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### Indigenous Policy Failure and its Historical Foundations

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#### Abstract

Public policy aimed at addressing the socio-economic disadvantage of Aboriginal Australians over the past three decades has largely failed. Much research has focused on this policy failure and the historical circumstances that created the socio-economic marginalisation of Aboriginal peoples. This essay revisits these two areas with the intention of offering a fresh perspective. Firstly, it is proposed that in order to understand policy failure in the context of a relationship characterised by marked power disparity, the understandings, assumptions and motivations of the holders of power require scrutiny. Previously, research on policy failure has generally concentrated on the stated intentions, implementation and outcomes of policy, rather than these more subjective conceptualisations of the problem (and therefore, the solution) held by policy professionals. However, in the very political landscape of colonial era Australia, the historical perspective fails to adequately analyse or explain the gap between rhetoric and reality, the disjunction between stated intent, actions and outcomes, and gulf between the letter of the law and its enforcement.

#### Introduction

History might appear an unlikely place to start an essay on contemporary Indigenous economic development policy. However, in order to successfully formulate new policy frameworks, the reasons for previous policy failure must be determined and revealed. The move from assimilation to self determination during the 1970s and 80s introduced an entirely new policy paradigm. However, self determination is widely considered to have failed to deliver the intended improvements to Indigenous wellbeing. While this policy failure has been attributed to the self determination policy itself (which is useful if you did not agree with it), this essay explores a more subtle explanation. It contends that such a significant shift in policy requires an attendant shift in the conceptualisation of the problem being addressed. At the most fundamental level, the way a problem (i.e. policy issue) is framed (i.e. articulated or explained) determines the appropriate response (Bridgman and Davis 2004). I argue that the underlying problem definition attached to Aboriginal policy has remained relatively constant since its first implementation in Van Diemen's Land during the 1820-30s. Therefore, the initial implementation of the 'Protection' policy forms the focus of this essay.

This focus on historical policy means that one must turn to the discipline of History for evidence. Historians deal with the minutiae of evidence remaining from past eras. However, the historical account of the political dimensions of colonial era policy decisions appears incomplete. Determining responsibility for, and assessing individual knowledge of, current political controversies poses a significant challenge. How much more difficult is the task when considering decisions and actions undertaken more than a 170 years ago? It should also be acknowledged that "[a] powerful alliance was forged between historical scholarship and officially approved nationalism" (Tosh 1991, 4). History is influenced by the society and the era in which it is formed, but while historical narratives explain our past, they also influence our understanding of the present and our visions of the future. Therefore a candid analysis of past policy has relevance for contemporary policy makers.

In order to identify the problem definition of the Protection policy, which was introduced in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) during the first half of the nineteenth century, the intention of the policy needs to be determined. While the policy outcome was genocide, contemporary Australian historians generally contend this was contrary to the intention. On this point, this analysis intersects with two other arenas of current theoretical debate: firstly, the question of whether genocide occurred in Australia, and particularly in Van Diemen's Land; and secondly, the intellectual battle over the representation of our colonial past, known as the 'history wars' (Manne 2003; Windschuttle 2002).

In *An indelible stain?: The question of genocide in Australia's history*, Henry Reynolds (2001) offers a contemporary historical interpretation of the *intention* of Aboriginal policy in the Van Diemen's Land context. In chapters four and five Reynolds considers the question of genocide in early Tasmanian policy. Contemporary literature contends that most Australian examples of violence (massacres, etc.) lack the requisite evidence of "intention, agency and consciousness" to substantiate a charge of genocide (Moses 2000, 90, quoted in Attwood & Foster 2003). Reynolds' research focuses on intention alone, as the decisions were taken at an official level and agents of the colonial government carried out the actions. Thus, agency and consciousness can be assumed. Reynolds' portrayal of early Tasmanian history has been criticised by Keith Windschuttle for exaggerating the level of ill treatment of the Aboriginal population. These two positions epitomise the protagonists in the history wars. On the one hand, Reynolds argues that the outcome of colonisation in Van Diemen's Land was genocide but it was not intentional (2001). On the other, Windschuttle argues against genocide altogether (2002). This essay offers an alternative perspective to both sides of the history wars and their denial of *intentional* genocide, by applying a public policy analysis to the issue.

The defence against the charge of genocide in Van Diemen's Land rests on the argument that the outcome of the policy (the 'extinction' of the Indigenous population) was opposite to the intention of Protection. In policy terms this is referred to as a perverse (or inadvertent) policy outcome (Bridgman and Davis 2004: Hirschman 1991: Stone 2002). This assertion forms the focus of this essay: was genocide a perverse policy outcome of the Protection policy? The test of a perverse policy outcome rests on three points: firstly, could the perverse outcome have been anticipated; secondly, were mitigating measures taken once the problem (high mortality) became apparent; and, finally, was the policy ultimately abandoned (or significantly altered) due to its failure? This essay entails an analysis of the sequence of decisions, actions (and the intelligence informing these) and the policy outcomes in Van Diemen's Land during the early colonial period. Reynolds' *Indelible Stain* (2001) is relied on as the *generally* accepted historical perspective. Re-examination of the evidence from a policy perspective encompasses the political nature of the situation that history has overlooked and identifies alternative explanations for the decision making process. The journal of one of the primary actors, George Augustus Robinson (Plomley 1966) provides additional information. Robinson was the colonial government's agent for 'bringing in' the Aboriginal population for 'relocation' - the Protection policy. Reynolds refers to Plomley's work but disregards information that this analysis considers central.

Reynolds' chapter four begins with a review of international opinion, which has long considered Tasmania a classic site of genocide. However, Reynolds points to the often naïve level of understanding and argues that these critiques lack the complex contextual knowledge required to establish genocide. His sources are a review of public opinion, including newspaper editorials, published letters, and evidence, letters and opinions from 'prominent settlers' to government officials and committees, that were published or recorded during the period ( 2001, 52-6). While Reynolds considered much of this rhetoric quite damning, he pointed out that it failed to prove what *everyone* thought and that to 'pursue the question of genocide' government policies needed to be considered ( 2001, 56). Unfortunately, Reynolds does not appear to consider the political pressure that this opinion, voiced by influential colonists and often calling for the destruction, extermination or extirpation of the Aboriginal population, may have exercised upon colonial policy makers. Examination of correspondence from the Colonial Office in Great Britain to Lieutenant Governor Arthur in Van Diemen's Land reveals contradictory policy objectives. However, Reynolds concludes that a letter written in 1830 discharged any responsibility of the Colonial Office for the 'indelible stain' that a policy of extinction would leave on the Imperial character (Reynolds 2001, 60). Chapter five reviews the black Line and the ultimate removal of the Indigenous population to Wybalenna on Flinders Island in Bass Strait.

Reynolds' investigation focuses on the 'intention' of the various actors, largely as determined by their own words in letters, reports and other records. The author's conclusion is that actions which appear genocidal must be considered in the context of war and that, ultimately, the charge of intentional genocide cannot be sustained. The following brief review of Reynolds' account of major political decisions and events (re-arranged into chronological order) provides the broadly accepted narrative of the period.

### **The historical narrative**

Arthur arrived in Van Diemen's Land to take up the position of Governor at a time when colonial pastoral expansion would soon begin to escalate conflict between colonists and the Aboriginal populations. Reynolds considered Arthur to be "predisposed to humanitarian policies" and described him as an

. . . evangelical Christian, an acquaintance of leading antislavery activists, with a reputation for defending the rights of indigenous people. He had attempted to free enslaved Indians when he was superintendent of British Honduras between 1814 and 1822, in the face of strong opposition from the local oligarchy. (Reynolds 2001, 60)

One of Arthur's first actions was to proclaim his intention to prosecute anyone harming the Aborigines, which had been an ongoing problem. However, Reynolds did observe that he "pursued contradictory policies" at the behest of the imperial authorities (2001, 56). On the one hand, Aborigines were to be protected; on the other, the use of force was sanctioned if they resisted incursion onto their own Country.

In November 1825, Darling visited Hobart enroute to Sydney to take up the post of Governor of New South Wales (Reynolds 2001, 57). He delivered a letter from Lord Bathurst which amounted to standing orders for both colonies. It ordered them to "by all lawful means prevent and restrain all violence against [the Aborigines]" but should they "oppose force by force" then they should be treated as if their actions "proceeded from the subjects of an accredited state" (Reynolds 2001, 56). Arthur used these orders as an 'authoritative guide' and actually produced the document at critical moments.

'Aboriginal resistance intensified from the spring of 1826' (Reynolds 2001, 61). In response, Arthur issued a public statement condemning Aboriginal violence and setting out six conditions that would justify settler retaliation. In April 1828, Arthur increased the intensity of the military action to total exclusion of all Aborigines (hostile or otherwise) from the settled districts (Reynolds 2001, 62, 64-5). The escalation of violence continued. On November 1, 1828, Martial Law was proclaimed (Plomley 1966; Reynolds 2001). In February 1830, rewards were offered to anyone for the capture of Aborigines, £5 per adult and £2 per child (Reynolds 2001).

Between October 15 and November 16, 1830, the military action that became known as the 'black Line' was carried out. In effect, the Line was a sweep of the settled districts by over two thousand armed men with the intention of forcing the remnant Aboriginal population into the Tasman Peninsular (Reynolds 2001). Reynolds estimates the cost of the campaign at £35,000 (a significant degree of public expenditure at that time) and the employment and provisioning of 2,200 men meant that the entire colony benefitted economically, either directly or indirectly (Reynolds 2001, 62, 69). However, the black Line was a spectacular failure: the entire campaign captured only one old man and a boy. Reynolds concedes that the 'attempts . . . to sweep the settled districts clear of the resident Aboriginal tribes has similarities with the modern practice of forced removal . . . and ethnic cleansing' but counters this on the basis that the efforts were localised - only being directed against the tribes in the central districts rather than the entire Van Diemen's Land Aboriginal population. It is further noted that whatever the intension, the failure of the black Line removes it from consideration as genocide. However, Reynolds offers no explanation for the change of policy from exclusion from the 'settled districts' to removal and confinement on a peninsular, despite exile being called for by some colonists for several years.

During the execution of the black Line, Sir George Murray of the Colonial Office in Great Britain wrote a letter to Arthur that included the following passage:

The great decrease which has of late years taken place in the amount of the aboriginal Population, renders it not unreasonable to apprehend that the whole race of these people may, at no distant period, become extinct. But with whatever feelings such an event may be looked forward to by those of the Settlers who have been sufferers by the Collisions which have taken place, it is impossible not to contemplate such a result of our occupation of the Island, as one very difficult to be reconciled with feelings of humanity or even with principles of justice and of sound policy: and the adoption of any line of conduct having for its avowed or for its secret object, the extinction of the native race, could not fail to leave an indelible stain upon the character of the British Government. (Reynolds 2001, 59)

Reynolds contends that the reference to the undesirability of any connection to a policy of extinction in this passage relieves the Colonial office of any responsibility for a charge of genocide. The policy of confinement continued but the method was altered from force, which had proved ineffectual, to conciliation. Between 1830 and 1834, George Augustus Robinson gathered in the surviving Aboriginal population in what became known as his 'friendly mission'. These people were removed to the 'mission' of Wybalenna on Flinders Island, which had been established for the purpose. Reynolds goes to some lengths to illustrate the good intentions motivating this policy. He explains the mission was comfortable and well provisioned (for the period), but argues that the disease which ravaged the inmates, proved to be beyond the medical capacity of the Colony. This explained the appalling mortality that was considered for almost a century to have caused the 'extinction' of the Tasmanians. The following is a summary of the generally accepted time line, reconstituted from Reynolds' historical narrative in *Indelible Stain*:

### **Historical Time Line**

1824 May: Arthur assumed control as Governor in Van Diemen's Land  
 1825 November: Arthur issues new standing orders  
 1826 November: Six conditions set to justify violence against Aborigines  
 1828 April: Total exclusion of Aborigines from the settled districts  
 1828 November: Martial Law proclaimed  
 1830 February: Rewards offered, £5 adults, £2 children  
 1830 October: 15 to Nov 16: the 'black Line'  
 1830 November: Sir George Murray to Arthur 'indelible stain'  
 1830 – 1834: Aboriginal population removed to Wybalenna on Flinders Island

### **Critique of Reynolds' method**

The evidence supplied in the two chapters dealing specifically with Van Diemen's Land in *Indelible Stain* is organised around groups of informants under analysis: the settlers, the imperial authorities and the local authorities. Even within these areas, the material does not follow a sequential structure. This creates confused time lines, which is problematic from a Public Policy perspective. Indeed, the narrative and the time line presented above took considerable effort to disentangle. This confused structure effectively removes the evidence, e.g. quotes, arguments and decisions from the context of time, situation and the information available at that juncture. This severely limits the usefulness of the material for meaningful analysis and effectively constrained Reynolds to accept all testimony at face value. Therefore, while the political context is referred to, there was little capacity to incorporate it within the analysis. It must be recognised that, *if* genocide were the intention of policy, the likelihood of an official voicing that fact in public or committing it to official or unofficial correspondence was extremely remote and potentially detrimental to one's career. The antislavery movement within Britain ensured a political sensitivity to public opinion on the rights of other races (Shaw 1971). This humanitarian sentiment was reflected in Murray's letter referring to the 'indelible stain' on the character of the government if extinction was identified as a policy objective (Reynolds 2001, 59).

Reynolds concluded that, in the Van Diemen's Land instance, there was actually confusion between war and genocide, with the first being the reality. This explained the attitudes of international authors who assumed genocide due to their limited understanding of the context. The violence against the Aboriginal population could be explained in terms of self-defence. In addition, the outcome of Protection – the mortality at Wybalenna – was opposite to what was intended. In policy terms, it was a 'perverse policy

outcome'. However, this paper contends that two decisions during this period, which may have seemed unrelated to a historian, are particularly informative to a policy analyst. The following is the sequence of events revisited, with an alternative perspective, further evidence and discussion.

## **Policy narrative**

### ***1824 May 14: Arthur assumed control in Van Diemen's Land***

At the time Arthur arrived in Van Diemen's Land, Aboriginal people were generally considered 'mild and peaceful' by the local colonial population (Reynolds 1995, 57). Reynolds noted that Arthur's actions as superintendent of Honduras indicated a sympathetic attitude towards Indigenes. However, opposition to the oligarchy there would have incurred costs, both political and to his career. Dr Michael Powell, a colonial Historian, has suggested that given the service already undertaken in the colonies, the Governorship of Van Diemen's Land was not necessarily a favoured appointment (Michael Powell, personal communication, 2007). However, Arthur did make the proclamation that the Aborigines were "under the same laws which protect the settlers" (Reynolds 2001, 60). Arthur was recognised for the establishment of many public institutions. The Supreme Court was established in Hobart the very month he arrived, and the first case heard was a charge against a white man for the manslaughter of an Aborigine (Plomley 1966, 29). The defendant was sentenced to three years secondary transportation, an indication perhaps, of Arthur's intentions. Similar proclamations had been made by previous Governors, but none had ever been enforced. This was the only instance of an attempt to do so (Plomley 1966, 29). However, the sentence was later reversed and the defendant discharged. Arthur may have attempted to enforce the proclamation but found there were limits to his power, and the status quo reasserted itself.

On the other hand, three Aboriginal men were found guilty and hanged for murder over the next two years, despite some colonists' belief that these men were innocent (Plomley 1966). Thus, the protection offered to Aborigines under such proclamations was essentially worthless, despite the 'good intentions' of any individual, even one in a powerful position. This highlights the need to distinguish between political rhetoric and hard policy decisions. This legal double standard was experienced Australia wide. Aborigines 'were regarded formally as British subjects, equal before the law'. However, they "were forbidden from testifying in legal proceedings" (Moses 2004, 7). They were subject to the law but had no recourse to justice; Arthur's proclamation was essentially worthless.

### ***1825 November: Darling's visit to Hobart enroute to Sydney***

Given the difficult political situation, where all communication had to be committed to writing and months elapsed between sending a letter and receiving a reply, the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting with a colleague of equivalent rank who had been briefed in person by the Colonial Secretary in Great Britain was rare and perhaps significant. This meeting would allow for the transfer of information and orders that could not (for political reasons) be committed to official documentation. The new instructions delivered by Darling amounted to a hardening of policy against the Aboriginal population – 'oppose force by force' (Reynolds 2001, 57). The order to treat Aborigines engaged in resistance as if they were 'subjects of an accredited state' is in stark contrast to them being 'under the same laws which protect the settlers' (Reynolds 2001, 60). Where policies directly contradict, it is those which are enacted that indicate intention. Without the force of law or implementation, policy remains rhetoric. The following year this hardening of policy saw the introduction of rules that would permit colonial violence towards the Aboriginal population.

### ***1826 November: Six conditions set to justify violence against Aborigines***

The six conditions set by Arthur in 1826 effectively authorised 'pre-emptive' attacks by settlers. Because Aborigines were excluded from giving evidence in legal proceedings, there was no recourse to complaint – effectively permitting settlers to act as they pleased. The violence escalated and in April 1828, all Aborigines were excluded from the settled districts (Reynolds 2001, 62, 64-5). At the time, Arthur wrote to the Colonial Office informing them of the decision, with the proclamation enclosed (THRA 1971). The conflict escalated and Martial Law was proclaimed on November 1, 1828 (Plomley 1966; Reynolds

2001). The number of Aboriginal attacks on the colonial population that year totalled 144 (Reynolds 1995). On February 20, 1829, the Secretary of State, Sir George Murray, wrote to Arthur, responding to the proclamation of exclusion:

I am aware of the extremely difficult task of inducing ignorant beings . . . to acknowledge any authority short of *absolute force*, particularly when possessed with the idea which they appear to entertain in regard to *their own rights over the country* in comparison with those of the colonists. (Plomley 1966, 43; THRA 1971, 8) [my emphasis]

Arthur had reported Aboriginal complaints 'that the white people have taken possession of their country . . .' in an earlier letter (THRA 1971). Perhaps it appeared politically astute to repeat this challenge to British sovereignty when condoning the increase in military action.

### **1829 April: Bruny Island 'experiment' established**

On March 7, 1829, a Government notice advertised the position of 'Storekeeper' on Bruny Island (Plomley 1966, 51). George Augustus Robinson applied and was duly appointed. 'The establishment' that Robinson embarked upon replaced an existing ration station that supplied the resident Aboriginal population (who were not hostile to the colonists). Robinson attempted to feed, clothe and Christianise his 'charges'. However, he also worked vigorously to confine the Aborigines to what he called the 'establishment'. Despite the appalling morbidity and mortality occurring, one of Robinson's major concerns was the Aboriginal people who managed to abscond from the establishment, or those who were not subject to his authority (labourers on local properties). On September 23, 1829, barely six months after the project's commencement, Robinson reported the number of deaths to Arthur – a total of 22. Half of those deaths were Bruny Island people, which constituted half the Indigenous Island population and the other 11 were Port Davey people who fell ill after a group of nine had visited for just three days in July. The illness struck before they departed the Island and left them unable to travel further. The death rate for the six-month period was 22 from a combined population of 33. Thus, the result of this type of confinement, later referred to as Protection, was fully understood by Robinson, the colonial authorities in Hobart and ultimately by the British colonial office. Thus, the outcome could have been anticipated – the first test against a perverse policy outcome.

A month later, Robinson received approval to travel to Maria Island to investigate if it was a more suitable site for the establishment (Plomley 1966, 83). There was no suggestion that an alternative location would reduce the mortality rate - the intention of relocation was to stop residents from escaping. However, Maria Island was deemed unsuitable (Plomley 1966). A total of 148 Aboriginal attacks was recorded that year. Reynolds considered this increase in violence the reason for the introduction of rewards for the capture of Aborigines. However, by February 1830, when the rewards were introduced, Robinson was on his way to Port Davey at the beginning of his Friendly Mission and the rewards would form a substantial part of his remuneration.

Inclusion of the Bruny Island establishment in the analysis puts the black Line, which began more than a year after the establishment's mortality rate was reported to Hobart, in a very different light. It makes clear that the change from a policy of exclusion to one of confinement was an informed decision. It also casts some light on the reference to the likely extinction of the Aboriginal population in Sir George Murray's letter to Arthur at the time of the black Line (quoted in the Historical Narrative section). Thus, the establishment of Wybalenna on Flinders Island was undertaken with a clear understanding of the likely outcome and motivation for the choice of site – distance was necessary for effective confinement. Just getting there was fraught with danger. Only 220 of the 350 Aborigines removed from Van Diemen's Land arrived at Wybalenna. The rest died at the various holding stations before reaching their final destination (Plomley 1987). At no point during the removal or the period at Wybalenna was there any question of a substantive change to the policy – the second test of a perverse outcome.

### **1839: Robinson appointed first Chief Protector for Aborigines in Port Phillip**

The final argument against genocide being a perverse policy outcome is that, far from being seen as a failure, Robinson was offered the same position in Port Phillip. The policy he enacted there: 'Protection'.

Indeed the Protection policy, in much the same form as Robinson established, was adopted successively throughout the Australian colonies and continued for some 70 years – the true test of a successful policy and the antithesis of a perverse policy outcome.

### **Policy Time Line**

1824 May: Arthur assumed control as Governor in Van Diemen's Land  
 1826 November: Six conditions set to justify violence against Aborigines  
 1828 April: Total exclusion of Aborigines from the settled districts  
 1828 November: Martial Law proclaimed  
 1829 April: *Bruny Island 'experiment' established, mortality rate: 22 (of 33)*  
 1830 February: Rewards offered: £5 adults, £2 children  
 1830 October: 15 to Nov 16: the 'black Line'  
 1830 November: Sir George Murray to Arthur 'indelible stain'  
 1830 – 1834: Aboriginal population removed to Wybalenna on Flinders Island  
 1839: Robinson appointed first Chief Protector for Aborigines in Port Phillip

So, what can be made of Reynolds' analysis of the question of genocide in Van Diemen's Land? Was there evidence of intention, or even Moses' requirements: agency, consciousness and intention? These criteria assume a context of 'rational decision making', based on the presumption of a single rational actor or entity, responsible for the ultimate decision (Stone 2002). Hence, the apparent search for 'proof' of intention - the one document commanding the destruction of the Aboriginal population - that would identify the 'guilty' actor or actors. This is not the reality in any political community, where decisions are a matter of negotiation and compromise, and where multiple actors can affect decisions. The political community of Van Diemen's Land was not a site of 'rational' decision making, despite the lines of authority being clearer than those experienced in contemporary society. This is illustrated in the attempt to prosecute a white man for the murder of an Aborigine in 1824. Arthur's influence was ultimately limited. The structure of colonial society was central to the progression of events. Colonisation rests upon the appropriation of other peoples' lands (and often their labour) to channel the wealth thereby produced back to the 'mother' country (a benign analogy). Thus, the structure that aligned the interests of colonists with the empire (and in direct opposition to Indigenous peoples) was anything but random.

The definition of the Aboriginal population as British subjects was not coupled with civil rights that would transmit the benefits of that status. Because they were not permitted to give evidence within the courts, they did not have recourse to the justice that true citizenship provided. The only substantive effect of the classification was the denial of the status of independent state or states, i.e. sovereignty and the rightful ownership of land. Aboriginal claims to land ownership and the precedence of these claims over the colonisers were voiced effectively enough to elicit a response in official correspondence from Great Britain. However, due to the humanitarian sentiment arising out of the antislavery movement this had the potential to damage the legitimacy of the colonial process (Shaw 1971). If not silenced quickly, this may well have created a groundswell of public opinion in Great Britain against such injustice.

### **Conclusion**

The intention of the (B)lack Line was confinement and, as we have seen, the (likely) outcome of confinement was already known. Thus, the first test of a perverse policy outcome, that the undesired outcome could not reasonably be anticipated, fails. The death rate on Bruny Island (two thirds of the total) falls within the United Nations definition of genocide (Reynolds 2001). Indeed, the death rate of the people held on various islands before Wybalenna was established (one third) was also within this definition as was the mortality at the Wybalenna 'mission'. However, no alterations to the policy were even considered. The ultimate closing of Wybalenna was not in response to the mortality of the inmates. It was due to the ongoing expense and was only undertaken once the remnant population was no longer considered viable. Thus, the second test – changing the policy once its effect became obvious – also fails. The most convincing argument against genocide being a perverse policy outcome rests on the third test, further implementation. The appointment of Robinson as Protector of Aborigines in Port Phillip in

1837 to implement precisely the same policy as Protection in Van Diemen's Land is the antithesis of a failed policy (with a profoundly undesired and undesirable outcome).

The outcome of Protection was explained through a policy narrative; the doomed race theory (McGregor 1997). This is what Stone would describe as a 'blame the victim story' (2002). The confinement of Aborigines across Australia was described as 'smoothing their dying pillow', an act of Christian philanthropy. Therefore, Protection met two competing political imperatives: it dealt with the existence of the prior owners while being seen to take due care for their needs to pacify the humanitarian element in Britain.

The relevance of Protection to current policy rests in the way our understanding of the past shapes our understanding of the present. Problem definition is central to contemporary policy (Bridgman and Davis 2004). The problem was originally defined simply as the 'aboriginal problem', in short, their existence. At the turn of the century when Protection gave way to Segregation, the definition of the *problem* did not change, just its demographic dimensions (Reynolds 1989). The 'mixed race' population was increasing and Segregation was calculated to mitigate that growth. However, the 'full bloods' were still expected to 'die out'. This was still the expectation when Neville, proposing biological assimilation in 1937, asked 'are we going to have a population of one million blacks in the commonwealth' (Manne 2001, 40). The problem definition had not altered, just the solution. Hasluck changed the rhetoric of assimilation but the policy remained constant (McGregor 1999). Even with the introduction of self determination, there was no evidence of a reassessment of the *problem*. The basic premise, that the interests of the Aboriginal population are in direct opposition to the best interests of the dominant society, still hold. Aboriginal economic community development cannot realistically make substantive change in Aboriginal wellbeing until the 'problem' is redefined and the interests of both groups are aligned or, ideally, are understood as interdependent.

Wendy Aitken belongs to a Flinders 'Islander' family with lineage tracing back to Elizabeth Maynard, a Boonerwung woman of Port Nepean in Victoria and to Mannalagenna, of the North East clans of Tasmania. Wendy holds a combined Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Arts (honours) Degree and is currently a PhD candidate and associate lecturer with the University of Tasmania.

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