter. Yet the clans were doomed to extinction for they were beset with petty squabbles and could not form a nation. Their defeat was inevitable. They were a casualty of progress.

Ireland was a more difficult story. The *History* was written against the backdrop of the Great Famine of the mid 1840s and the

increasing recognition in England of what became known as 'the problem of Ireland'. For Macaulay the history of the two countries was 'a history dark with crime and sorrow, yet full of interest and instruction'.[38] He applauded Cromwell's brutal attempt to make Ireland English — for this, he believed, had been the only possible resolution. If civilisation had taken root then, how different Ireland would have been. But Ireland was 'cursed by the domination of race over race and of religion over religion'. It 'remained indeed a member of the empire, but a withered and distorted member, adding no strength to the body politic, and reproachfully pointed at by all who feared or envied the greatness of England'.[39] There were two populations: the English settlers, knowledgable, energetic and persevering, and the aboriginal peasantry, living in an almost savage state. These two populations were morally and politically sundered, divided by race, religion, language and national character, at very different levels of civilisation: 'There could not be equality between men who lived in houses and men who lived in sties.'[40] Freemen and hereditary serfs were different branches of the great human family. When James II with his ally Louis made Ireland the centre of his struggle to maintain power, the end was predictable. Protestants of Anglo-Saxon blood, English and Scots, united to defeat the Irish and it was inevitable that victory would be 'with the nation that though inferior in numbers was superior in civilisation, in capacity for self-government, and in stubbornness of resolution'.[41]

For Macaulay the growth of nationhood was associated with successful processes of assimilation. 1688 and 1832 were moments of that kind. On each occasion change had been necessary in order to preserve: while France went through revolution and violence England demonstrated its superiority by its history. Macaulay's *History* wrote the nation. As J.W. Burrow argues it provided the conclusion to its own story: 'Through it, the electorate and parliament, by sharing a common political memory, could be united in a common political culture.'[42] The *History* embodied a sense of the privileged possession by Englishmen of their own

history. This common political culture was based on the inclusion of particular groups — middle-class men and Scots. Women could be subjects not citizens, they were the feminine and the domestic. The Irish were intractable — the knotty problem that could not be solved. Africans and Indians were outside — not part of history. Only when they became black or brown Englishmen might they enter the body politic. This was a defensive Englishness. Others could join in theory — but only when they had reached civilisation. This was an assimilationist model with no space for difference. Only sameness was allowed. This model has been with us a long time, and it persists.

I wish I could end with a story of a meeting between Macaulay and Parkes in which they recognise their common interest in the construction of white nations and of an imperial race. For both men the uncivilised other was central to the civilised self. What I can say is that Parkes almost certainly read Macaulay: the historical narrative he himself produced followed the *History* closely with 1688 marking the key moment when the principle of rule by 'popular prescription' had been established. There was one key difference between the two men's historical perspectives: while Macaulay believed that constitutional reform had been completed in 1832 (certainly for the foreseeable future) Parkes looked for further change.[43] The *History* was on sale, in a variety of editions, in the bookshop of William Piddington, the largest radical bookseller in Sydney and a keen supporter of Parkes in his first political ventures.[44] It seems likely that Parkes had, in his own way, met Macaulay.

Notes

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3. Henry Parkes, *An Emigrant's Home Letters* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co., 1897), p. 57.
4. Catherine Hall, 'The Rule of Difference: Gender, Class and Empire in the Making of the 1832 Reform Act' in (eds) Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall, *Gendered Nations. Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).
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6. Martin, *Henry Parkes*, p. 8.
7. Parkes, *An Emigrant's Home Letters*, pp. 146–7.
8. Sir Henry Parkes, *Fifty Years in the Making of Australian History*, vol. 1, (London: Longmans, Green, 1892), p. 10. Thanks to Bill Schwarz for this reference.
9. Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects. Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge and Chicago: Polity and Chicago University Press, 2002).
10. Parkes, *Home Letters*, p. 89.
11. Quoted in Paul A. Pickering, 'The Finger of God. Gold's impact on New South Wales' in (eds) Iain McCalman, Alexander Cook and Andrew Reeves, *Gold. Forgotten Histories and Lost Objects of Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 40.
12. Parkes, *Home Letters*, p. 136.
13. Martin, *Parkes*, p. 108.
14. Ibid., p. 391.
15. For biographical material on Macaulay see George Otto Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1881); John Clive, *Thomas Babington Macaulay. The Shaping of the Historian* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974).
16. Trevelyan, *Life and Letters*, pp. 21–2.
17. E.M. Forster, *Marianne Thornton 1797–1887. A Domestic Biography* (London: Edward Arnold, 1956), pp. 129–30.
18. Forster, *Marianne Thornton*. William Thackeray's portrait is in *The Newcomes. Memoirs of a Most Respectable Family*, 1st ed., 1853 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1898).
19. For Macaulay's school experiences see (ed.) Thomas Pinney, *The Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, vol. 1, 1807–1818 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).
20. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Mill on Government', *Edinburgh Review*, March 1829.
21. Ibid., especially pp. 1–62.

22. Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Speeches on Politics and Literature*, Everyman edition, 1909 (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1909), p. 62.
23. On Macaulay's role in setting the property levels for the franchise see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), pp. 823–5.
24. Macaulay, *Speeches*, pp. 95–126.
25. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'History', (1828) reprinted in Fritz Stern, *Varieties of History. From Voltaire to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957), p. 87; Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Hallam's Constitutional History' in *Literary and Historical Essays contributed to the Edinburgh Review* (1828) (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 1.
26. (ed.) Pinney, *Letters*, vol. 3, Jan. 1834 – Aug. 1841, pp. 36–7.
27. Ibid., p. 97.
28. Cited in Clive, *Macaulay*, p. 336.
29. (ed.) Pinney, *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 114–5, 129, 158.
30. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Lord Clive' (1840) in *Literary and Historical Essays*, p. 421.
31. Thomas Babington Macaulay, Minute recorded in the General Department by Thomas Babington Macaulay, Law Member of the Governor General's Council, dated 2 February 1835, reprinted in (eds) L. Zastoupil and M. Moir, *The Great Indian Education Debate. Documents relating to the Orientalist–Anglicist Controversy, 1781–1843* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), p. 166.
32. Trevelyan, *Life and Letters*, p. 263.
33. Nicholas Dirks, 'History as a Sign of the Modern', *Public Culture*, 2 (1990), pp. 25–32.
34. J.W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent. Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 35.
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36. (ed.) Pinney, *Letters*, vol. 5, p. 42.
37. As early as aged 15 Macaulay had defined these as the arenas that interested him: (ed.) Pinney, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 71.
38. Macaulay, *History*, vol. 2, p. 312.
39. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 10.
40. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 611.
41. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 395.
42. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent*, p. 88.
43. Paul A. Pickering, '"The Oak of English Liberty": popular constitutionalism in New South Wales, 1848–1856' *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 3, no. 1 (April 2001), p. 14: Vernon stresses the central importance of constitutional rhetoric, certainly up to if not beyond 1867, *Re-Writing the Constitution*.
44. Thanks to Paul Pickering for this information. People's Advocate, 12 August 1854.

conversations *memoir*

Diana Giese

How to Survive

Imagine you have lost everything. Your city has been bombed. Your father has disappeared. Soldiers are at your door. You are forced to leave your home.

You are at the mercy of thugs, reduced to your body and your wits. How do you find the guts, the heart and soul, the hope you will need to survive?

How to begin contemplating a future?

Sorathy Pouk Michell found out how. At her lowest, 'when you saw the sun rise, you knew that you were lucky for another day' she says. By the time she was ten years old in the early 1970s, Cambodia was 'very unstable: it wasn't very safe'. Although she came from a distinguished family, with her grandfather, So Pouk, made a knight, this didn't help them. The whole society was in upheaval. Much of the countryside lay in ruins. Phnom Penh was being bombed every night. In late 1974, her father and mother decided to move their family of nine children to Pailin near the Thai border. They wanted to be able to escape.

In April 1975, the Khmer Rouge arrived. 'They didn't call themselves Khmer Rouge. They called themselves "freedom fighters". We knew they were fighting the war. They were very young, teenagers or younger: ten, twelve. And with guns. You

could see with a lot of them, the gun's bigger than them. When they carried it on their shoulders, the tip of their gun dragged along the ground — so you can see how small they were. Everyone had the same uniform, with the cap and black pyjamas on. All the girls had short hair, and the boys had very, very short hair. Black teeth.'

'We weren't scared at first. I thought, "Well, we'll celebrate along with them. War is finished. We're going back to Phnom Penh. We'll go back to school, start again." But a lot of refugees had come into the towns and they became very crowded, very dirty and polluted.'

Then the Khmer Rouge soldiers ordered everyone to leave. Like most others, the family took only a couple of cooking pots, some rice and a change of clothes. They were already without her father, who was nowhere to be found. Their pregnant mother had in her care nine children, the youngest three, and the eldest sixteen.

In April in Cambodia it can reach 40 degrees, hot and steamy. They lingered as long as they could. They were the last family to leave town, pushed onto a bus. Peering from its windows, they saw that along the way, 'people had dropped dead. There were swollen bodies all along the road.'

The bus moved further and further into countryside none of them recognised. Then they were told to get out, and were abandoned, far from villages or any other sign of habitation.

Over the next few days, they started to learn to fend for themselves. They had to walk for miles to find water. Getting food each day became their focus.

When they finally located a village, they found its people unwilling to help them. 'They were told we were millionaires. The reason they had to join the revolution was because of us.' Families such as Sorathy's, the 'new people', were forced to begin different lives. They bartered their rings and bracelets for food. 'One by one I stripped them off, necklaces, earrings.'

Men and boys were more vulnerable than women and girls. In the chaos of their flight, Sorathy's second brother had become separated from them. First Brother gave some of his clothes to a villager and, in return, was directed to a farm where he was told he could dig potatoes. But it was someone else's farm. The owner chased him with a gun. First Brother was so frightened that he became ill and gloomy. Now it was up to Sorathy to bring in the day's food. 'I was the only one who was able to walk through the mud and across the village and carry rice and water back to the bush.'

Their only shelter became trees and shrubs. A Khmer Rouge leader, passing by, remarked that they had no hut. 'But how can we have a hut? We had no tools, just jungle tools.'

The lack of help from others was a harsh lesson. 'I saw selfish. I saw mean. So nasty. So cruel. I saw people get shot in front of me. I never dreamed of other Cambodians killing us — especially kids. One of the boys who ran in front of me — he got shot dead. And I thought: "The poor boy!" He had done nothing; he had done no crime.'

But far from retreating in terror or sinking into depression, 'I became more determined to survive.' Sorathy was small and skinny and young. She now dressed herself in the baggy black pants and top of a peasant girl. If she was questioned, she would indicate the nearest village and suggest she was from there. No-one took much notice of her as she moved around foraging for the scraps that might keep them all alive for another day.

Despite her efforts, her sisters and little brother became weaker and weaker. An older brother went off on his own. One little sister continually complained of stomach ache.

One day when Sorathy returned from her food-gathering, she found the whole family sitting round their open fire, drying themselves from the soaking they had received from the day's heavy rain. They were completely silent. In horror, she noted that a small figure was missing. Her sister had died.

Again, Sorathy summoned up what strength she could find. 'I thought, if I become weak like them, my whole family will be dead, like flies. So I forced myself to be strong.'

She had to move out further and further each day to find any food. One day, far from her family, 'I got caught.' She was told to board a truck full of people even thinner than she was, many with babies that reminded her of her little brother and sisters. When she asked where they were going, she was told by a Khmer Rouge soldier: 'You'll be moved to a new village, new town.'

Like all the others, she kept very quiet, as she had been told to do by her mother. If questioned, she was to say she was from a farm. The family did, in fact, own one.

By late afternoon, they were far from any village. Those in charge told them to get out and sit in a circle.

Up until then, Sorathy had not been more than usually frightened. She was now used to the bush, and felt she would be able to find her way back to her family. But then she heard the sound of shooting. She sank into darkness.

'By the time I woke up, I didn't know how many days I'd been there. I had a dream: you fight, and someone falls on you. That was how I felt. It took me a while to get up, because I didn't feel my leg at all. I could move my arm, so I started to move. And then I didn't touch my leg; I just touched somebody else. I thought: "Why are these people sleeping like that?" And then the sun started shining; you could see a bit of light there. And it started to smell — awful smell — and I started to realise these were dead people around me. But I still thought: "I must be in a dream." So I kept telling myself that I was in a dream, still dreaming. I forced myself to walk. And about midday, I was so dry. I still couldn't feel my leg. I knew my hand when I touched my face. It's all — ah, yukky. All I knew was, I had to look for water to drink. But when I got to the pond, I couldn't drink the water. The water was white and clear, but

when I walked into it, the water turned to red. Everything's still in a dream. I walked into the water; the water's red. I took the water in my palm, and the water's all red and smelly. The smell! Awful, awful smell. Even now, when I think, I talk, I still smell it.'

She didn't drink.

'I walked until it was late. And I came to these green bushes, a garden, and suddenly this lady came out. She looked at me; she stared at me. I thought: "I'm not dreaming. This lady is real." I went and pinched her skin. She didn't ask me anything. She just linked my hands through hers and just dragged me. She washed me. I remember she poured buckets and buckets of water on me. And then I really realised that I wasn't in a dream. This was red washing off me. The blood was real.

'And after a couple of days I remembered that I had left Mum in the bush and my family, my siblings, in the bush. The lady didn't ask me much. She said: "Well, you'd better go to them."'

Now Sorathy realises that the woman could have seen her as a daughter to care for. 'Probably all her children had been taken away from her.' This could explain why she hid the girl and looked after her, rather than reporting her to the authorities. At last, she showed her the way to the main road. It took a day's walk to get there. But Sorathy was reluctant to use this route, since this was where she had been picked up.

It took another three days to get back to her family. She shadowed the main route, walking parallel to it, hidden by the bush. When she was hungry, she asked people for food. She found many had 'quite a soft heart when they saw a little skinny girl like me. They took pity on me.' At the end of the day, 'when my feet couldn't carry me any more', she asked the nearest house if she could stay the night. 'I just needed to sleep. I put my head down.' No-one questioned her 'because they didn't want to find out something that they didn't want to hear. Bad enough for them to cope in their own daily lives.' As soon as the sun rose, she went on her way.

Eventually she reached the tree where her family was living. When one of her sisters spied her from a distance, 'she was so joyous, she jumped up and down. "Oh, my sister's coming back! My sister's coming back!'

Sorathy resumed her daily food-gathering forays. She carefully noted those people who were a little kinder, a little more generous with what they gave her. Her mother's pregnancy was by now far advanced, and her youngest sister was becoming weaker and weaker. She knew the family had to move to save themselves from slow starvation.

They chose to try the village of Phnom Kraper. It had gardens of green vegetables and trees loaded with coconuts and mangoes. But when they arrived, they found that the Khmer Rouge had passed down a new policy, one decreeing that if villagers sheltered 'new people', they put themselves in danger. The villagers wanted nothing to do with city people who had never joined the revolution.

But the family persevered. Near the local Buddhist temple was a school, emptied of pupils. They were allowed to stay there for a few days, out of compassion for the youngest girl, 'swollen up like a balloon' from malnutrition. The family quietly extended their stay to a couple of weeks, at the same time desperately searching for long-term shelter. 'But no-one was willing to take us. They all feared for their own lives. I thought there must have been some killing here before, people were so frightened, so fearful.' Sorathy sought help from the monk at the temple, but he told her: 'Child, just think yourself very lucky that you've survived, and that you've got your mother here to look after you.'

Phnom Kraper yielded one surprise: Third Brother was living in the village. He had found a niche for himself as a shepherd, caring for cattle with other children. 'But he pretended he didn't know me. He didn't want to know who I am. And I was very, very sad.'

Her mother wanted to approach the family that was sheltering him. 'And my brother stopped her, because he didn't want them to know

that he came from a city family. He had made up this story that he was from somewhere else. He had to save himself. Everybody had to.'

Later they discovered that the eldest brother who had disappeared had been taken in by a village blacksmith's family who lived within the Khmer Rouge compound.

As the days dragged on, they decided that their only hope was to take direct action. 'We went straight to Khmer Rouge headquarters, where the killing had happened. If we got killed, so what? It's quicker. If we kept dragging on as we were, underground, we would die slowly and suffer a long time. Especially my younger sister. She didn't complain, but I could see the agony in her eyes. I could feel it: the agony of dying.'

The Khmer Rouge leader they approached was blunt. 'What use are you if we keep you here?' he asked. Sorathy knew he was right. She had no skills; her mother was about to have her baby; her sister was dying. She emphasised their willingness to 'do anything — work in the fields'. The answer was still 'no'.

Then her little sister died. Sorathy knew she had to try again, even if it was the last time she ever begged. 'The leader looked at me as though he thought: "You're useless."' Again, she agreed with him. She was 'basically a skeleton'.

'If we're no use to you, you might as well kill us all,' she said, boldly.

The family was made to wait another long, agonising night. Then they were informed that they could stay — if they all started work the next day. 'I think they took pity on us because we lost our sister.'

But they still had no shelter. Then her mother spotted a tiny building at the edge of the village. It had a single opening, a door. It was quite unfit for humans, having been used to store rice. 'But to us, this is heaven! We'd lived in the bush. This at least kept us away from the sun, away from the rain. We took it as our castle. Our rice palace.'

Inside, her mother lay down to wait for the birth of her baby. Sorathy at once began to work in the rice-fields, planting, tending and harvesting. At first she was clumsy and slow among people who had done little else all their lives but plant rice. 'They had a good laugh at me.' But she soon picked up all the tricks and skills. Then she could laugh back.

She also developed other ways of fitting in. During their breaks, she retold stories from the French books her aunt had read to her. As they worked, the women cracked jokes and played word games, to ease the drudgery. They sang revolutionary songs, subtly changed, and put old words to the new tunes, so that the horror was transformed into a kind of gaiety.

'And I thought sometimes: "Why would I make fun of horror?" But that was my survival technique. Otherwise you'll die of your own grief. Otherwise you keep looking at each other and all you see is a skeleton face, skeleton body. You had no hope.'

But over all this stubborn cheer, sickness and death loomed. People would drop where they stood in the fields. The family eked out their meagre rations of rice porridge with snails, crabs and fish. They plucked green weeds. Very occasionally, there was a thin slice of meat. Sorathy's mother had her baby boy and 'he lived for a while. That was quite joyful for Mum and for my sister.' They fed the tiny creature rice porridge, but it wasn't enough. 'My mother lost everything. She lost her children. And when the baby came along, that kept her hope alive. But after he was gone, she wasn't herself.'

As she remembers that time, Sorathy begins to cry in her story-telling. 'But in those days, you had no time to be depressed; you had no time to mourn. You're not supposed to be depressed. You didn't show any sign. But Mum was depressed. I know that she was very depressed.'

She wasn't the only woman in the village to have lost her baby. Others were able to help her through her grief. 'They worked in

the fields together, and they talked through it. Without these women's support, I can't imagine how she would have coped.'

The days dragged on. 'You don't think of a future; you don't plan for the future.' They didn't keep count of the days. There was no point.

Then in what they later found was 1977, things began to change. A sham election came and went. 'When I started asking: "Why is there only one person on the ballot paper?" they said: "Just vote." I said: "Vote for whom? When you vote, you vote for a party; you vote for a group of people. But here there's only one. Might as well just take it." They didn't have a clue what an election's supposed to be.' The family where her brother was staying had a forbidden radio. One day, the man remarked to their mother: 'You'll go back to Phnom Penh with your family soon. You'll be free.'

Then there was a new revolution, and more killing. In the village, there was no news from outside, just the propaganda broadcast from the one public microphone.

The family was able to lie low and subsist, until it was announced that it was time for another 'class cleansing'. 'They only wanted to keep the pure revolutionary group, not mixed in with city people.' To their horror, they were asked to leave the village. Ominously, the departure time was set for after dark, late at night. 'I knew that was a one-way journey.'

The family was asked where it wanted to go. Meanwhile, all the men suddenly disappeared from the village, to join the guerillas. It was harvest time, so everyone else was sent to the fields to work day and night.

Sorathy thought rapidly. One of the Khmer Rouge leaders was 'softer' than the others. He was so sympathetic that he was known as Uncle Plek. Several times when she had been under threat, he had saved her. When recruiters of mobile work teams had tried to get her to join other young men and women, he ridiculed her to

them. 'You can take her,' he told them. 'She looks skinny, but it takes two people to carry her home when she collapses. You take her; I don't want her.' Naturally, they had left her alone.

There was confusion, shooting and fighting. Their protector Uncle Plek was killed.

Within a week, Vietnamese forces arrived in the village. This was their chance. The family slipped away and kept moving, aiming for the city of Battambang. They took care to keep out of sight. They were afraid the Khmer Rouge could regroup and capture them again. There were rumours of people like them being used as human shields.

When they arrived in Battambang, they found a huge market, noisy with radio music, bright with the clothes people now wore instead of their black pyjamas. First Brother made contact with a family who used to work with their own father, and they were invited to stay. 'We're very good at adopting people, or people adopting us.'

Then they had to find a way to live in another new world. 'We had no gold; we had nothing. People can use gold as money; they can use rice as money.' To get a basic supply of rice, they started collecting leaves from the dem kor tree, to roll into incense sticks. Sorathy taught her mother to help her, and they sold these Buddhist staples in the market. Gradually, they built up their store of rice.

'We had enough food. We had more things. But the more things we had, the sadder I became.' The long nightmare was catching up with her. 'It was still too close. I felt I had to leave, move away.'

Even today, Sorathy still wakes with nightmares.

There are many more survival stories in her life. She tells how the family got themselves to a transit camp in Thailand, where she worked as a mid-wife; how they talked their way into Australia, a country about which they knew nothing; how they arrived just

before a Christmas they were not invited to share, 'lonely, sad, isolated'; how the family quarrelled and went their separate ways; how she contemplated suicide, 'but if I die now, who will take care of my little sister?'; how she learned English and went on taking course after course, meeting her Australian husband through an English class her sister was taking; how her true welcome to Australia came only with her wedding, when her brother-in-law offered her a place in their family; how she and her husband Michael struggled against official indifference to get Khmer recognised as an HSC subject; and how, with Australian degrees to her name, she is now passing on her language, her heritage and her strength to children born here.

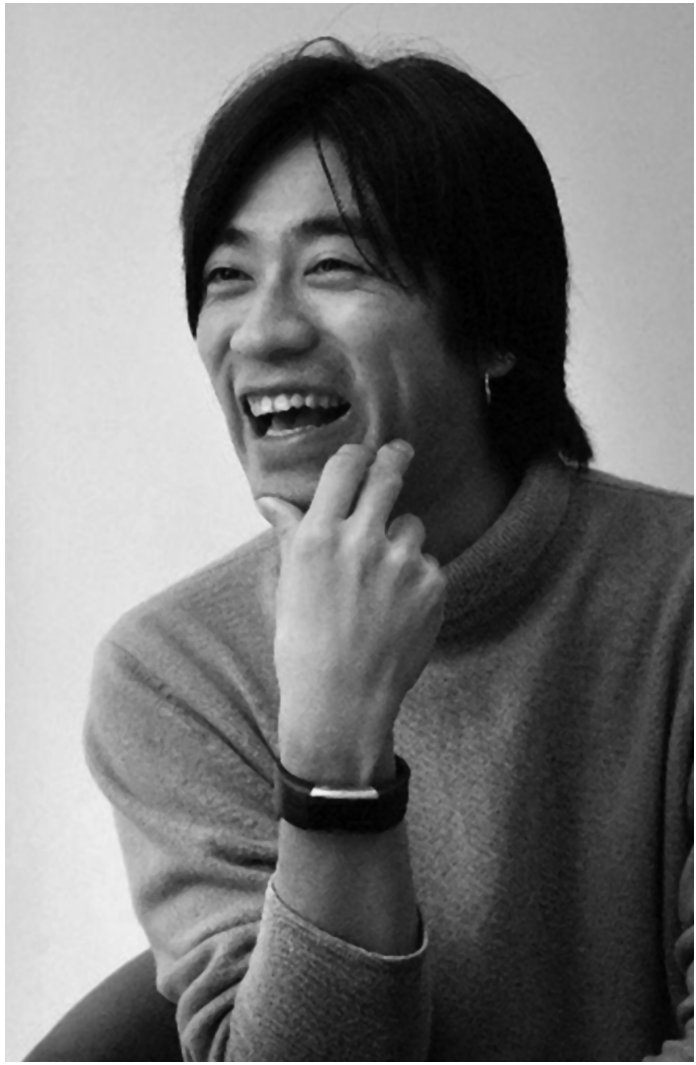
Based on Sorathy Pouk Michell's interview with Diana Giese for the National Library of Australia Oral History project, Khmer Community in Australia, *TRC 3945, Sorathy's own written summary of her life prepared beforehand, and her presentation* Life lost, life found *as part of Giese's* Reclaiming the Past *series at the Museum of Sydney. This extract is from a larger project about people who have won through in their lives. Another, the story of a doctor who was told that his invention would kill his patients, will be published in the next* Conversations.

Minoru Hokari

The Living Earth: The World of the Aborigines

Minoru Hokari (1971–2004) made outstanding contributions towards 'cross-culturalising' historical practice and towards developing a respectful collaborative research strategy with Indigenous Australians. A graduate of Hitotsubashi University (MEc 1996) and The Australian National University (PhD 2001), Minoru conducted fieldwork amongst Gurindji elders, who he acknowledged as exceptional historians in their own right. In June 2003, he began writing a serial column for a local newspaper in Niigata, Japan, entitled *The Living Earth: The World of the Aborigines*. In the middle of that project, Minoru was diagnosed with malignant lymphoma. He died on 10 May 2004.

It gives the editors of *Conversations* great pleasure to reproduce here *The Living Earth: The World of the Aborigines*. We express thanks to Kyoko Uchida for providing the translation of Minoru's words.



Freedom and Danger

I was born and raised in Niigata, on the Sea of Japan. As a child, I loved to go fishing. From the beach or the seawall, away from the cramped houses and classrooms and narrow city streets, I could see the ocean all the way to the horizon and beyond. I was still in elementary school, and at that age, it was not the subtle give-and-take of fishing that I enjoyed; rather, facing the ocean, I was physically experiencing the vastness of the world and the meaning of freedom.

Needless to say, playing near the water was not without its risks. I slipped on the pier countless times. Once I nearly fell off the seawall's concrete blocks. Those childhood years, before I had to worry about school entrance exams and careers, I played intently by the ocean, which gave me a taste of both freedom and danger.

I had always told myself to follow my heart — to do only what I truly wanted to do. Itching to leave Niigata, I went to university in Tokyo. Several years later, now itching to leave Japan, I flew to Australia.

Before long, I found myself wishing earnestly to live among the Aborigines — Indigenous Australians — and to study their culture and history.

From Sydney to the Aboriginal community in north central Australia where I was going to stay was at least 6,000 km each way. I headed out on my motorcycle down the desert highway, under the scorching sun, in near-40°C heat day after day.

In the desert I met almost no one.

Standing alone in the middle of a landscape that lies flat in every direction, I realised that the world is made up mostly of sky. The bold earth seemed to bear — to embrace — the full weight of the enormous sky.

That sense of freedom and danger that I experienced as a boy came rushing back. Throughout junior high, high school and university, I had had to deal with the world of social obligations like anyone else; it was essential for me to remove myself and encounter open space like this.

And I have a feeling that I'm not the only one.

On this apparently barren land, the Aboriginal peoples have maintained a life of hunting and gathering for over 50,000 years. They tell me that Australia, the continent with the scarcest water supply, is a land of rich, life-giving earth. For the Aborigines, with their deep understanding of the earth, this land is literally bountiful.

In what can only be an overwhelmingly harsh environment, these peoples have lived for tens of thousands of years without requiring substantial labour (even the concept of labour may not exist for them). Once they had obtained their food as efficiently as possible, they focused on nurturing a rich spiritual life through religious ceremonies and interactions.

These people have been living with the freedom and danger of the vast earth on a day-to-day basis. These Indigenous Australians, who neither built great structures nor created the bow and arrow nor invented the wheel, must have nurtured, over the course of more than 50,000 years, something different from what we call 'civilisation'. It is that something that I am interested in.

These are oppressive days, but how wonderful it is to think that the Aboriginal people share with us this beginning of the 21st century. We have no time to retreat into cynicism, to say, 'Whatever will happen will happen. There's nothing we can do'. Through my experience in Australia, I hope to learn how to 'play' with all my heart in this vast world of freedom and danger.

Floating and Fixedness

As soon as I land at Sydney Airport, approximately 10 hours after taking off from Japan, I feel a sense of relief. It's always been this way, ever since I first arrived in Australia; whereas whenever I land at Narita Airport upon returning to Japan, I feel low. Shouldn't it be the other way round?

Don't get me wrong: I have nothing against Japan in particular. In Japan I can see my old friends and family. In Japan I can indulge in all the wonderful food I've missed. As a fan of music and film, I have access to a much wider variety of artists in Japan than in Australia. And perhaps most important of all, Japanese is spoken there. I know I'm stating the obvious, but this is very important to me. I forget when I'm living in an English-speaking environment, but when I return to Japan and start speaking Japanese, I notice that words come flowing out without my being aware of it. It's never this way in English. There's a filter somewhere in my brain, and that slows down the words. Now that I think about it, the same subtle filtering seems to occur when I switch between standard Japanese and the Niigata dialect.

Still, sometimes I feel that there is something almost unhinged about the happy-go-lucky spirit of Australia. For better or worse, this is a colonial society in which the colonists built their country however they wanted to.

Since 1788, the white settlers, who neither recognised the importance of the Indigenous Australians' traditions nor respected them, have established their civilisation where they perceived 'nothing', a blank. The guerrilla tactics of the Aboriginal resistance against colonisation only justified the whites' 'revenge'. It was not until the 1960s that the human rights and Indigenous rights of the Aboriginal peoples, who were by then facing the danger of extinction, finally began to garner attention.

The culture of white Australians — a culture that violently negated the Indigenous cultures and was erected in a sphere completely removed from them — seems somehow imperilled and fragile today. The cityscape appears fake, as if it were all a movie set. This civilisation appears detached from the earth.

In fact, the majority of the colonists' descendants still live in the coastal areas. I wonder if they've positioned themselves there for a quick getaway just in case things go awry? It seems logical, too, that Australia's most famous tourist site is the Sydney Opera House, with its world-renowned architectural design in the image of a ship's full sails. I cannot help thinking that Australia's colonial society remains afloat at sea.

Australia's other major tourist destination is Ayers Rock, called Uluru in the Aboriginal language. Located more or less at the centre of the continent, it is an enormous 'red bed' monolith that is a sacred site for an Aboriginal group called the Pitjandjara.

There, the history of the earth and life since 'the beginning of time' has been passed down from generation to generation. I suggest that anyone travelling to Australia visit both the Sydney Opera House and Ayers Rock and physically experience the floating detachment of the Opera House and the solid stability of Uluru.

As for me, I appreciate both the floating sensation of the civilisation born of Australia's colonial culture and the unmoving fixedness of the Indigenous culture. Perhaps it is because when I place myself between these two divided Australias, I feel that there may be a new, third path, one that is neither exclusively oriented towards advanced civilisation nor ancient tradition.

Desert Solitude

It seems that loneliness is generally frowned upon as unhealthy and undesirable. 'As you can see from the Chinese character for "person", we become complete as people only by supporting one another,' my teacher explained years ago. I remember thinking that it rang false, that in other countries there would be a lot of different ways to write the word.

Being alone certainly is tough. It can be unbearable, especially when you are thrust into the depths of loneliness out of no will of your own — when you have lost a loved one, when you have been bullied, when you are trapped somewhere. Loneliness can make people feel unstable and can even lead to psychological illness.

The British psychologist Anthony Storr, however, has pointed out that there are positive aspects to loneliness as well. Many artists and philosophers have produced great works in solitude. The issue is the question of will, of consciously choosing to be alone.

Time and again, I have been back and forth across central Australia, alone. At first I didn't have a driver's license, so I rode my motorcycle. These days, due to my limited stamina and the weight of my equipment, I often travel by 4WD.

If this were a real expedition, I suppose I would travel as part of an organised team, but since my work is nothing so grand as to be called an expedition, usually it's just me. Under the blazing sun, I drive the 4WD or ride my motorcycle all day long. Driving non-stop down a straight road for hours on end without speaking, I begin to drift, feel faint and even begin to think I'm losing my mind. (Or at least it feels that way.)

To come to think of it, I haven't spoken in days. I make myself speak out loud, and I hear my own words. Hey, I can still speak; I can still hear. I'm okay. I'm okay.

One night a huge bush fire erupted not far from where I was camping.

Beyond the wildly dancing flames, a full moon hung in all its brightness. The earth burning orange and the moon shining through the rising black smoke were so breathtakingly beautiful that I was thoroughly overwhelmed.

'I wish I could share this view with someone,' I thought to myself, but of course there was no one around. The bush fire was headed in my direction, so I suppose I should have feared for my safety, but instead, I stood rooted to the spot, completely taken by the spectacle.

Yet looking back on that night, I think that if I'd been with a friend, we probably would have said, 'Wow, that's really pretty,' or 'Maybe we should run away?' And then I would not have experienced the duet of the flames and the moon as viscerally as I did. Having completely given myself over to the landscape, I had forgotten even to take a photograph (which I deeply regretted later).

Perhaps just for the good part of an hour that the moon was shining down on me through the rising smoke, I had become a poet. I don't mean that I would have actually written a poem, but rather that I had engaged in the landscape in a poetic way.

By confronting and living with solitude, we can connect with the world in unexpected ways. As we live day to day, hurrying through our routines, how can we capture such moments when we can live poetically?

A 'Network' Society of Woven Relationships

It was on January 10, 1997, that I first met the Gurindji people, with whom I would come to enjoy a long-lasting relationship.

Australia's Aboriginal peoples are made up of approximately 600 language groups, the Gurindji being one of them. Such collective units were once referred to as 'tribes', as in 'the Gurindji Tribe', but these days we tend to avoid the word because of its connotations of prejudice.

Perhaps there is nothing wrong with using the word 'tribe', but then we should also refer to our prime minister as 'Junichiro Koizumi, the leader of the Japanese Tribe', and discuss 'The Niigata Tribe's Familial Structure and Trade and Cultural Sphere', or 'The Escalation of Tribal Conflict within the European Union'. No room for progressivist history here …

While many Aborigines live in urban areas, some live in the centre and northern parts of the continent and have land rights, according to legal steps taken since the 1970s. In order to visit an Aboriginal commuity with land rights, you have to apply for permission beforehand.

I was granted permission to enter the community of Daguragu where the Gurindji people live. 'I wish to learn your history and culture,' I explained and left it up to them to decide how to interact with me.

The first thing that the Gurindji people demanded of me was to learn their language. The standard language spoken in Daguragu village is a kind of Creole, a mixture of Gurindji and English. The older generation speaks Gurindji and Creole, while the younger generation speaks Creole and English.

I was learning the language as fast as I could when, after a while, they gave me the name 'Japarta'. The Gurindji people have what is called a 'skin name' in addition to their given names. There are only 16 skin names, eight for men and eight for women.

Usually, your skin name is determined by your parents' skin names. For example, the father of Japarta is Jurlama, and the mother is Nanaku. His sisters are Nimarra and his wife is Nalyirri. Imagine what such a system means. All of the men with the skin name Jurlama are my fathers. All of the women named Nalyirri are, at least as a matter of form, my wives. My actual wife would be chosen from among them.

In this way, the entire society is bound together in an intimate network of familial ties. Interestingly, an interdependent system of rights and obligations has developed among these 16 skin names. For example, Japarta has the right to make all sorts of demands on Nalyirri, but he is not even allowed to speak to Nangala, who is Nalyirri's mother. The eight men's names and eight women's names rotate from generation to generation, so that every person in the village has the right to make demands on one skin-name group, and at the same time is obligated to obey another skin-name group. As a result, no single group can exert absolute power over the society as a whole. Gurindji society is run without a system of centralised power. This familial-political system, in which power is never concentrated in one place or one person, is unique to the Aborigines and has long intrigued anthropologists.

I wonder if this system wouldn't be useful at the United Nations?

Modern-day Hunting

After I'd lived in Daguragu for a while, the Gurindji began to invite me to go hunting.

Beginning in the 19th century, northern Australia saw the rapid development of cattle stations. Those Aborigines that had escaped the earlier killings by white settlers were then forced to give up their lives of hunting and gathering and were half-forcibly brought to work on the settler-run stations. It was not until the 1970s that these Aborigines won land rights and regained the right to govern their own societies.

It goes without saying that a great part of traditional hunting skills were lost in the interim. Today, the people travel in 4WD vehicles, hunt with rifles instead of boomerangs and spears, and fish with store-bought fishing lines and hooks instead of handmade ones (although they still forego fishing poles). Moreover, they buy beef and vegetables at the community store most of the time, so it is not as if they live primarily by hunting and gathering. Yet hunting remains a joy for young and old, men and women.

First everyone piles into a 4WD vehicle, and we speed through the unmarked paths of the plain or creek bed. They drive so recklessly over the steepest inclines and rocky surfaces that I worry that the vehicles could tip over at any point. Especially worrisome are the river-crossings. When the water level is high, I can feel the car float just a little. Every year, several cars are washed away in unsuccessful river-crossings.

As we drive along, sometimes the elders sing of the 'myth narratives' relevant to that area. In this way, they strengthen the spiritual bond between the land and themselves, even while travelling.

Then suddenly a young man yells, 'Right there! Stop the car!' Everyone except me is looking in the same direction, all talking at once. I look into the distance and see nothing.

'Look, can't you see that there's a kangaroo over there?' someone says. Yet I can see nothing beyond the trees and grass. The men emerge from the car with their rifles, taking a few steps forward. Holding their breaths, they aim their rifles. I still can't see the kangaroo.

Bang! After a while, the men return carrying the kangaroo.

When we go fishing at the lake, first the elders sing to the earth: 'We are from such-and-such country. Our children are hungry. Please nourish us with your fish.' Once the lake hears their voices and realises that they are neither intruders nor enemies, it shares its food. We catch an abundance of crucian carp, turtles and enormous catfish more than one-metre long. The men who have rifles walk around the periphery of the lake and hunt birds and goannas. The women often gather fruit and nuts.

The game is often roasted and enjoyed right there — an ad-hoc outdoor feast. The hunters sit around the campfire and boast about their feats and adventures on the hunt. Whatever food is left over, they bring back to Daguragu village and share with their relatives.

It may be hard to believe, but goanna and turtle meat and nuts are surprisingly tasty. Besides, wild game and other wild ingredients are thought to be much more nutritious than what's grown in artificial ways by agribusiness.

An Aboriginal friend once asked me, 'What do you eat in your country?' When I answered, 'In Japan we eat sashimi, which is raw fish,' he looked at me incredulously, as if to say, 'You must be kidding. That's unbelievable!'

A Terrifying River-crossing

The youths invited me to go fishing, and we all excitedly piled into the 4WD. To reach the fishing hole we were headed for, we first had to ford one of the river's tributaries. But when we got there, the water level was too high to drive across. So we decided to park the car and cross on foot. Carrying our belongings on our heads, we waded slowly into the river. The current was fast, and we had to take care not to lose our balance, but we made it across. We were completely soaked up to our chests, but no one seemed to care. It was another hot day. Sooner or later our wet clothes would dry in the sun.

We had a particularly big catch that day. Our bags were filled with crucian carp and catfish. Toward evening, with the sun going down, we made our way back to where we'd parked the car. But perhaps because it had rained upriver, the tributary, which had only come up to our chests when we'd crossed earlier, was now a raging torrent.

'No way, we can't possibly cross now. Let's camp here overnight,' I suggested, but the youths would not listen.

'It'll be alright. Let's swim across,' they said. I thought it was reckless, but then again, if the river were to rise even further, even the high ground we were standing on could become flooded. The youths asked me, 'You do know how to swim, don't you?' Of course, I had swum in pools and at the beach. But never had I swum across such rapids, and where unseen trees and boulders underwater could snag me. Obviously not.

The river was about 50 metres wide. Since this area was not usually underwater, here and there the trunks and branches of the taller trees poked out above the water. Once at the jumping-off point, the youths explained that they were going to swim across by letting themselves be pushed along by the current, while holding onto the tree trunks and branches along the way. But if you missed catching

hold of a tree trunk, you would be quickly swept far downstream. If that were to happen, you would definitely go missing. In fact, I had heard many stories about Aborigines who had been swept away by the river.

At that moment, for the very first time and from the bottom of my heart, I asked for help from the Aboriginal earth and spirits. 'I swear that I am not an intruder with evil intentions. Please, please carry me safely to the other side.' I don't remember what language I made this plea in.

When there is nothing else to rely on, and with one's life in danger, all academic and rational reason becomes meaningless. I don't mean at all to strike a politically correct pose, as in, 'I respect the Aboriginal culture's belief system'. I mean that the act of begging the earth and the spirits for help was very real on my part.

I jumped into the raging river. I wasn't so much swimming as thrashing about, just trying to keep myself from going under. I thought I heard the youths yelling in the distance, 'Look out!' I crashed into a tree trunk, stomach first. A sharp pain shot through me. I felt faint, but I still had farther to go. I hung onto the trunk as tightly as I could, so as not to be torn away by the current, and searched for the next relay point.

I plunged into the water again, I thrashed around, was pushed downstream, banged into another tree trunk, hung on for life. I repeated this four or five times, and thoroughly shaken and half-crying from terror, I reached the river bank at last.

My muscles had turned to jelly. My entire body shook uncontrollably. I could see blood seeping from the scratches all over my body, but the important thing was that I was still alive. For the first time in my life, I had experienced what it was to plead for one's life.

An Introduction to Aboriginal Art

I wonder if the reader is familiar with Aboriginal art. I have heard that a single work by a world-renowned Aboriginal artist can fetch a price of tens of millions of yen.

When I hear that some people buy Aboriginal art for investment purposes, I feel a little let down; yet if it provides economic assistance to impoverished Indigenous communities, perhaps it is not for me to complain about it.

Aboriginal paintings can be divided into roughly two categories. One is bark painting, practiced in the coastal areas of northern Australia. The bark is stripped from a tree trunk and flattened; the artist then draws figures of people, animals, or spirits on it.

The other is dot painting, practiced by the Aboriginal people in the central desert areas. In these paintings, the entire canvas is covered in colourful dots and lines. As the result is an abstract pattern, it is difficult to determine at first what the subject is. When asked, the artists typically reply, 'This is my country'.

Both bark paintings and dot paintings depict various stories. It may tell a sacred history or describe a hunt or some such scene from daily life.

Bark painting has its origins in Aboriginal rock painting, which is said to be possibly the world's oldest. While Aboriginal rock paintings have been preserved in caves and rock surfaces all over Australia, in the northern part of the Northern Territories, there are numerous groups of rock paintings in many, many layers, one painted over the other. I strongly recommend that visitors take a day trip to Kakadu National Park, which can be reached via a tour from Darwin. Contemplating these rock paintings layered one over the other over a span of tens of thousands of years, a friend from Japan said, 'Maybe they laid down their souls like this, each one over the last'.

In contrast, dot paintings are derived from the ceremonial patterns drawn in the sand during rituals. As the community's secret knowledge cannot be directly revealed as is, the artist modifies the patterns for the general public. The placement of these geometrical patterns of dots and lines — which evoke Kandinsky or Monet — is very mysterious. For it supposedly contains, in indirect form, the secrets of the world. We can glimpse in these paintings an aspect of what is generally referred to as 'Dreaming' — the creation myth narratives in which kangaroos and goannas and snakes shape the earth.

For some reason, I associate Aboriginal art with jazz music. To come to think of it, the jazz great John Coltrane was a deeply spiritual musician. In Aboriginal art (as in jazz), a high level of spirituality born of a formality deeply rooted in tradition coexists beautifully with an uninhibited free-spiritedness that thinks nothing of breaking out of such forms.

The earth that is directly connected to one's soul. The animals, plants, and spirits that inhabit that earth. The life force that bursts forth from the Aboriginal terrain also flows from these canvases. Next time, I am going to listen to Coltrane's masterpiece *A Love Supreme* while taking in Aboriginal art.

Participating in Religious Ceremonies — Part One

My parents are not at all religious, and I was brought up the same way. I don't remember ever being taken to the Shinto shrine on New Year's Day, a tradition among even the most secular Japanese families. When my parents built a new house, my grandmother insisted that they put up a 'household altar' in the living room, but my mother neglected the miniature altar saying, 'God moved to Grandma's'. But even we went with our relatives to tend the family grave at Obon, the Buddhist festival in August. One year when I was still a child, standing at the grave of our ancestors passed down from generation to generation, I dismissed the whole thing as being 'merely for the self-satisfaction of the living.' Our relatives were appalled.

My father, however, was proud of this episode and reminisces about it even now, saying, 'Minoru was a clever child'. Atheism, rationalism, modernism, secularism, empiricism — call it whatever you want, but perhaps we were stereotypical of the modern Niigata family in post-war Japan, having lived through the economic growth spurt of the '60s and '70s and then the bubble economy.

I had heard about the importance of religious ceremonies to the Gurindji community. So even though I had been living in the village for a while and had become accustomed to life there, I didn't dare ask lightly to participate in one.

Then one day, one of the elders came to me and said, 'You've been living here for some time now. It's about time you were allowed to participate in a ceremony.'

I was driven about 20 minutes out of the village, to a secret ceremonial site where only grown men were allowed to enter. The eyes of the many Aborigines who had gathered there fell on me. Some wore unquiet expressions, as if to say, 'What is an outsider doing here?' but many others welcomed me with smiles. Here I encountered another world of Aboriginal people, a world set apart from their daily routines.

For many Japanese, it is probably quite difficult to grasp how real the spiritual world can be. In Japan, talk of religion is often mistaken for some shady discussion of the occult. Otherwise, religious rituals are given only a symbolic role, like visiting the family grave at Obon or paying one's respects at the Shinto shrine on New Year's Day — seen merely as tradition, rather than as having any religious reality. But in Gurindji society, the ceremonies are performed to fulfil a serious and concrete necessity: It is believed that if the ceremonies are not conducted, the world will not function properly.

The Aboriginal people perform a great variety of ceremonies. There is a ritual for abundance in nature, for balanced increases in animal and plant life; a coming-of-age ritual; a ritual to punish those who have broken the law; celebrations of births and funerals.

For many of the rituals, men and women conduct separate, exclusive ceremonies, and neither is permitted to know or to observe what takes place during the others' ceremonies. Therefore, I have no idea what the women's ceremonies are like. And although I have participated in the men's ceremonies, I am forbidden to divulge the details here.

The knowledge passed on through these ceremonies is extremely important information pertaining to the origins of the world. This is why it cannot be revealed casually to unknown numbers of people.

In Aboriginal societies, where only the permitted are allowed to learn — and only at the permitted ceremonial grounds — some part of the mystery of the beginning of the world, no single person holds the aggregate knowledge of the entire community, and no one aspires to do so. The desire to know the all-encompassing big picture is unknown in Aboriginal societies.

Participating in Religious Ceremonies — Part Two

Traditionally, clothing was not worn in Aboriginal societies. Today, most people wear clothes, but they still strip naked for certain ceremonies. Naturally, I also participated naked. Laughing and teasing, young men paint designs on my body with red clay and white clay. Then we dance non-stop from sunset 'til dawn. Sometimes this goes on for weeks.

During these rituals, we rarely leave the ceremonial grounds. For almost an entire month, we camp outdoors without once being able to wash. My skin is caked dry with ornamental red clay and sweat and dust, turning scaly and rough. The first week my scalp itches, but after that I feel nothing. Think about it: we are singing and dancing all day and all night, day after day, night after night. We are much too exhausted to worry about our itchy scalps.

One of the ceremonies that men and women perform together in public is the coming-of-age ceremony for boys of about 10 years old. The first few days, during which the boys are taken from the sphere of their mothers, involve both women and men; the second half of the ceremony, when the boys are welcomed into the world of grown men, is conducted in secret, exclusively among men. First the women perform the ritual dance of lament and of sending-off. Then the men sing and the women dance the wild night through. The entire village participates in the celebration to send the boys off into adulthood.

The next day, the boys are given their first lesson on the origins of the world from their elders. It is forbidden to divulge the specific contents of the lesson. What is most important is the vastness of the world that the boys are entering and the heavy responsibilities they are taking on.

In Japan, too, we have a ceremony to welcome young people into adulthood. Once we reach adulthood, we are expected to fulfil our social responsibilities as adults. But do we ever take into account our responsibilities to 'the world' and to 'the universe'?

In Aboriginal societies, going through a coming-of-age ritual does not mean simply that one becomes an adult with social obligations; it means that one becomes involved with the mystery upholding the origins of the world. That is to say, one accepts the opportunity and the responsibility of reaching beyond quotidian societal life and engaging the mystery of the cosmos.

> The wild rough sea —
> Reaching across to Sado Isle,
> The Milky Way.

I wonder what kind of cosmic sensibility inspired Basho to write this haiku?

We human beings carry within us an urgent need that cannot be completely fulfilled by interactions with family and society in our daily lives. In Japan, where religion has been reduced to the extremes of either an empty shell or a cult, have we lost our opportunity to ponder the universe? Do we no longer require a place where we think of the dead, fear other-worldly forces, and abandon ourselves to expanses beyond the temporal and spatial dimensions?

Some might say that modern, rational human beings are capable of living a rich life without need of such suspect sensibilities. In this day and age, when religiosity has declined irreversibly, how might we live a quietly fulfilling life of depth and meaning? I feel that this is one of the great challenges that modern society faces.

If I were to father a child one day, and he/she said at our ancestral grave during our ritual visit, 'This is merely for the self-satisfaction of the living,' how would I respond? 'That certainly may be true. But are you sure that's all it is?' I would ask, and then I would take my child out to visit the vast Australian landscape.

Alone in the Desert — Part One

Word was that a community far down south was preparing for a grand ceremony. The village was abuzz with rumours about the ceremony, said to be the largest ever. When I asked around, I learned that the Daguragu elders had been invited to this great ritual by people living 1,200 km to the south.

The widespread use of telephones and 4WD vehicles, especially the introduction of the Toyota Land Cruiser, brought revolutionary change to the lives of people living in rural Australia. To be sure, British-made 4WDs had been available before. But they were expensive and prone to breakdowns, so they were rarely used by the common people.

With the introduction of the Land Cruiser, 4WDs became essential to rural life. The Aboriginal society was no exception. As their cash income is limited, the people tend to live modestly most of the time. But when they come into money for one reason or another, many spend it on a rifle if it is a small amount, and a 4WD if it is a large amount. For the Aboriginal society, a nomadic people to begin with, the introduction of the Land Cruiser was an epochmaking event in that it allowed them to travel much greater distances. I almost think it should be called the 'Toyota-Aboriginal Revolution'. In fact, in Daguragu village, all 4WDs are referred to as 'Toyotas', even the Nissans and Fords. Among the Aboriginal people living in northern Australia, 'Toyota' has become a common noun meaning 4WD vehicles, rather than a specific brand.

Telephones also brought great change. Although white people in rural areas had been using radiotelephones running on generators, it was only after public telephones were installed that the Aboriginal people had a convenient way of contacting distant places. These days, there are one or two public telephones in each village.

Before the widespread use of telephones and four-wheel-drives, travelling to a community 1,200 km away to participate in a ceremony would have been unthinkable. Modern technology, far from bringing an end to the traditions of Aboriginal society, has touched off an explosive expansion of such practices.

'Do you want to join in on the trip to the ceremony?' the elders asked. I was deeply, deeply grateful for their invitation. I had been given permission to join an expedition of a scale that they themselves had never experienced. We split up into six vehicles and set off in high spirits for the southern desert. I was driving my 1981 old-model Land Cruiser, bought with what little money I'd managed to save from my fellowship stipend. I couldn't complain if it was a clunker. There were no gas stations along the way, so we stashed extra gas in jerry cans. And we just drove through the southern Tanami Desert.

During the day, we sang the songs of the country as we drove; at night, we sat around the campfire and prepared for the planned ceremony. Again and again, the cars got stuck in the sand, and we all had to dig out the tires and push.

I was exhausted and beginning to wonder if we would ever arrive — when the radiator blew a hole and water came spurting out. If I were to keep driving, the car would overheat and break down. There were two choices: Use the 20 litres of emergency water for coolant and pray that I make it to our destination, or wait for help and keep the emergency water for drinking.

Things weren't looking so good …

Alone in the Desert - Part Two

I had no idea how much farther it was to our destination or how large the leak in the radiator was. It was too dangerous to pour emergency water into a radiator that I knew had sprung a leak. Although I was worried, I decided to stop and wait for assistance. The others went on ahead, promising to send help if they reach their destination.

It being in the middle of the desert, there wasn't even any real shade to speak of. The temperature was well above 40°C. Moving around would bring on exhaustion in no time. So I stayed as still as I could, sipping water a little at a time. I figured that the water would last about two days. If no cars appeared after two days, I would write a will.

If I were to die, I thought to myself, my family would grieve, of course, but at least no one depends on me financially so no one would be left destitute … But I'd really rather not die yet … No matter what, I don't want to die before I record for the world what I've learned from the Aboriginal elders … Who in the whole wide world, other than myself, could possibly decipher my notes, written haphazardly in a mixture of English, Gurindji, and Japanese … ? Damn, it's hot … I've heard that if you're stranded in the snow, you're supposed to dig a hole to stay in to keep warm, but what are you supposed to do in the desert …?

For hours on end, I sat there thinking aimlessly about such things. For hours on end, I stared out at the landscape … I was sure that the others would have arrived at the southern community in a day or so. Then, they would send help. It was going to be alright. I had often heard about people who had nearly died in the bush, but rarely of anyone actually dying. It was going to be alright; all this would make a good story one day.

In the distance, I heard the rumble of a vehicle. Help had arrived at last. The earth had not abandoned me.

When I finally reached the community, thoroughly worn out and unsteady on my feet, the Gurindji people who had arrived earlier welcomed me with thunderous applause. They loudly called out my name, shook my hand, and put their arms around my shoulder. I was so moved and so relieved that I couldn't keep the tears from flowing.

More than 1,000 people from all over Australia had gathered at the desert community of Docker River. The ceremony consisted of the different communities displaying their songs and dances, one after another — which were completely different from those I had experienced in the Gurindji community's ceremonies. This was a secret ceremony conducted exclusively by grown men, so I was not even allowed to take notes, let alone take pictures. Only those who are present at the ceremony are allowed to experience and remember all that takes place. The strictness of the prohibition against leaving any documentation attests to the depth and mystery of Aboriginal culture.

Now, it was the Gurindji's turn. Conscious of the scrutiny of the many Aboriginal men I had met for the first time, and led by the Gurindji elders who had taken me in so completely, I participated in the Gurindji songs and dances.

In the car on the way back, I said nonchalantly to the elder next to me, 'Maybe next year, I'll come to live here in this community in the desert'. He immediately shot back in a harsh tone, 'No, don't do that'. Surprised at his gruffness, I asked, 'But why?' There was a silence for a while, then I heard his mumbling voice say, 'This is too far away. We need you to stay closer to us.'

A History of Suffering

The Aboriginal people that I have met, not only in Daguragu but all over rural northern Australia, are all very straightforward with their emotions. They laugh loudly, fly into rages, and weep openly. Then they laugh wholeheartedly again. The connection between their brains and bodies seems somehow more direct, more efficient.

Evidently, expressing your emotions honestly and openly is not seen as immodest in any way (unlike in Japan). The entire society accepts these outbursts of emotion as a matter of fact. Human beings laugh, get angry, and cry. Why is there any need to cover up something so natural?, the thinking goes. But how is it, I wonder, that these people can be 'straightforward' to such an extent? To me, it seems like an extremely difficult thing to do — to live deeply and straightforwardly.

The history of the Indigenous Australians after colonisation by whites is a wretched one. They were massacred in great numbers. Some were shot with rifles, others poisoned. Many also died of contagious diseases brought to Australia by the colonists. Those who managed to survive were relegated to the bottom rungs of society and have long suffered from discrimination and poverty.

Mainstream white Australian society decided long ago that the Aboriginal peoples were an 'inferior race destined to die out,' and thus justified colonisation. They robbed the people of their sacred land, exploited them for cheap labour, and made no substantive effort to address the problems of poverty and population decline.

By the 20th century, however, calls for the protection of the Aborigines finally began to be heard. But under a policy of forcibly Westernising them, the obliteration of their traditional culture began. It was not until the 1960s that such assimilation policies were in turn criticised, and the Aborigines' human rights, Indigenous rights, and the rights of self-rule were reflected in government policies. Yet even today, many Aboriginal societies face problems of high unemployment, low life expectancy and alcoholism — serious social issues typical of the poorer classes.

The Aboriginal society that I have described here, maintaining its rich traditions of hunting and conducting ceremonies, is also a society deeply scarred by colonialism — and the wounds are still raw. When speaking of their experiences under colonialism, the Aboriginal elders raise their voices in anger. One elder tells of how his grandmother and mother were both murdered before his eyes. He was a small child and was crying out of fear of the white man. The man ordered his mother to make him stop, threatening her. When the terrified child began to wail even louder, the man hit the mother, kicked her, and finally shot her dead in front of him. The body was burned and dumped into the river to hide the evidence. His grandmother met a similar fate.

'I saw everything with my very own eyes. I will never forget what happened. The white man did such terrible things!' the old man said, staring into my eyes.

From Daguragu a small hill can be seen in the distance. Once, Aborigines fleeing the white men took refuge on that hill. The white men circled the foothills, shooting their rifles at them, and the Aborigines fought back by throwing spears from the hilltop. Many died. Imitating the way the white men aimed their rifles, the elders explained, 'It was as if they were shooting dogs, the way they just picked us off.'

Yet these people's spirits are not defeated. Immediately after they express their anger straightforwardly, these elders laugh straightforwardly. 'Such things must never happen again. We should learn from one another and live side by side in peace. That is much better,' they say, and they go on laughing.

The Japanese Connection

The connection between Australian Aborigines and the Japanese may not be apparent to many. For most Japanese people, the Aborigines are a people of a distant world, a culture of a distant world. Nevertheless, the link between the Japanese and the Indigenous Australians go way back, to the 19th century.

Around the middle of the 19th century, an excellent harvesting ground for pearl oysters was discovered along the coast of northern Australia. These days, the pearls themselves are sold as precious gems, but at the time, it was the oyster shells used to make mother-of-pearl buttons that were in high demand in Europe. But diving for oyster shells — collecting shells along the sea bottom wearing diving gear — was dangerous and cruel work, so none of the white settlers wanted to do it.

In Japan, the Meiji Restoration was underway. Once Japan ended its 300-year isolation policy and emigration became possible, thousands of Japanese labourers travelled to Australia and worked in the pearl industry. By the beginning of the 20th century, there were Japanese communities in the small town of Broome and on Thursday Island in northern Australia.

Many Indigenous Australians were also working in the pearl industry, that is, the Aborigines and the Japanese shared in this harsh labour. A Japanese man in town was known to have had a child with an Aboriginal woman. Some men married Aboriginal women and settled in Australia. When World War II erupted, however, the Japanese were sent to detention camps; after the war ended, they were deported.

Lucy Dann, who was raised by her Aboriginal mother and was told only as an adult that her father was Japanese, was finally reunited with her father a few years ago, with the help of a Japanese journalist. A documentary slide show entitled *The Heart of the Journey* tells her story; it has been shown nationwide to critical acclaim.

The close links between the Aborigines and the Japanese are not limited to the pearl industry. The Aussie beef that Japan imports comes from cattle stations that were developed through colonialism — through the occupation of Aboriginal land by the colonists and by the exploitation, under miserable conditions, of the Aborigines that had survived the initial massacres.

The development of a uranium mine inside the Kakadu National Park, a World Heritage Site, is being opposed by the local Aboriginal community and environmental groups — and it is a Japanese electricity company that is planning to buy the uranium from that mine. Without even knowing it, we Japanese are undermining the foundation of the Aborigines' nourishing terrains.

In this globalised world of the 21st century, no place is far enough away to be of no concern to us. On the one hand, we may be able to learn of the richness of life from the Indigenous Australians' connection to the earth, but on the other hand, we risk destroying that earth definitively. Just as the Aboriginal people are not irrelevant to our present and future, we cannot be indifferent to the present and future of the Aboriginal people.

The New Generation

When you are trying to learn about Aboriginal culture and history, you inevitably spend a lot of time with the elders. Yet the future rests on the shoulders of the younger generation. So here are some thoughts about the young people.

The younger people of Daguragu village refer to themselves as 'the new generation'. Caught between traditional ways and modernisation, they are searching for a new path. Every one of them goes through the coming-of-age ceremony. Each of them has fulfilled the difficult requirements of the ritual, and is thus carrying on the traditions of the Aboriginal society. But these young people are also very susceptible to Western culture.

For example, rock music is extremely popular, not only in Daguragu, but in every Aboriginal community. There are multiple rock bands in each community, and they hold outdoor concerts several times a year. A band called Yothu Yindi, out of Arnhem Land at the northern tip of Australia, has won national success and has even performed live in Japan.

It was mostly on hunting and fishing trips that I spent time with the younger people of Daguragu village. When riding with the older generation, we usually sang the traditional songs of the country, but with the younger generation, we sang mostly rock songs. Once, calling it Japanese rap, I sang Buddha Brand's 'Human Power Station' to enthusiastic applause. Afterwards, the youths kept after me to perform 'Japanese rap' until I didn't know what to do.

The circumstances surrounding the younger generation of Aborigines are not rosy, by any stretch of the imagination. The unemployment rate is hopelessly high, and drug and alcohol abuse is a serious problem. The crime rate is also high. Most feel that there is more to life than following the elders' teachings and faithfully conducting the demanding rituals for the ceremonies.

At the same time, they do not want to pursue the kind of education that would assimilate them into white mainstream society, either. The future is unclear, and they don't know what to do. Yet they are bursting with youthful energy. Their preoccupation with sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll may sound glamourous, but their frustration with an uncertain future and their pent-up energy is almost tangible.

I dare not say lightly to these people, 'You should value traditional Aboriginal culture and not be swept up by modern ways.' I myself had become frustrated with my life in Niigata and eventually had come to discover the Aboriginal landscape, precisely because there was a deep yearning in me that could not be fulfilled by the status quo. It is only natural that these young people should also explore their own paths.

The musician Prince once had a hit song entitled 'New Power Generation'. The lyrics go like this:

> We r the new power generation, we want 2 change the world.
> The only thing that's in our way is u.
> Your old fashioned music, your old ideas,
> We're sick and tired of u telling us what 2 do.

I left Niigata and came to know the Aborigines' life-giving, living earth. What will these young people, who are leaving this nourishing terrain, encounter in their future lives? I only hope that they do not abandon their land, just as I have not abandoned Niigata.

The Interconnected World

'You're always coming and going, moving from place to place. Where do you plan to get a job and settle down eventually?' people sometimes ask. And I always answer, half joking and half serious: 'Anywhere in the world, as long as it's not Niigata.' It isn't that I dislike Niigata; it isn't that simple. I've written this column in the *Niigagta Nippo* precisely because I'm particularly attached to Niigata, my home. This can only be called a 'love-hate relationship'. I'm reminded of the author and essayist Ango Sakaguchi, whose relationship with Niigata was also emotionally complicated.

Once a Daguragu village elder asked me, 'Do you know why you came here?' 'Because I wanted to learn about Aboriginal culture and history,' I answered. But the old man looked into my eyes and said, 'It's because the country called you here'. Then he laughed heartily. In the face of the Aboriginal landscape, this living earth, the 'reasons for visiting' that I could offer were pathetically meaningless. The elder told me again and again: 'The earth will show you how to follow the right path.' To listen to the voice of the earth — facing this incredibly difficult task, I feel that I have much more to learn from the world of the Aborigines.

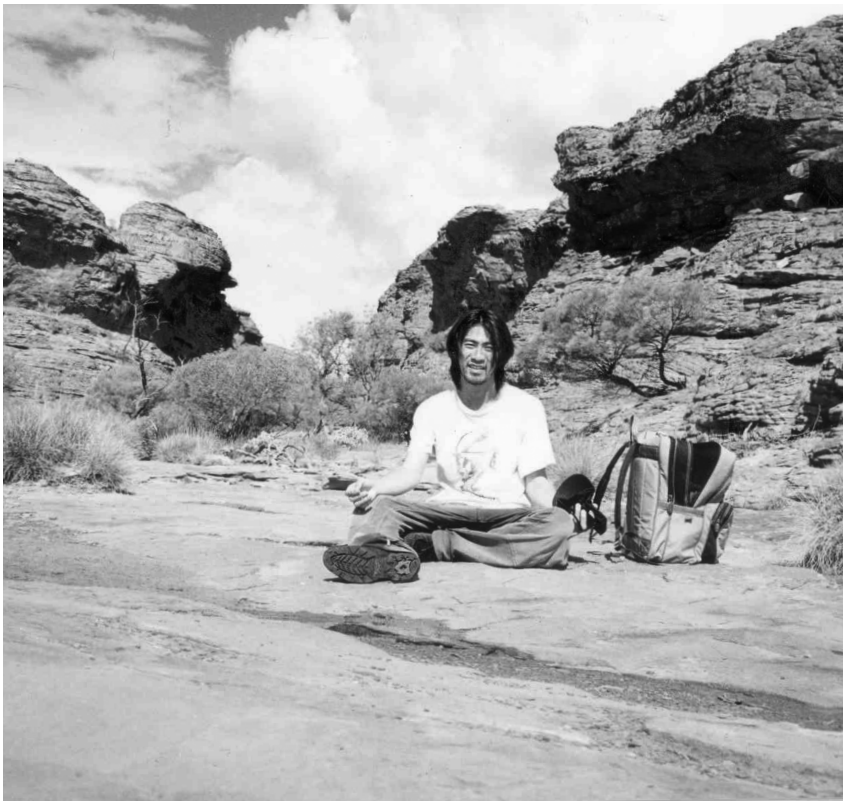
In Japan, too, some people ask, 'Why study the Aborigines? How useful can that kind of research be?' They're mystified, and they're not satisfied with my answer that the earth had called me there. They're even less convinced when I venture to say, 'I'm doing it to make the world a better place'.

I translated Deborah B. Rose's book *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*. It's a book that I'd like to recommend to anyone with an interest in ecology and indigenous cultures. For example, even if we look at a single global issue such as the environment, there is a great deal to be learned from the Aboriginal people. It is not just the most advanced nations and the superpowers that make up the world.

No, in fact, whenever the most advanced nations and superpowers attempt to hold up the entire world, to define it only in their terms, nothing good comes of it. Think about it: Could Japanese society be improved with just the IT revolution and Tokyo's urban culture?

Spending many years shuttling back and forth between the Aboriginal land and my home in Niigata, Sydney and Tokyo, Australia and Japan, I realise time and again how the earth is contiguous and the world interconnected. There are boundaries between groups in Aboriginal society, too, but they exist as a way for people to rely on one another, not to exclude one another. In this age of globalisation, we can, if we only have the will, travel back and forth frequently between the centre of the world and the periphery, between metropolitan and rural areas. I hope for a future world in which we no longer need passports and can visit various countries just as we go from Niigata to the neighbouring prefecture of Nagano today.

In closing, to the generation that must shoulder the 21st century, but to myself more than anyone else, I would like to repeat the words that I offered in my first column: We have no time to retreat into cynicism, to say, 'Whatever will happen will happen. There's nothing we can do.' Let us learn how to 'play' with all our hearts in this vast world of freedom and danger.



conversations *fiction*

Jan Borrie

Snow

Perhaps we are asleep and dreaming — one of those hallucinations without a soundtrack in which nothing quite makes sense. How else to explain the way the light picks out this mute and dazzling ice fall streaming from the darkness, from some unseen reservoir beyond the reach of our torchlight?

Swift and steady and yet untidy, irregularly sized flakes and larger fragments and clotted *clumps* of snow. Every surface glistening wet and shining pools dilating; gum leaves lacquered silver, candle bark trunks spectral white, but slick, like soap-oiled skin.

How to describe the calm that also falls and settles, which seems to form its own encasing crust? The distinctive hush that arrives unannounced like this windless, gentle storm — so stealthy, so silent, so suddenly one moment drizzle fading to mist to nothing but empty rigid air, then … wait … the raw breath, the altered timbre of the patter against leaf and canvas, the softer, barely footfall, and it begins.

The pervading stillness seems at once to descend from above and to push in from all sides, to enclose us within this intimate orb of night-enfolded forest, beyond which there is no other world. It pushes against us like a wordless, insistent sighing, holds this single second impossibly extended — withholding — until the magic is complete.

And it must be magic — for what elemental force could transform mere water molecules into this? Delicate crystals seemingly bonded at once with earth and sky, with unknown cells in between, some dissolving, some forming a strange and tense new skin.

And what of the elements at work within the two of us? We must do more than watch; we are drawn out to stand within this, to feel its icy yet so exquisitely, painfully gentle, tingling touch upon our skin. Like children, we extend an arm, an open palm, offer up our faces, open-mouthed, our tongues. We give ourselves for this benediction. *I want to taste this*. We will make the most of this extended moment because — like ecstasy, like joy, like love — it will not last and there's no telling when such pleasure might come our way again.

Subhash Jaireth

Cricket Ball

One December evening in 1993 I received an unexpected call from a friend in Lucknow.

'Who told you that I am in India?' I asked him.
'I have some news for you.' He ignored my question. 'But you'll have to come to Lucknow.'
'Why can't you tell me on the phone?'
'I can tell you alright but you won't believe me and hence it would be better for you to come to Lucknow.'

My friend Bhagwan Singh had thus found a reason to persuade me to come to Lucknow where he had an impressive job as a chief designer in the factory of Scooters India Ltd. In a way his invitation had arrived at the right time, because I had been thinking about going to Lucknow to see the library of the Lucknow University. The building was designed by Walter Griffin — the same Walter Griffin who had also designed and planned the city of Canberra.

As students in Moscow, Bhagwan and I had stayed for many years in the same hostel. Bhagwan was an obsessive chess player and a shameless chain smoker. One of his regular partners used to be Oleg Ivanovich Petrov, our *starshii prepodovatel* (senior teacher), whose job was to look after us and to help us settle down. He organised excursions for us and planned our vacation tours and,

for those who were keen to earn a few extra roubles in the summer breaks, Oleg Ivanovich found the right connections to arrange a spot in the student building brigades. He often talked to our teachers, kept tabs on our academic performance and, if required, arranged extra coaching for us. He was a kind man, easy to talk to and ready to listen. Once a year he also invited us home for a real, to use his own words, 'home-made' Russian dinner. In the winters of 1972 when I was hospitalised for a few weeks suffering from pneumonia and asthma, he often came to see me and brought me books, tapes and bottles of raspberry jam.

Oleg Ivanovich loved his chess games. However when the play reached the climatic stage he would become unbearably tense. He would start fidgeting and cursing but what annoyed Bhagwan the most were his frequent toilet breaks. Almost every 15 minutes or so he would say 'excuse me for a second,' and rush to the toilet for a leak. 'Keep an eye on this bastard,' he would tell me before leaving the room. 'It's because of the war,' he explained later. Lieutenant Petrov was injured in the battles around Stalingrad. Lost part of his right leg. In the wet, cold and muddy trenches when the bombs dropped and the bullets flew he often lost control of his bladder. 'Don't think I was the only one, there were many like me who wetted and soiled their pants.'

Oleg Ivanovich played his chess with passion but didn't mind losing. In fact he rather enjoyed losing. 'He is great with the openings,' Bhagwan used to tell me, 'and he is not bad in the middle, but his end games are terrible.' During one of his chess sessions with Bhagwan, he had asked us about cricket. 'What is this game you Indians, the Pakistanis and the English like so much?' We had to tell him that the Australians, the South Africans and the West Indians also played the game, and that they were better at it than the rest. 'The British Empire, hey?' He laughed. I had with me a book that I had borrowed from the library of the Indian High Commission in Moscow. I showed him the book and explained the basic rules. He was amazed to discover

that a test match was played for five to six days. He was also intrigued by the lush green of the field, the flat brown strip in the middle, white uniforms, red balls and soldier-like fielders placed strategically in the battle field. 'It sounds so much like chess,' was his first remark. 'Is it as brainy as chess?' I had to tell him that the most important figure in the team was that of the captain, who planned most of the moves and commanded his players. Soon he understood that cricket was a meditative game, measured and stately. It was slow and steady and lacked the mind boggling speed of ice hockey or soccer where one had to act and react quickly and at times impulsively.

One thing that escaped him altogether, however, was the live, ball-by-ball, description of the match. I was unable to make him appreciate the fact that it was not only the playing of the game that was important to the fans but also the way the game was talked, thought and theorised about. In fact in India, talking about the game had become at times more important than the game itself.

That December evening before putting the phone down, Bhagwan was able to throw one more riddle — a sort of googly — at me. 'Do you remember Jasu Patel?' he had asked me. 'Of course,' I had replied.

Bhagwan met me at the railway station. Like a good chess player he had planned every move. 'We'll first go to the factory to show you the scooters we make,' he announced, and before I could say a word my suitcase was whisked away into a Fiat with a chauffer in a neat blue uniform. The tour was OK. Nothing special. One of his young female assistants led us through the workshops, the design bureau and the marketing divisions. I was introduced to his chief engineer who, Bhagwan told me, had a degree from a university in Newcastle and was very keen to talk about Australia.

Bhagwan and his wife Geeta, a doctor in the factory clinic, lived in a factory bungalow with servants' quarters at the back. They had two kids, a boy aged 12 and a girl of 10. It was an ideal Indian

family, the Family Planning Commission of India would have proudly declared. Its most popular jingle, '*Hum do humare do*' (we are two we have two), was painted on billboards throughout the country. However, it was also a typical middle-class family of professionals who enjoyed entertaining guests, and making them feel at home. After dinner as sweet paan and supari, rolled betel leaf and nut, were being served on a silver plate, I asked Bhagwan about Jasu Patel. 'Thanks for reminding me,' he replied, 'I had totally forgotten about it.' He turned to his son and asked him to call in Ramlal Mali, the gardener.

The gardener came in with his granddaughter. He was old and looked quite weak and sick. He had cataract in his right eye and his body shook like a twig on an old tree.

'The sahib has come from Australia,' Bhagwan told Ramlal .
'He would like to look at the ball.' Ramlal opened his jute bag and produced an old cricket ball. I took the ball in my hand. It felt nice. I gripped the ball and, like a natural leg spinner, spun it a few times in my hand.

Bhagwan was smiling. 'I knew you would love it,' he said. Suddenly something flashed through my mind.
'You mean this is the ball?' I asked Bhagwan.
'Yes this is it.'
'Are you sure?'
'Positive. This is Jasu's ball, the very ball with which he clean bowled Sir Richie Benaud.'

The ball was old and a bit greasy from the endless number of hands that would have touched it and held it. However the contrast between the shiny and roughened sides was quite visible. In places, the seam had worn out and one could see a few cracks on the shiny side cutting across the brand name. The gold-coloured letters of the name had almost disappeared.

'Have a look at this,' Bhagwan handed me a small calico bag that Ramlal had taken from his pocket. I opened the small bag

and found several clumps of dried clay, a few shreds of reddish leather and a small tooth brush. 'Where do these come from?' I asked Ramlal. 'From the ball Sahib,' he replied. Ramlal it seems had scraped the dirt from the ball and kept it as a proof of its provenance. In the process he had also scratched and removed some of the leather.

'Hey Ramlal, the Sahib from Australia wants to hear the story. Tell him, won't you? Tell him all. Don't leave anything out.' Ramlal was handed a mug of sweet, hot and milky tea and the story seeped out of his toothless mouth mixed with sighs, spit and laughter. Occasionally, he was helped by his granddaughter who translated obscure Bhojpuri words for us.

I was nine in 1959, the year the famous match took place in Kanpur. In the Delhi test match, a week before, the Indian team had suffered a humiliating innings defeat. That was, however, not new to me and my friends. We had got used to the spineless performance of our cricketers. The glorious uncertainty of cricket, with which the commentators used to explain the defeats of the Indian team, was for us nothing but the glorious uncertainty of the Indian team. We were sure that this team would never win, but we wanted it to fight, to show some guts, to convince us that it was doing its best. We loved the Australian team, although its invincibility, professionalism and arrogance annoyed us. We wanted them to be like our Hindu gods, perfect, kind, but also fallible, frivolous and unreliable.

For me, the Australian team had a special place because I had learnt the tricks of spin bowling from none other than Sir Richie Benaud. In those days a sports magazine in Madras (I no longer remember its name) had serialised Benaud's lessons of spin bowling. My friend Ramesh and I had spent hours trying out various grips and round- and high-arm actions. Unfortunately, the home-made ball with which we used to play cricket didn't have a proper seam and hence it was quite difficult for us to give it a real tweak, but the importance of flight, loop, dip and swerve was

not lost to us. Our cricket balls were made from rags. The rags were rolled into a ball by binding them on the outside with rubber bands. The bands were cut from bicycle tubes which we bought for a few annas from the 'puncture-man', who owned a small bicycle-repair shop under a huge pippal tree, also home to a couple of rowdy monkeys.

The first day of the second test match thus brought no surprises. The Indian skipper Ramchand won the toss and elected to bat. 'At least he is not scared to face the pace of Alan Davidson,' we told each other, and when the first few overs of pace didn't get a wicket our hopes began to rise. But then, the spin attack began and Benaud, in his fourth or fifth over — I can't recall exactly — got Contractor, the left hand opener, caught by the keeper. This was no disaster but then Kline, the left arm spinner and chinaman (the left arm spinner's wrong one) bowler, got Poly Umrigar out with the addition of only nine runs. After this the wickets began to fall at regular intervals. There were a few dazzling shots played but it was Davidson's pace that destroyed the Indian batting. An hour after lunch saw the whole Indian team back to the pavilion sipping tea and eating creamy cakes, at least that is what we kids imagined. Under the front-page headline 'India's poor batting in Kanpur test' K. N. Prabhu, the cricket writer for the *Times of India*, reported on the day's play. In the disastrous test at Delhi, the pace had destroyed the Indian team, but at Kanpur it was the bowling of my spin hero Benaud that started the procession. On the first day the Australian team scored 23 runs without the loss of a wicket in the afternoon session and we knew that on Sunday, the next day, their batting would decimate the weak Indian attack. But what did happen on Sunday the 20th December was truly remarkable.

I am a big fan of spin bowling. Not because I bowl spin but because I dislike the brutishness of sheer pace, its capacity to intimidate and inflict physical pain. I have been hit many times by balls rising high from the good-length spot. I have seen my opening partner in my high school team floored by a ball that hit him hard in the chest. In

those days we didn't have the luxury of helmets and thick protective pads and the sight of a pace bowler running at you with a red ball in his hand was scary. Perhaps that is why I like the civility and gentility of spin bowling. Its virtue lies in its virtuosity, and the amount of guile and trickery that a master spin bowler can add to it. Instead of intimidating, he mesmerises you. The skill of the batter lies in coming to terms with the magic that the bowler tries to weave around him and his bat. The batter has to read every movement of the bowler and the ball, the height at which the ball comes out of the hand, the direction in which it spins, the flight and dip it carries, and the place where it lands on the pitch. The bowler on the other hand shows only the bare minimum, only that which is essential for creating deception. The bowler and the batter are thus locked in a tangled chain of action and reaction, of reading and not being able to be read. If Brett Lee is sheer arrogance, Shane Warne's arrogance has an aesthetic dimension to it: the slow, measured — almost contemplative — approach to the bowling crease, the round arm action, the twirl of the wrist, the rotation of the shoulder, the swing of the hip and the follow through where the back foot lands on the pitch with a sharp twist. The whole body performs a dance meant to enchant and disarm the batter.

Jasu Patel was an off-spinner. At 35, he was already too old for cricket. No one knew much about him except that he had bowled on matted wickets and that he had taken only a few test wickets before this encounter. He was a bit tall for a good spinner. Tall spin bowlers achieve bounce and pace but their mastery over flight and dip is at best tenuous. They rely on patience, bowling more or less the same deliveries and waiting for the batter to make a mistake. But it seems that on that wintry Sunday, with a strong breeze blowing across the pitch Patel came into his own. The pitch was still damp and soft, but the fast jerky action helped him to let the bowl bite into the pitch and turn. He was never a big turner of the ball; he bowled a little too fast to achieve that, but he had a very well disguised straight ball which not only went straight but often turned the other way, an off-spinner's googly — or what Sauqlain

Mushtaq nowadays calls '*doosara*' the odd one or the wrong one. His jerky action had aroused suspicion of the Australian team that had toured India three years before. Benaud was not happy, I guess also because Patel cleaned bowled him in the first innings and got him out, caught by the first ball he received, in the second. But the wicket I remember the most was that of the Australian opener Gavin Stevens. A subtle change of pace engineered a false straight drive from Stevens. The ball went up at great pace and Patel took a one-handed catch over his head.

In the second innings, Patel got Stevens again — this time by bowling a slightly faster ball. That Sunday between lunch and tea Patel bowled 16 overs and took five wickets conceding only 11 runs. When the Australian innings ended just after tea, Patel had taken nine wickets for 69 runs. 'Jasu Patel's Sensational Performance at Kanpur' read the headline in the *Times of India*. 'At lunch Australia were 128 for one and all seemed lost,' wrote Prabhu, 'but in one electrifying hour Jasu Patel altered that. He bowled McDonald with a quick off break, and Harvey with true, but well-disguised, straight one, and after Borde had removed the threat that was O'Neill, he brushed the rag tag and bobtail out of the way.' On the final day the Australian team needed to score 166 runs to win the test match. At that time, the team had lost only two wickets. Patel dominated the second innings as well, taking five wickets.

The last wicket, which he took of McDonald, was truly a spinner's dream. You flight the ball and the batter comes at you — trying to hit you high and out of the ground — but the ball dips, lands and turns, missing the bat, the batter and the wickets. What the keeper has to do is to remove the bails with a swift action. That is what happened to McDonald on the second-last ball of Patel's 26th over. Gordon Rorke, the left-arm fast bowler did not bat. He was sick. The dreaded Delhi belly had struck him down. The Indian team recorded its first memorable win, which we knew would be followed by a lengthy drought. Miracles, as we knew, do happen

but not every day. For Patel, after that match, the cricket soon came to an end and his name disappeared into the pages of cricketing history.

As I write about Ramlal Mali and Jasu Patel's cricket ball, I need to confess that as a nine-year-old boy in 1959, I didn't have the patience to listen to the ball-by-ball description of the whole match on the radio. Hence, apart from a few remarkable moments, most details of the match had disappeared into the unknown crevices of my memory. I have reconstructed this short account from old newspapers and magazines. The nine or so years which I had spent in Moscow had dampened my passion for cricket. I did, however, play a couple of matches in Moscow. The students from Pakistan threw down a challenge to the boys and girls from India. The matches were quite friendly. In fact I played my first match for the Pakistani team. There was a big group of students from Sri Lanka but they played cricket with a tennis ball which in my view was an insult. So, the leg spinner in me didn't die, it just went to sleep for a while. What I needed was a real cricket ball to let the sleeping 'giant' come alive. The mere feel of a cricket ball in my hand was enough to make it twitch. Perhaps that is what happened to me that evening when Ramlal Mali, the gardener, handed me the ball.

But how did the ball end up with Ramlal Mali? This is what he and his granddaughter told us that evening

'*Areh Sahib ab kya Batavain?* [Hey Sahib what is there to tell?]' he began. 'My memory is no longer as good as it used to be. I was, you know, the assistant to the *burra mali*, the chief gardener, who had been asked to prepare the pitch and keep it in playing condition. I was one of his four assistants. One of us had to water the ground; the second, I think Akbar Miyanh [he looks in the direction of his granddaughter who nods in approval] had to mow and cut the grass on the pitch and the ground. The third had to look after the rollers. I don't remember his name. He was short though, very short, almost a *baunnah*, a pygmy. My main task was to take care of the wickets and the bails, and to help the umpires mark the crease.

On the rest day when every one was relaxing, we were busy keeping an eye on the ground and the pitch. Cricket we had been told is a sahib's game and honesty and fair play is more important than winning or losing. We had heard this many times, but we also wanted the Indian team to win. Hence we had to keep an eye on each other so that none of us got carried away. *Oopparwallah*, the God at the top, sees and hears everything. No one can trick him, sahib, no one [the granddaughter smiles and gives Ramlal a nudge with her elbow forcing him back onto the neat track of the story].

'On the final day I was sitting just outside the boundary. We knew that the end was near. The *lakhs* and *lakhs* of people [Ramlal has exaggerated the numbers of spectators. The newspaper reports suggest that there were around 15,000 people in the ground] had started cheering and throwing all sorts of rubbish on the ground. The fire crackers had begun to be set alight. It was such happy mayhem. I was a bit scared too. Who knows what is in the mind of the unruly, *ek ruppiaha* [one rupee] mob. But it all ended well. Patelbhai bowled such a magical ball to McDonald sahib that he missed it completely and Tumhanebhai standing behind the wickets broke the stumps. The ball hit the stumps and ran towards me. I caught it in both my hands like a precious bird. The players, both Indian and the white sahibs, were shaking hands, hugging and patting each other's backs. I put the ball in my pocket and without telling any one walked home. For three days I didn't talk to anyone. At first I felt guilty that I had stolen something, but then I thought that the ball was a gift from above. If the ball ran into me, I argued, it meant that it wanted to come to me, or that someone wanted me to have it and keep it. It was just a ball. I didn't know at that time that it was a souvenir, that people collected such things, that such things were bought and sold, and that people became rich through owning them.'

When I asked Ramlal if he had told any one about the ball, he replied that a week or so after the match he had taken the ball to the *burra mali*, but the *burra mali* was too busy making arrangements for his daughter's marriage, and so Ramlal decided

that there was no point in telling him about the ball and putting extra pressure on him.

Ramlal did try once to sell the ball. He needed money to send his wife, who was suffering from breast cancer, to the medical institute hospital but, before he or his son could find an interested party, his wife died and he gave up the idea of selling it.

I returned to Canberra in February the following year and as I was reading through newspaper reports about the match, I found that most of what Ramlal had told us was correct. There were a few inconsistencies but they were minor. For instance, Patel clean bowled Benaud in the first innings and not in the second. Hence, the ball that he showed us was either the ball that was used in the first innings and not the match winning final ball or he had forgotten that Benaud was bowled out in the second innings. However, his description of the fall of the final wicket of the match was spot on. I also made checks about the make of the ball and was pleased that my friend in India, whose father ran a sporting-goods factory in the city of Jullundur, was able to confirm that the ball had the correct brand name. So why did Ramlal fail to find an interested collector? Why didn't he ask me to buy it? Why didn't he ask me to take it to Australia and find a buyer there? Didn't he care? If yes, why had he kept the ball?

I haven't found any satisfactory answers to these questions. There is, however, one small detail which could perhaps be of some significance. On one of his trips to Kanpur, Bhagwan met an army officer who played for the army services cricket team there. The army officer, Bhagwan told me in a letter, was offered on two different occasions cricket balls alleged to be bowled by Patel. 'Isn't it fascinating,' to quote the final words of Bhagwan's letter, 'that like Hindu gods, Jasu's ball has also undergone several incarnations? Does it matter which of them is real and authentic?'

Does it really matter? What do you think, is it the ball that is important or the stories which have come to grow around it?

notes on *contributors*

Jan Borrie is a writer and editor who lives in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales. Her second novel, *Unbroken Blue*, was published by Pandanus Books in 2005.

Adrian Caesar was born near Manchester, UK, and has lived in Australia since 1982. He is author of several books of literary and cultural criticism including *The White: Last Days in the Antarctic Journeys of Scott and Mawson 1911–1913*, (Picador, 1999) which won the Nettie Palmer Prize for non-fiction in the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (2000) and the ACT Book of the Year, 2000. His collection of poems, *High Wire*, is to be published by Pandanus Books in February 2006.

Diana Giese is a freelance writer and an oral historian, with a particular interest in Australian multiculturalism. Diana Giese's published works include *Astronauts, lost souls and dragons* (1997) and *Beyond Chinatown* (1995), as well as articles in various journals. She is an interviewer for the National Library of Australia's oral history project on Post-War Chinese Australians.

Catherine Hall is the Professor of Modern British Social and Cultural History at University College London. Her research focuses on questions of race, gender and empire, and in 2002 she published *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830–1867* which won the Morris D. Forkosch Prize by the American Historical Association. She is now a member of the collective of *History Workshop Journal*.

Minoru Hokari (1971–2004) made outstanding contributions towards 'cross-culturalising' historical practice and towards

developing a respectful collaborative research strategy with Indigenous Australians. A graduate of Hitotsubashi University (MEc 1996) and The Australian National University (PhD 2001), Minoru conducted fieldwork amongst Gurindji elders, who he acknowledged as exceptional historians in their own right. In June 2003, he began writing a serial column for a local newspaper in Niigata, Japan, entitled *The Living Earth: The World of the Aborigines*. In the middle of that project, Minoru was diagnosed with malignant lymphoma. He died on 10 May 2004.

Subhash Jaireth is a poet, essayist and short story writer with three published works: *Before the Bullet Hit Me* (1994), a collection of poems in Hindi published by Vani Prakashan in Delhi, *Unfinished Poems for Your Violin* (1996), published by Penguin and *Yashodhara: Six Seasons Without You* (2003) by Wild Peony. He is based in Canberra.

Carol Jenkins was born in Woy Woy, NSW and left as soon as possible. She is a recent convert to writing fiction and is actively neglecting her career in chemical regulation and assessment. Her work has appeared in the *National Model Regulations for the Control of Hazardous Substances*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Overland*, *Heat*, *Island* and *Quadrant*. She lives in Sydney.

Anita Patel's father is an Indian from Kenya and her mother is Malaysian, part Indian and part Portuguese Eurasian. She considers herself to be Australian but very much part of the Asian diaspora. Anita has lived in Canberra since 1982 and taught at Narrabundah College since 1990. She won the ACT Writers Centre Poetry prize in 2004 for her poem *Women's Talk*.

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