

**Centre for Aboriginal Studies**

**The Legacy of the Late Edward Mippy:  
An Ethnographic Biography**

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TO MY FRIEND  
THE LATE EDWARD "NED" MIPPY

## ABSTRACT

Cast in the dual genre of ethnographic biography, this thesis is focused on the life, work and vision of the late Edward “Ned” Mippy, an Aboriginal Elder of the Yuat Nyoongara Community who devoted the latter years of his life to promoting and developing the cultural identity of his people. As biography, it portrays the life of Mr. Mippy with particular emphasis on the factors which help to highlight his understandings and his vision for an Indigenous cultural renewal. As ethnography, the study is intended as a vehicle for wider concerns, evoking an interpretative glimpse of his community and contributing a new perspective of that community as a continuing social entity.

These aims are broadly set forth in the brief introduction. The first chapter of the thesis then outlines the origin and development of the research project and the evolution of its methodology. Chapter two presents a picture of Mr. Mippy’s life experience, largely in terms of his own recorded memories and perceptions, while chapter three places his later life in a community context which includes historical, personal and demographic perspectives. The following two chapters, four and five, present various accounts of the work undertaken by Edward Mippy. They offer a glimpse of his cultural knowledge, seeking to explain the nature of his vision and the way in which his goals were implemented. The sixth chapter aims to situate his life and work in the wider social and academic discourses of Indigenous identity. The thesis then concludes with an interpretation of Mr. Mippy’s personal understandings regarding the dynamics of cultural transmission and its importance for future generations.

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Above all, I give thanks to Almighty God, with whose help anything is possible.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AAM	- Australian Aborigines' Mission Society
AAPA	- Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (WA)
ABC	- Australian Broadcasting Commission
ADC	- Aboriginal Development Commission
ATSIC	- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Commission
CAS	- Centre for Aboriginal Studies (Curtin University, WA)
CDEP	- Community Development Employment Program
CALM	- Department of Conservation & Land Management (WA)
CMAPA	- Central Midlands Aboriginal Progress Association
DAA	- Department of Aboriginal Affairs (Federal)
DCW	- Department of Community Welfare (WA)
DEET	- Department of Employment, Education & Training (WA)
DET	- Department of Employment & Training (Federal)
GWN	- Golden West Network
MRNS	- Moore River Native Settlement
NNA	- New Norcia Archives
SHC	- State Housing Commission (WA)
SNHC	- Swan Native and Half-Caste Home
TAB	- Totalisator Agency Board
TAFE	- Technical And Further Education (WA)
WA	- Western Australia
WAC	- Wheatbelt Aboriginal Corporation

## A NOTE ON THE MAIN TEXT

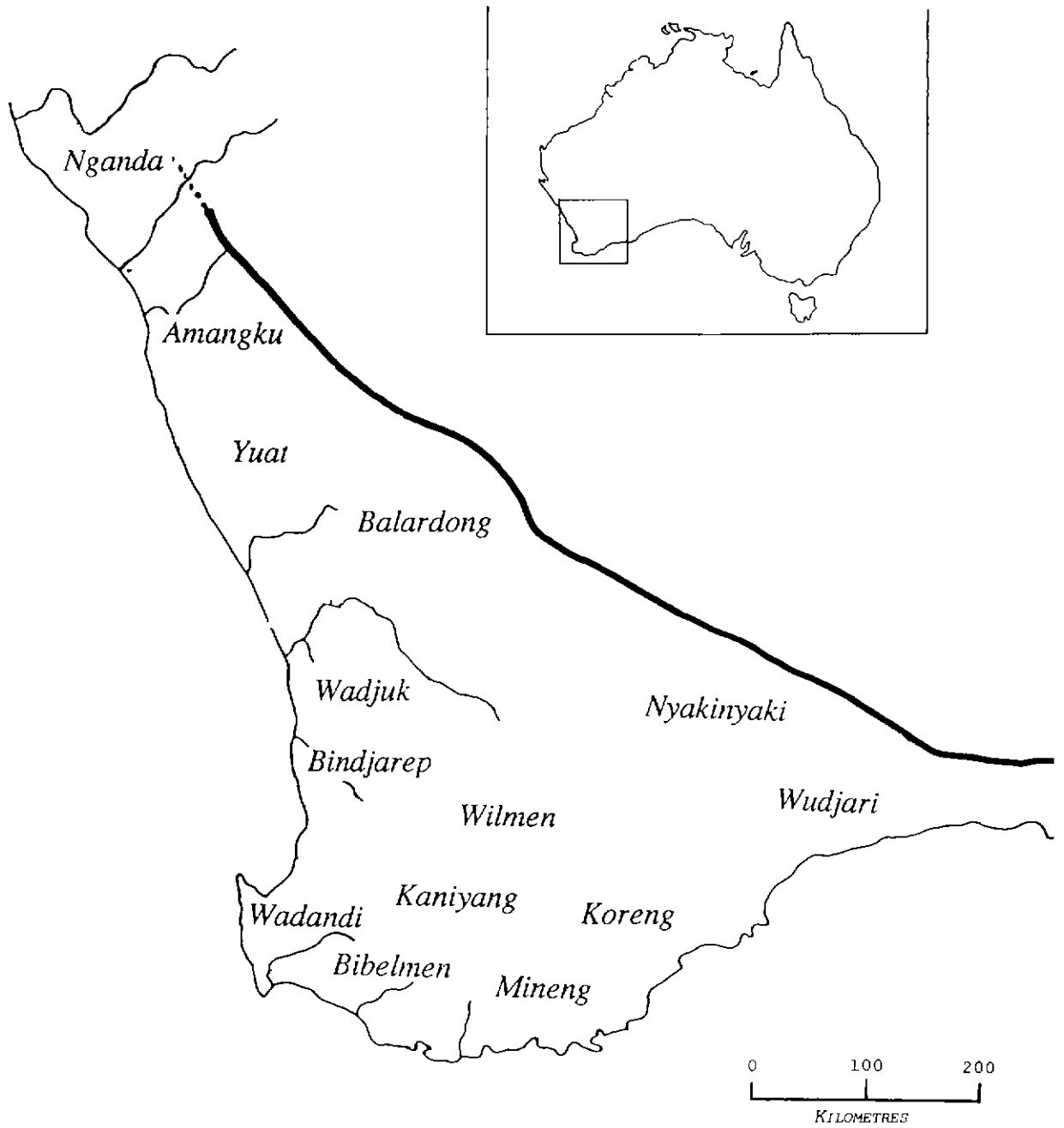
Throughout this biographical study, all direct quotes and other texts representing Indigenous Voices, besides being placed within the customary quotation marks, are also presented in *italics*. Likewise, all words and expressions in Aboriginal language are expressed in *italics* (a

lengthened vowel being expressed in *bolded italic*). This measure has been adopted in order to highlight the importance, uniqueness and centrality of Indigenous speakers and sources in relation to this thesis. However, in order to avoid the confusion which can arise between Indigenous and non-Indigenous names and places and their variant orthography, proper names of Indigenous persons, societies, places and institutions are presented in Regular font, except where they are quoted from Indigenous sources. Direct quotes from non-Indigenous sources are presented in the normal manner, in Regular font. It should be noted also, that the usual literary convention for the use of *italics* prevails in the Bibliography and List of References

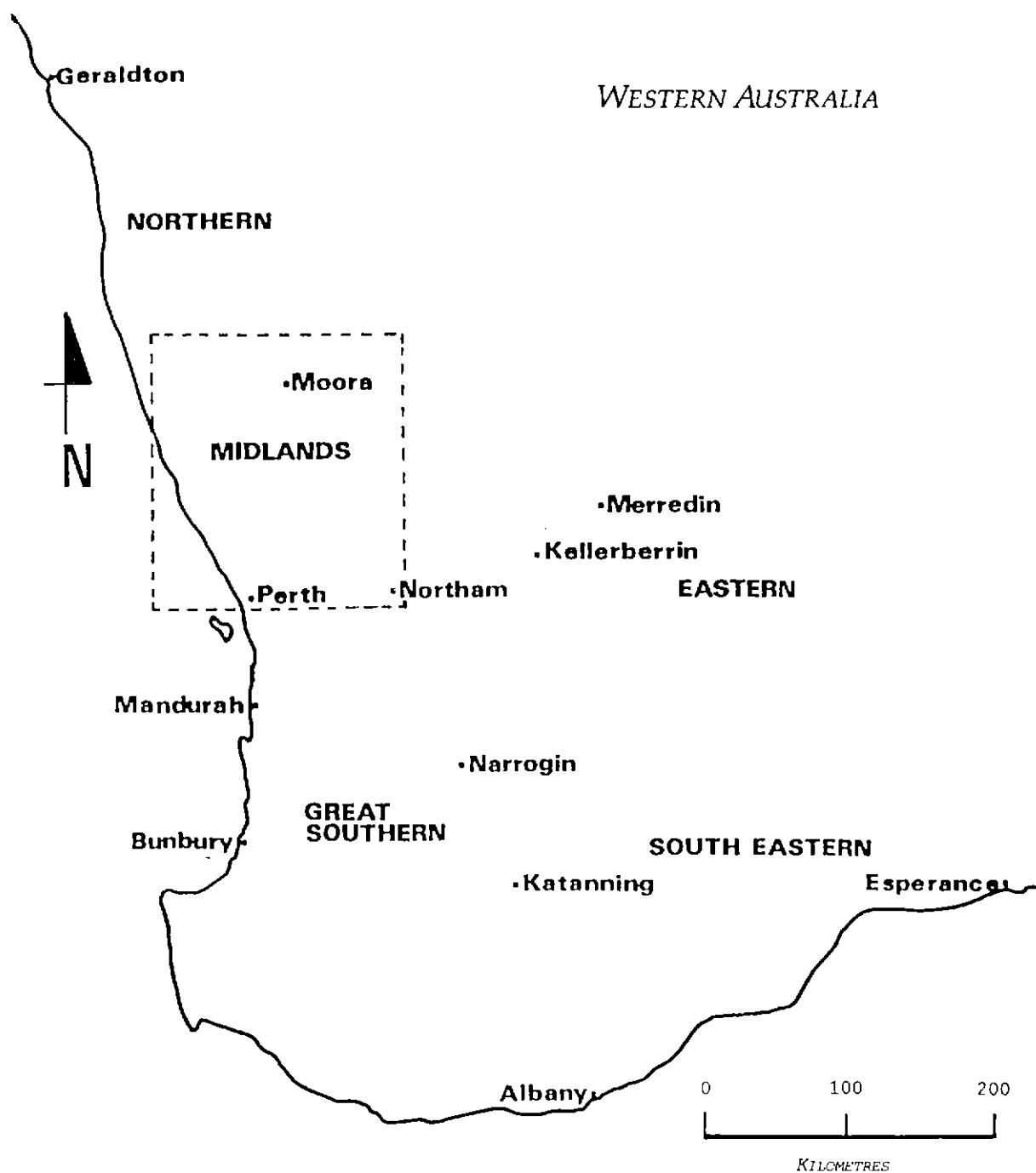
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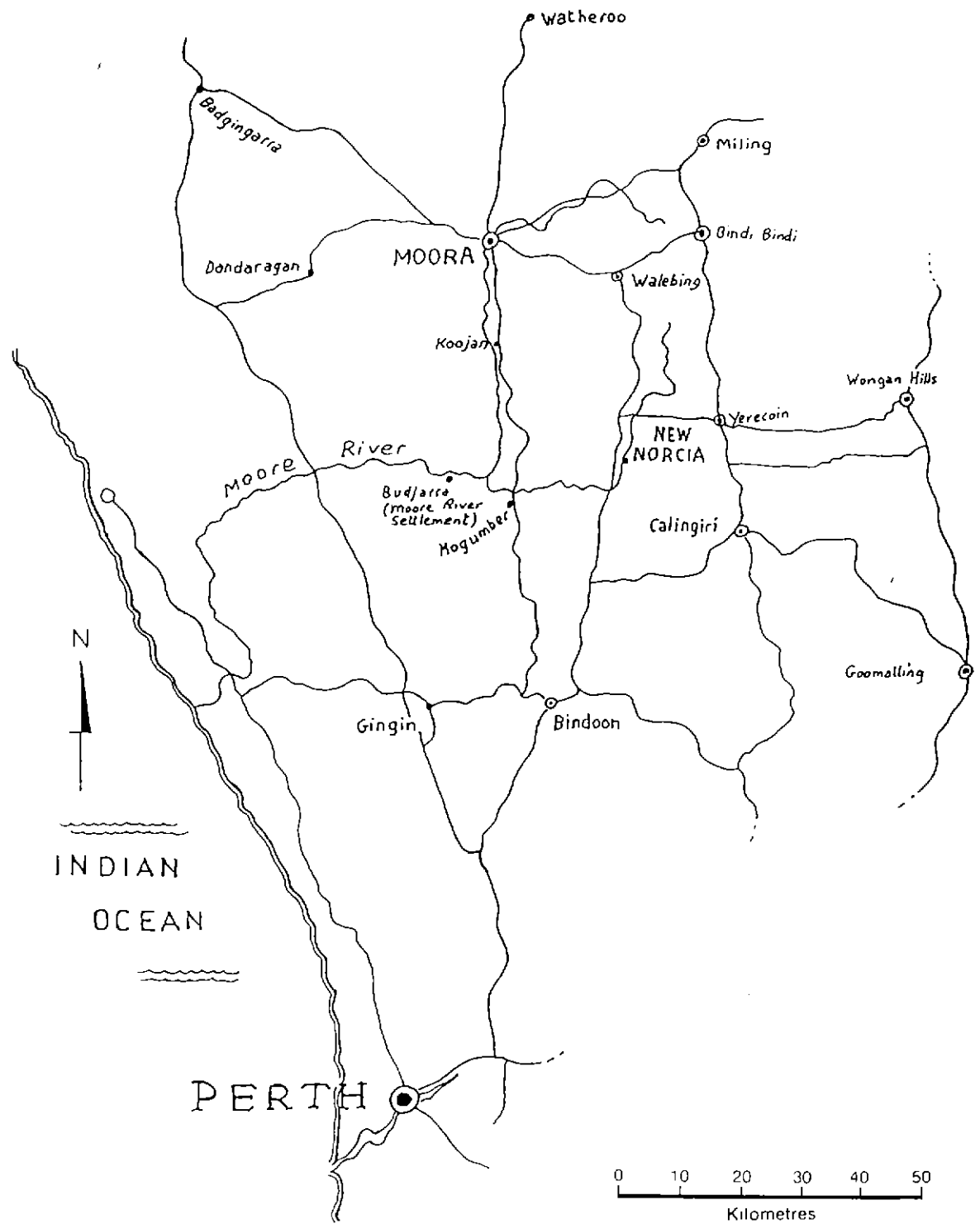
These pages display three maps of Yuat country plus a presentation of the "Narrier Family Tree"



**Fig. 1:** Map of Nyoongar country according to Tindale (1940), showing the Yuat as one of fourteen Indigenous regions of the Southwest.



**Fig. 2:** Map showing major regional centres and districts of the Southwest. The area enclosed by the box is detailed in fig. 3.



**Fig. 3:** Map showing Perth in relation to Moora and other rural centres of relevance to this thesis.



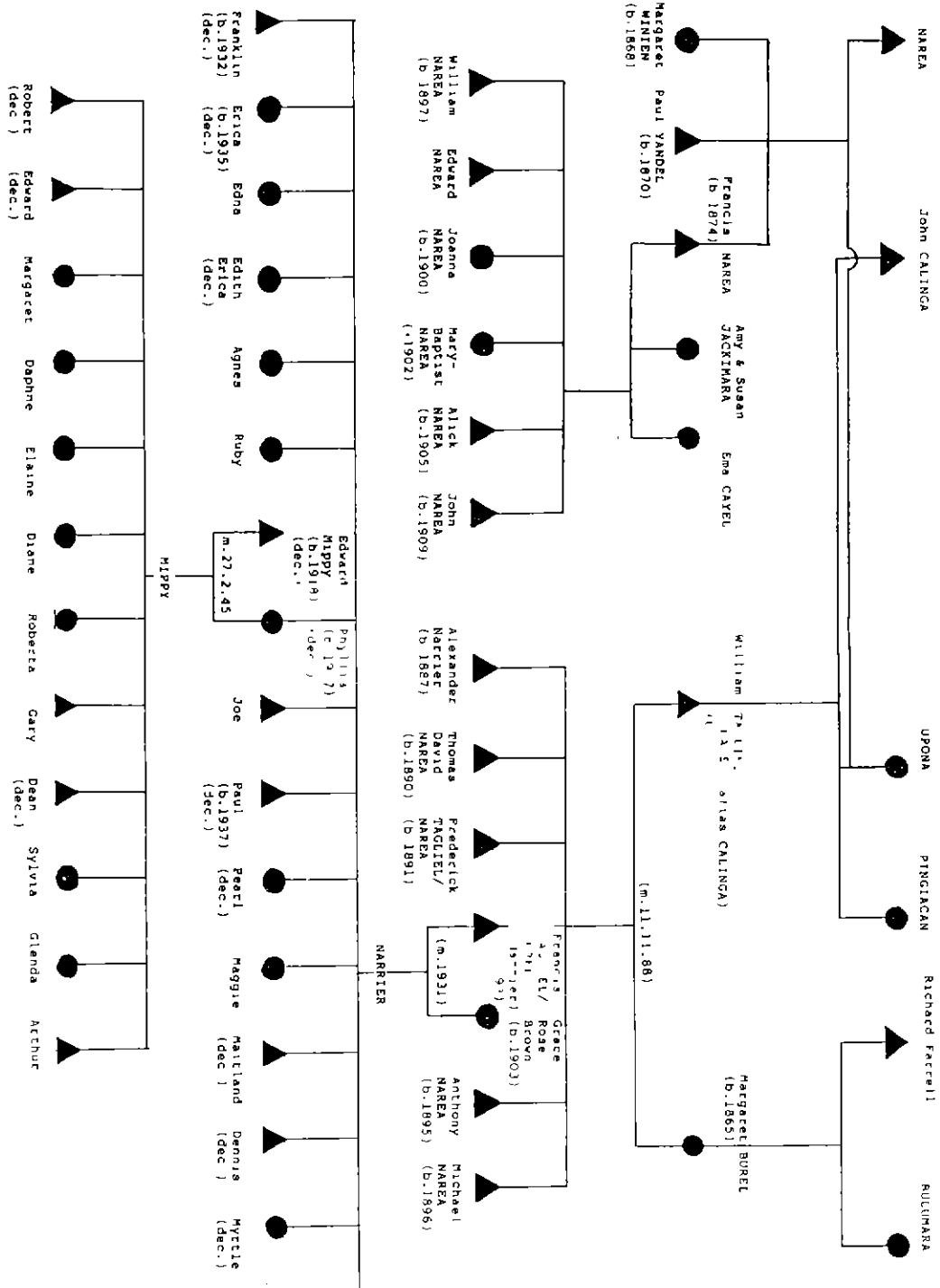


FIG. 4: THE NARRIER FAMILY TREE

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to present a perspective of the life and legacy of the late Mr. Edward (Ned) Mippy, an Aboriginal Elder who lived most of his adult years in the town of Moora, Western Australia. Cast in the genre of ethnographic biography, the study has a wider significance, providing a fragmentary glimpse of a contemporary Indigenous society known today as the Yuat, as it emerges and takes shape through the “lens” of Mr. Mippy’s memories and life experiences. Following the principles of qualitative enquiry, it offers a glimpse of a cultural community of First Australians which has not only not “disappeared,” as some writers have suggested (e.g. Berndt 1977: 270), but has retained an affinity with what is still regarded by many as its ancestral region.

The territory of the Yuat is amongst those delineated and described by anthropologist Norman Tindale (1940) as a result of his demographic survey of the Nyoongar<sup>1</sup> people of the Southwest of Western Australia. The map devised by Tindale<sup>2</sup> shows the geographical area of the Southwest divided into fourteen Indigenous regions. Each of the regions or subdivisions shown on the map represents a dialect group which was traditionally associated with that area. The name “Yued,” also spelt “Yuat,”<sup>3</sup> is used by Tindale to designate one of the northernmost of

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<sup>1</sup> This name has been given a variety of spellings. Mr. Mippy himself preferred “Nyoongar” or “Noongar,” or a plural form, ie. “Nyoongara” or “Noongara.”

<sup>2</sup> See fig. 1. The accuracy of Tindale’s map is now widely questioned (see Eagle 2002). However, it is still useful in situating the Yuat and Balardong in relation to other Indigenous groups in the area.

<sup>3</sup> The name Yuat (spelt with “u” rather than “oo”) is a self-descriptive name used by the local people and is given this spelling throughout the thesis.

these fourteen social or dialectal entities. It represents a geographical region which now encompasses the present-day towns of New Norcia, Moora and Mogumber as well as the Moore River generally to the coast (Tindale 1940: 214; Berndt 1977: 270).

The story of my association with the Yuat begins in 1957, the year in which I left my home in Sydney in order to begin a new life at the Spanish Benedictine Mission of New Norcia. This community, part of the world-wide Order of Benedictines, had been commissioned by ecclesiastical authority in 1846 to work amongst the area's Indigenous inhabitants. There were, at the time of my entry, few available written sources of information regarding the local people. Bishop Salvado, founder of New Norcia, had written an ethnographic account of their society (Salvado 1851), but there was as yet no edition of that work in English. As a member of the Benedictine Community and a non-Indigenous person, I was keen to find out what I could about the Indigenous people of the locality. In the 1950's, however, academic and public opinion in relation to Aboriginal culture still reflected the colonial mentality of the previous century. They were also very strongly influenced by the 1930s and 1940s assimilation policy suggested by Elkin and carried out with gusto in States such as Queensland. Narratives of the "destruction of Aboriginal society" <sup>4</sup> and the loss of its Indigenous identity and cultural heritage as a consequence of colonial occupation were part of the generally accepted frame of history. Perceptions as to the disappearance of the local cultures and languages of the Southwest were entertained within my own community and I saw no reason to question them. As a result, my incipient interest in the ancient peoples of the Yuat region was somewhat academic and historical and was

confined to what could be revealed through the records of early settlers and missionaries. In those days, there were a number of Aboriginal people living in and around the New Norcia Mission, especially in the nearby wheatbelt town of Moora. Nevertheless, there was no perception within the wider community, as far as I knew at that time, that these Indigenous people might constitute an identifiable social entity.

From the 1960s, prevailing academic and community attitudes were already being questioned in journals such as *Aboriginal History*. Shifts in attitudes and interpretation within academia escalated in the 1970s with, for example, a growing awareness of “massacres” and the rise of the “lands rights” movement. It was not until 1980, however, that my own perceptions began to change. For me, that year is a milestone, marking the beginning of a personal journey across a cultural divide. It was a journey undertaken by me in the company of an Aboriginal Elder named Mr. Edward (Ned) Mippy,<sup>5</sup> whose destiny had placed him at the interface of two worlds divided by race and culture. In presenting the life experience and cultural understanding of Mr. Mippy, this thesis retraces that metaphorical journey. Its main task, as an ethnographic biography, is not only to portray his life and times but to offer through him a glimpse of his Indigenous community. In doing so, it confronts the negative representations of Aboriginal identity which have long been current and in which Indigenous voices and visions have been notably absent. Through its particular scope of enquiry, it introduces new constructions of Aboriginality which emanate from Aboriginal people themselves and are, in words which Dodson attributes to Cobo (1983), in

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<sup>4</sup> This became the title of a book by C.D. Rowley (1972).

<sup>5</sup> Although he was universally known to his contemporaries as “Ned” in his adult life, Mr. Mippy is usually referred to throughout this thesis, in accordance with the family’s wishes, as “Mr. Mippy” or “the late Mr. Mippy.” As a child or youth, he is usually referred to as “Edward” or “Ned.”

accord with *"their own perception and conception of themselves."* Putting aside what Dodson describes as the *"historical landscape full of absolute and timeless truths ... set in place by self-professed experts and authorities all too ready to tell the world the meaning of Aboriginality,"* it offers a new understanding of Indigenous identity which *"rejects all forms of imposed definition."* (Dodson 1994: 4).

In speaking of the challenge, recently issued at the United Nations to the world's Indigenous peoples, Dodson (1994: 5) cites Cobo (1983) who emphasised the need *"to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations"* an awareness of their *"ancestral territories and their ethnic identity."* Through its focus on the life of Mr. Mippy, this thesis evokes a perception of the way in which a singular Aboriginal community has responded to that challenge in developing, at the dawn of the new millenium, a renewed awareness of its Aboriginality.

The thesis emerges from Mr. Mippy's perspective of the Aboriginal community to which he belonged and which today bears the title "Yuat" or "Yuat Nyoongara." This community, in his view, has maintained its identity with the traditional Indigenous territory listed as "Yued" on Tindale's map. The thesis suggests that, contrary to assertions found in some earlier ethnographic accounts,<sup>6</sup> the Yuat people, as a social entity, have preserved an awareness of their identity and their cultural boundaries and have survived the dispossession and disruption brought about by 150 years of colonial settlement.

Chapter one opens with an account of the genesis of the thesis and documents successive stages in the evolution of its methodology. It introduces as its focus of biographical study Mr. Mippy, the man through whose life and cultural perspectives an interpretation of contemporary Yuat culture is to be evoked. To help in understanding

the setting for this methodology, there follows an account of some of the important changes that have occurred in relation to ethnographic research and to the new narrative forms which have influenced writers in employing appropriate styles of ethno-biographical writing.<sup>7</sup> The chapter concludes with the assurance that the scope of the present enquiry is faithful to the terms of reference used by the Aboriginal community, specifically the Mippy family, in defining its understandings and aspirations.

In examining Mr. Mippy's life from his earliest years and carefully tracing it through its various turning points to the time of his death in Moora in 1992, the second chapter assumes a central place in relation to the thesis. It presents an account of the life of Mr. Mippy, based primarily on his own memories and observations, identifying the social and environmental factors which may have influenced his early cultural experience and helping to reveal the Indigenous understandings which laid the foundations of his later life and work. One of the most basic of these understandings, in the world-view of Mr. Mippy, was the interdependence of Aboriginal cultural awareness and personal and social identity. Pursuing this theme, chapter two suggests that the policy of the Western Australian government and its agencies, which was to "contain" Aboriginality among the adult population and to eradicate it altogether among the children at the Moore River Settlement, failed to restrain a continuing dynamic of Indigenous cultural education and transmission in relation to young Edward and his contemporaries. The chapter also helps to create a kind of biographical "lens," offering an insight into the concrete, existential world of Mr. Mippy's human

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<sup>6</sup> e.g. Bates (1944) and Berndt (1977); see ch. 1 of this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Where the terms "ethno-biography" and "ethno-biographical" are used in this thesis they refer likewise to the genre of ethnographic biography.

environment and beyond into the ideal, as yet unrealised society of his dreams – the cultural “utopia” towards which his vision and activities were seemingly directed.

In the course of this chapter, and indeed throughout the thesis, extensive use is made of interview material supplied by Annette Roberts, a self-described farmer’s wife from Dandaragan. An oral historian and author in her own right, Roberts conducted and recorded extensive personal interviews in 1990 with a number of people, including Edward Mippy and his wife Phyllis. Her immediate purpose in so doing was to provide interview material for Susan Maushart’s history of the Moore River Settlement (Maushart 1993) and for her ongoing research into the life of Sister Eileen Heath. After Mr. Mippy’s death, Mrs. Roberts kindly made the relevant tapes and transcripts freely available to me for the purposes of this thesis.

After interpreting his life experiences and identifying the formative influences which throw light on his social and cultural perspectives, the thesis, in its third chapter, documents Mr. Mippy’s move to the Central Midlands town of Moora. It proposes a rationale for his choice of that town as the place in which to settle permanently, raise his family and pursue his ambitions. Relevant sources are then used to provide a general overview of the history of the Yuat society from the time of Western Australian colonial contact. The movement of the people is traced from their initial experience at the New Norcia mission, through the various centres of the Central Midlands region to their final settlement within the rural community of Moora, the town which for many present-day Yuat people represents an epicentre of regional identity. Besides offering a perspective on the present-day Moora community as part of a specific historical and social entity, this section

contributes an understanding of the cultural environment which constituted the context of Mr. Mippy's life.

The recorded perspectives of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous observers throughout this chapter help in formulating a tentative history of the Yuat as a people and the genealogical roots of some of its families, especially the one to which Mr. Mippy was related through marriage. The chapter examines, from the various social and historical viewpoints presented in the literature, the question of cultural dynamics within Moora's Indigenous community and the factors involved in the construction of its concept of Aboriginality. It then draws on the contemporary perspectives of some local Indigenous people to evoke the sense of regional identity which exists within the Yuat area .

Following this socio-historical purview of the regional community which provided the context for Mr. Mippy's adult life and activities, the study advances to a consideration of the origin and development of his projects. Chapters four and five trace these projects, not only through the perspectives of participant observation but also through the lens of his recorded memories and those of his community.

Chapter four is devoted to one of the more significant of Mr. Mippy's programs of cultural education. What later came to be known as the "Yuat Artefacts Project" was a scheme which combined opportunities for self-employment with practical forms of education in cultural awareness. Through the complementary perspectives offered in this chapter, an understanding may be gained of the arts and crafts centre as one of Mr. Mippy's more important initiatives, demonstrating the practical dimension of his vision for his community's cultural renewal.

Through a similar methodology, chapter five attempts to provide an insight into the understandings and perspectives which underpinned



and inspired the vision of Mr. Mippy and to describe the many ways in which he used his knowledge to benefit the youth of his community as well as the wider Aboriginal world beyond. By studying in some detail his language, his oral literature and his cosmology, this chapter also provides an entry into the kind of everyday world which Tyler (1986: 125, cf. 134) envisaged as the goal of ethnographic narrative, preparing the way for an understanding of that cultural world in the way Mr. Mippy understood and appreciated it.

Chapter five does not represent a contribution to the formal discipline of linguistics; nor does it intend to model the Nyoongar language or its dialects. Nevertheless, it places considerable emphasis on the social and cultural importance of language, in Mr. Mippy's perspective, as an interconnecting framework for all aspects of his cultural understanding. Unlike other published vocabularies, the Indigenous language examined in this chapter and documented in the Appendix to the thesis is not drawn from a wider linguistic community. It is the fruit of my long association with Mr. Mippy. As such, the vocabulary is presented as a personal phenomenon – the unique language of one particular individual. The study sets out to describe the nature and extent of Mr. Mippy's linguistic knowledge and the way in which he used his native language, both as a means of valorising his use of English and as a means of communication and instruction. It transcends these parameters, however, in recording his aspirations in the wider field of linguistic education, documenting his participation with others in the work of reconstructing and preserving the Nyoongar language of the Southwest. Language is also seen to play an important part in his oral literature which consists of five traditional stories, presented here in the very words of their raconteur. The chapter

explains his frequent use of these “Dreamtime” stories as a means of combining social and behavioural instruction with traditional teaching.

In Mr. Mippy’s cosmology, the influence of spirits in human affairs and the interconnection between the physical and the metaphysical world is apparent in the many beliefs, memories and anecdotes reproduced here. The importance of the land, its sacred character, is also evident in the verbal record of his experience. The traditional land to which his people belong is seen as “mother” and universal provider. It is also a veritable university of knowledge. From his perspective, the harmony between human life and the natural environment is best preserved when cultural values reflect the order of things in nature.

In its penultimate chapter, the thesis moves from the Indigenous understandings which were the subject of Mr. Mippy’s vision of cultural renewal to a consideration of the most significant areas of social and cultural life in which his legacy is discerned and appreciated by his contemporaries. Beyond these more tangible elements, his vision for a renewal of cultural identity is valued by his community as perhaps the most practical and enduring part of his legacy to succeeding generations. Answering the need to contextualise an understanding of Mr. Mippy’s vision of identity, chapter six then takes a broad look at discourses of Australian Aboriginal identity in the years since colonial settlement and examines the part played by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors in challenging popular misconceptions of Aboriginality.

The concluding chapter is devoted to a brief examination of Mr. Mippy’s concept of Aboriginality, expressed in his own words, as a practical ideal transmitted to him by his immediate forebears. For him, it was an ideal which had its roots in the autochthonous past of his society and which was itself a reflection of the order and sequence of things in the world of nature.

This thesis may best be described as a biography with a strongly ethnographic dimension. Through its biographical focus on the life, times, vision and work of Mr. Edward Mippy, it aims to achieve an understanding of the cultural world of one Aboriginal man who, in the final years of his life and using his own legacy of traditional knowledge, attempted to sow the seeds of cultural renewal as a means of promoting and ensuring a continuing social identity within his regional community.

## CHAPTER ONE

### FINDING DIRECTION: METHODOLOGY

#### *THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA*

Mr. Mippy's perspectives on his life experience and his insights into the Indigenous community in which he lived and worked constitute the major focus of this thesis. The perceptions and understandings thus presented provide us with a means of crossing cultural boundaries, acting as a kind of lens through which to view his everyday world in the way that he himself perceived it.

At the time of my arrival in Western Australia, in the mid-nineteenth fifties, Indigenous perspectives such as those of Mr. Mippy were yet to be openly articulated or widely heard. The general population of the State at that time had limited comprehension of its contemporary Aboriginal societies and it is scarcely surprising that there were popular misconceptions about their nature and existence. In relation to the human and social identity of Aboriginal people and their place within the wider human family, misapprehensions and prejudices were widespread and deeply entrenched. Indeed, many of these attitudes can be traced to the very beginnings of Anglo-European settlement. Opinions advanced by early Queensland explorer, Carl Lumholtz (1889), for instance, might be seen as typical of the period. This author prefaced the account of his travels by questioning whether local tribes could be said to have "any culture whatever" and predicted their complete disappearance "within a generation or two." Closer to

home, Daisy Bates (1944: ch. 7) went so far as to posit the complete demise of the Aboriginal “race” in Western Australia. More recently, anthropologist Ronald Berndt, in his appendix to the Salvado Memoirs (1977: 270) has “written off” whole societies of Southwest Indigenous people as no longer existent. Amongst the latter were specific social entities such as the Balardong and its neighbouring people, the Yuat, both of which are named amongst the fourteen traditional territories shown in Tindale’s map of the Southwest of Western Australia.<sup>1</sup>

Because the people known as the Yuat had been the primary object of the New Norcia community’s missionary endeavours, it seemed natural for me as a professed member of that community to focus on the Yuat as the point of departure for my proposed research. My hope and expectation, from the outset, was to subject some of the widely accepted, imposed definitions of Aboriginal cultural identity to closer scrutiny and to offer new constructions which, being more in line with Aboriginal people’s *“own perception and conception of themselves”* (Dodson 1994: 5), might help to reverse or offset some of the negative attitudes existing amongst the general population. The following account of the circumstances and events leading up to my entry into this chosen field should help to explain the genesis of this study, its motivation and the influences driving my research perspectives as they underwent considerable evolution.

My introduction to Aboriginal culture and to that of the Yuat Nyoongara people in particular began in 1957. In that year I entered the monastery at New Norcia, a missionary community of Benedictine monks who for over a century had devoted themselves to carrying out their founder’s plan for the conversion of native peoples (Salvado 1977:

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<sup>1</sup> See fig. 1. Note that some of the names listed can have variant spellings.

18). Benedictine involvement with the Aboriginal people of Western Australia was the result of a directive from the Pope himself. At a farewell meeting with Benedict XVI in Rome in June 1845, prior to embarking for Western Australia, Salvado and his companions had received their mandate. The Pope had directed the missionaries to share in the task of converting “whole peoples and nations to the faith” and to “educate them in the ways of civilized life” (Salvado 1977: 20).

During my earlier years in New Norcia, situated as I was at the very heart of traditional Yuat country, I set myself the task of learning more about the region’s Indigenous inhabitants. I was able to discover a large number of early local books and manuscripts devoted to a study of Nyoongar language and culture, but fewer recent studies were readily available. Some important works on Australian Aboriginal anthropology have, in fact, been strangely silent in regard to the Nyoongar, the people of the Southwest. Books by Elkin (1964), the trilogy of works by Rowley (1972), Mulvaney (1969) and R.M & C.H. Berndt (1977), were amongst those available in the New Norcia library. However, these yielded little if any reference to the Nyoongar people in general, let alone the Yuat. It was not until the 1990s, when I began more intensive research into the history and culture of the people of Western Australia’s Southwest, that new doors were opened for me to the rich variety of literature available on these subjects.

In 1957 and for the decades following, before the appearance of the demographic work of Yuat author Headland in 1995, the only available published work which dealt specifically with the people of the traditional area surrounding New Norcia was the *Memorie Storiche dell’Australia* (1851), the personal diary of New Norcia’s founder, Bishop Rosendo Salvado. Unfortunately, though editions existed in Italian, Spanish and French, it had yet to be translated into English. Besides the

memoirs of Salvado (1851), the New Norcia Archives contained a large number of unpublished and untranslated nineteenth-century diaries, letters and manuscripts written mostly in Spanish by Salvado and other early Benedictine missionaries. Apart from a small amount of information in Flood (1908) and an unpublished work by Romanus Rios OSB (1924) together with some research still being carried on at the time by two monk-historians, William Gimenes (1958) and Eugene Perez (1968), the only English-language sources of any importance which treated of the local Aboriginal inhabitants, so far as I then knew, were those of George Grey and Daisy Bates. Grey had passed through Yuat country in the course of his exploratory journeys, documented in his *Journals* (1841) and *Vocabulary* (1840), but there seems to be little information therein which is relevant to the Yuat area. Bates, for her part, had recorded a significant amount of general linguistic and cultural information, much of it traceable to the Yuat, in her various publications (eg. 1907, 1913, 1914, 1944; see also Bridge 1992).<sup>2</sup>

It was not until 1977, with the publication of Stormon's competent translation of *The Salvado Memoirs*, that a detailed ethnographic account of the people that bear the name of Yuat became readily accessible. No longer having to struggle with the Italian original, I was able at last, through this translation, to share something of Salvado's perspectives on the history of New Norcia's missionary activity and on the culture of the people he had been instructed to "civilise" and "evangelise."

Of special interest and included in this English edition as an appendix to Stormon's translation, was a piece by Berndt entitled 'Salvado: a man of and before his time' (1977: 267-274). A particular paragraph therein was to provide for me a point of entry into the cultural

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for further reference to these works and for a general review of the

world of the Yuat and may be seen, in hindsight, as a motivational trigger for this present thesis. In the article, Berndt has this to say about the people known as Yuat:

The Aborigines he [Salvado] came among in 1846 were the Yuet (Juet), who occupied the area around New Norcia and Moora, Mogumber and the Moore River generally to the coast. Very close indeed to New Norcia were the Balardong, who took in Wongan Hills, Northam and York. Both languages are virtually extinct today, except for short vocabularies known by a few descendants of the people. As social entities they have disappeared, the part-Aborigines who do survive are an admixture of those from other areas and Australian-European settlers (1977: 270).

The author's contention that the "social entities" here described as "Yuet" and "Balardong" have "disappeared" came to me as no great surprise. I was already familiar with the perceptions of Bates who, writing some four decades earlier about what she saw as the demise of the Aboriginal race, had used such expressions as "the last of the Perth tribe." She had also described what she perceived as "the beginning of the end" of the Bibbulmun race and referred to a man called Monnup as the "last" of the Yuat people (1944: 67). Such perceptions were in accord with an earlier anthropology which, as Pettman (1992: 108) points out, linked Aboriginality with genealogical factors such as percentages of Aboriginal blood. They were based on historical constructions of Aboriginality whose obsession with distinctions between "real" and "inauthentic" Aborigines would have denied existence to many contemporary Indigenous societies (cf. Dodson 1994: 3).

In the late 1950's, I heard an old aunt in Bunbury express the opinion that "the Aboriginal today is only what the white man has made him." This, I believe, would be an example of one of the more benign, if



somewhat ambivalent, views regarding Aboriginality which were commonly held at that time within the wider population. From the older Benedictine missionaries then living at New Norcia I was to be served with similar opinions inferring the demise of Aboriginal identity. It was a common perception amongst them that the Aboriginal people, deprived of their own cultural heritage, had not only failed to assimilate themselves to the colonial culture, but had shown themselves ready to adopt what were seen as its less desirable aspects.

In 1980, while moving around Perth and other areas of the South-west, I had the opportunity of meeting a number of Aboriginal people. I made many new friends, especially amongst those who had spent their childhood at New Norcia or who could claim historical connections with the Yuat area. These informal contacts enabled me to gain a better insight into the cultural world of the Nyoongar community. My own attitudes began to change from that time onwards, particularly through an association I had formed with an Aboriginal man to whom I was introduced in Perth in the latter part of 1980.

*EDWARD MIPPY: YUAT ELDER AND SPOKESPERSON*

Moora, a town in the old Yuat heartland situated some 50 km. to the north of New Norcia, was home in 1985 to a sizeable Aboriginal community whose dwellings, as a result of decisions implemented in the mid-seventies, were interspersed with those of the wider community. Originally drawn from the former Reserves at Moora and at Walebing, together with people who had relocated there from the New Norcia Mission, the Moore River Settlement and from other centres, Moora's

Aboriginal community numbered over 200 people, constituting something like 12% of the overall local population.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Edward Mippy, commonly known as “Ned,” had been a life-long resident and respected Elder of that community. Although not of Yuat descent on his father’s side (Arthur Mippy was born much further south, in the Manjimup area), he often spoke of his mother’s connection with some of the local families. Clara Mippy, whose maiden name was Harris, had some forebears of that name whose relations appear in the New Norcia marriage records as spouses of local New Norcia Aborigines (Green & Tilbrook 1989: 56-7). Some of these Harris-related families (e.g. Andersons, Ryders, Moodys and Taylors) were long-time residents of Moora and were referred to by Mr. Mippy as *moordman*, the Nyoongar term for “relatives.”

Perhaps an even stronger affiliation with the Yuat people existed through his wife, a member of the Narrier family. Phyllis Mippy’s great-grandfather (great-great grandfather to the nine surviving Mippy children), was a Yuat man known as Narea (alias Calinga) who appears listed in New Norcia’s earliest census, drawn up in 1858 (Green & Tilbrook 1989: 206).<sup>4</sup> Additional factors identifying him with the region and its people were his length of residence in Moora, his life-long involvement in local social and cultural issues, his wealth of local affiliations and last but not least his store of memories and cultural knowledge, much of it derived from his early years at the Moore River Settlement. At the time of my meeting with Mr. Mippy I was as yet unaware of his family connections. As events were to prove, however, the esteem in which he was held within the Moora community as an

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<sup>3</sup> For a map of regional centres, see fig. 3.

<sup>4</sup> See fig. 4, “Narrier Family Tree.”

Elder and spokesperson was an important factor in the work which we were about to undertake together.

My first conversation with Mr. Mippy, in a house in the Perth suburb of Wanneroo, appears in hindsight to have been a major turning point in my understanding of the Yuat. It was on that occasion that I made a remark to him which re-stated the expressed opinions of Berndt regarding the presumed loss of the Indigenous language in the New Norcia/Moora area. He suggested by way of response that I should sit down with a pencil and paper and take some dictation. There followed a lesson from Mr. Mippy in a selection of words and phrases that formed part of his Indigenous vocabulary.

Moved with excitement at what was being revealed I soon filled the page I had hastily torn out of an exercise book and began looking for more paper. While explaining and giving examples of the ancient language which I had previously thought no longer existed except for the “short vocabularies” mentioned by Berndt (1977: 270), Mr. Mippy, in the course of an hour or so, introduced me to some of the stories, beliefs and customs that formed part of his cultural experience. *Wakal*, the Rainbow Serpent; *djanak* the ubiquitous evil spirit; *woodadji*, the little evil men of the bush – all suddenly came alive for me in that little suburban dwelling in Wanneroo. For me, a new perspective was dawning. Here were indications, from the mouth of a local Elder, of an Indigenous cultural heritage existing in the Yuat area – a heritage which, it seemed, may not only have survived the trauma of colonial settlement but one whose links with the past might still be identifiable.

Four years later, inspired partly by a desire to continue my association with Mr. Mippy and his associates, I sought and obtained an appointment as Parish Priest of Moora. From this point on, situated as I was in the Yuat Nyoongara heartland and being in daily contact with the

Indigenous people who comprised part of my parish, I began to question the negative colonial attitudes and accepted typology that had fashioned the popular perceptions of Aboriginal society. I saw the value of acquiring a more experience-near view <sup>5</sup> of the Indigenous people, of endeavouring to see their cultural world from their own standpoint rather than from the “outside” perspective on which such popular perceptions were often based (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 30).

For the next eight years, from 1984 to 1992, I was to be associated with Mr. Mippy in the combined roles of pupil, mentor and personal friend. As pupil, I was able to absorb much of his language and culture. As mentor, I had the privilege of working with him as he pursued his vision for an Aboriginal cultural renewal. It had always been his wish to pass on to the younger generation of Yuat children a renewed awareness of their Aboriginality and he saw in his long association with me the opportunity of so doing. Aware of his limitations in the literary sphere, he encouraged my efforts in recording his cultural knowledge. “*You'll be my computer, koorda [mate],*” was a remark he often made to me during his final years.

As I entered more fully into the life of the Moora community I found myself rejecting the inferences of earlier authors such as Bates (1944), Rowley (1972) and Berndt (1977) that colonial settlement had caused the “disappearance” or “destruction” of Aboriginal society. In relation to Mr. Mippy and his community, at least, there appeared to be clear evidence to the contrary. In my view, there was indeed a “social entity” called the Yuat. To describe them as “part-Aborigines” who were no more than “an admixture of those from other areas and Australian-

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<sup>5</sup> “Experience-near view”: one based on shared, participant experience.

European settlers “ (Berndt 1977: 270) seemed as offensive to me then as it would have appeared to the people themselves.

In July 1988, having relinquished my parochial duties, I was able to devote more time to Mr. Mippy and his educational initiatives. In addition to setting up a community self-employment enterprise,<sup>6</sup> we undertook tutorial programs in Aboriginal Studies, including language, at Moora Senior High School. In 1991, we extended our course in Nyoongar language instruction to the adult Aboriginal students at the newly- instituted college of TAFE. After the death of Mr. Mippy in 1992, I was able to continue these activities on behalf of the Moora Aboriginal community until 1996. In that year, having resigned from TAFE, I decided to enrol as a postgraduate research student at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University, Western Australia.

My intention was to undertake research with a view to counteracting some of the prevailing popular misconceptions in relation to Aboriginal identity, with particular reference to the Indigenous people of the Moora area. To achieve this end, I aimed at providing an account of cultural life and interaction within the present-day Yuat community. Based on information provided by Mr. Mippy and other local Elders in areas such as language, kinship, legends, folklore, customs, beliefs and traditional arts, my proposed research, as then envisaged, was to be centred around proving or demonstrating the identity of the Yuat people. Originally, I considered that this could best be done (to quote my original draft proposal) by “studying issues related to continuity and change in the culture of the Yuat Nyoongara community within the wider context of the Indigenous peoples of the Southwest of Western Australia.” Using the principles and practice of interpretive

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<sup>6</sup> See thesis, ch. 4.

ethnography I would seek to represent contemporary Yuat culture through an interpretation drawn from the perspectives of Mr. Mippy and his contemporaries. An underlying narrative theme or motif would be, as I then expressed it, “the perceived need on the part of significant Yuat Nyoongara people for a renewal of cultural awareness as a means of promoting and ensuring a continuing cultural identity.”

In short, this was a methodology based on the hypothesis that the regional and social identity of an Aboriginal group could be affirmed through establishing or proving its historical, cultural continuity with its pre-colonial past. In this view, the concepts of “social identity” and “cultural continuity” are seen as virtually co-terminous. Successfully to demonstrate the latter, I then believed, would be automatically to establish the former. What I came to realise was that, in formulating this approach to my proposed research, I would be adopting the same hypothesising methodology that had underpinned the very conclusions I was opposing. To insist on linking a group’s cultural identity with the demonstrable survival of some kind of essential core of cultural practice and tradition was surely questionable. In following this path, I asked myself, would I not be adopting the same realist, objectivist style of research which had led people like Berndt and Bates to quite opposite conclusions? Was it not their measuring of Indigenous communities on the basis of so-called “objective” criteria that had led them to deny their existence as traditional entities?

Because of these newer insights and the influence of more extensive reading and academic direction, my proposed methodology, as outlined above, began to undergo considerable evolution. Ultimately, it was the method of interpretive, ethnographic biography that was to be chosen as the means best suited for gaining a perspective of contemporary Yuat culture. By way of an introduction to this newer and more appropriate

methodology, I consider it useful to give consideration here and in the section following to the two related fields of biography and ethnography. I begin with a brief survey of the main schools of biographical research.

Life histories and stories have been organised in one of two broad categories (Denzin 1989b: 49). The first includes the classic, objective, natural history approach, together with the stance adopted by the “new” school of life history. The other category is the interpretive approach, advocated by Denzin and others, which rejects norms of evaluation and works from the subject’s point of view, regarding biographical materials from within a literary, fictional framework.<sup>7</sup> It is this latter, interpretive approach, as presented by Denzin, that has been used as the framework for this thesis.

Sociologists employ a unique and varied family of terms in describing biographical writing. According to Denzin (1989b: 13 et seq.), the subject matter of the biographical method is the life experiences of a person. When written in the first person, the account is called an autobiography, life story or life history. Written by another, an observer, it is a biography. Biographies are based on life stories in which the individual in question reports his or her life, or a segment of it. Self-stories, so called, are stories which position the self centrally in the context of a specific set of personal experiences. What are termed oral histories are records obtained through spoken conversations and interviews. These provide the raw material for what are called life histories or personal histories, which are the written accounts of the lives

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<sup>7</sup> For important works in these fields, see the literature review (Appendix 1: 1)

of individuals or groups.<sup>8</sup> Oral histories, derived from my own research and the recorded interviews of Roberts, for example, have provided much of the data for this thesis.

Closely related to biography is the form of ethnographic statement known as autoethnography. Denzin (1989b: 34) calls this “an important variant in the traditional ethnographic account which positions the writer as an objective outsider in the texts that are written about the culture, group, or person in question.” More will be said later in this chapter about my use of this form of writing.

Cast in the dual genre of ethnographic biography, this thesis is an account of Mr. Mippy’s life in the form of a biography with an ethnographic focus. Having referred to the various forms of biography, therefore, I now proceed to examine the concept of ethnography, with particular reference to new perspectives in the field of ethnographic research.

#### *ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE POST-MODERN WORLD*

Marcus & Fischer (1986: 17) assert that 19th. century philosophy was much taken up with “a pervasive ideology of social progress.” They list a number of contemporary intellectuals who “sought the origins of modern institutions, rituals, customs and habits of thought through the contrasts of evolutionary stages in the development of human society.” They further argue that, in the field of anthropology, overarching

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of oral history and life history, with life story studies, are regularly published in the journals of the Oral History Society (*Oral History*) and of the Oral History Association of Australia.



theories about the "Science of Man" (sic) directed the search for order and meaning through "the comparison of data on the range of human diversity." Such ideologies were, it seems, the result of an evolutionary social theory which saw in mankind a movement "toward ever higher levels of rationality" and social development. Haebich suggests that the passing of so-called "primitive" races such as the Australian Aborigines was a postulate of Social Darwinism which predicted that in the "struggle for survival," the "less evolved" races were doomed to extinction (Haebich 1988: 48). This kind of anthropological thinking, as a "weltanschauung" or world view, provided a philosophical rationale which was sympathetic to imperialist and colonialist expansion. As Rowley (1972b: 88) has argued (with reference to the impact of settlement on Aboriginal Australia), "the theories of Darwin and Huxley were popularised to justify colonial ethics."

Just as the sociologist, the economist and the political scientist found a recognised role in the study of developed Western societies, so it fell to the anthropologist to write about Indigenous people and to influence the way in which they were perceived (see Pettman 1992: 107-8). Marcus & Fischer (1986: 17) extend this view in suggesting that anthropology in the nineteenth century gained some of its legitimacy from evolutionary theory. They describe it somewhat dismissively here as "armchair ethnology," based rather in theory than in practice. Indicating a departure from these earlier mind-sets, they contend that the twentieth century has seen a "remaking of the anthropology of the past" with the distinctive method known as ethnography (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 18). They note how the early realism which characterised the science of anthropology gave way to a constructionist phase which changed its rhetoric and textual strategies. The "nineteenth-century grand vision of an anthropological science of Man" with its "sweeping

global statements," they further suggest, has been superseded by a social and cultural anthropology, based in field research, whose goal is "to represent a particular way of life as fully as possible" (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 22).

For these authors, the main narrative motifs of ethnography are also under scrutiny. In former times, they say, importance was given to the romantic discovery of new peoples and places, or the salvaging of diverse cultures "threatened with global Westernization." While these themes are still strong, there is a perception that they "no longer serve well enough to reflect the world in which ethnographers now work" (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 24). There is a perception too, I would hasten to add, that they do not sufficiently serve to reflect the needs and interests of Indigenous peoples at the present day.

The authors suggest that, in order to fulfil a more meaningful role, ethnography should employ an experience-near style of research through the method of participant observation (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 25). In line with what they call the "genre characteristics of ethnography," the key requirements of ethnographic writing may be summarised as follows:

(1) It should be a presentation which gives a sense of the presence of the ethnographer within the research scenario, describing "the conditions of fieldwork, of everyday life, of microscale processes."

(2) It should involve a competent translation of Indigenous language and concepts across the cultural divide, thus enabling the professional reader to enter the world of local meaning and subjectivity.

(3) It should be "holistic." This should be understood, the authors suggest, as a broad-frame approach which, rather than endeavouring to achieve the Realist "holism" that had been the goal of functionalist

discourse prior to the 1960's, focuses on "translating and explaining mental culture."

Marcus & Fischer then reinforce their argument by quoting the "classic statement of the ethnographic method" as expressed by Malinowski (1922). They point to his view of the need for anthropology to translate and explain "mental culture" – the need "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his"<sup>9</sup> world" (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 25). It would seem to these authors, however, that Malinowski's approach, while emphasising the role of participant observation in cultural research, takes insufficient account of its essentially interpretive nature. They highlight the importance of what they call "the metaphor of dialogue" in reference to the way interpretive processes are necessary "both for communication internally within a cultural system and externally between systems of meaning." Any process of cross-cultural interpretation, they insist, involves a relativity "between distinct sets of categories and cultural conceptions," thus requiring the researcher to act as a "mediator" between the Indigenous world being studied and that of the professional reader (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 30, 31). Continuing their comment on the views of Malinowski (1922), the authors indicate that understanding the "native's point of view" requires communication, exchange and further interpretation by the researcher. It is not simply information or data to be "grasped" or "realised" (to use Malinowski's terms), as one might grasp or realise an objectivised, scientific account.

In eliciting, mediating and explaining this so-called "native's point of view" and in effectively communicating cultural meaning and subjectivity there is need for a sufficient knowledge, on the part of the

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<sup>9</sup> Malinowski's emphasis.

researcher, of the “communicative processes” which are indigenous to the cultural context (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 25). In particular, a knowledge of the language is needed. For an interpretive biographer, endeavouring to achieve an ethnographic focus within the research setting, the problem of language and meaning assumes particular relevance. This is because the conceptual and linguistic exegesis of Indigenous ideas presupposes an understanding of the language in which those ideas are expressed.

In treating of the problem of “capturing” biographical experience in the “natural social world,” Denzin suggests that “as the researcher works his or her way into the research setting, the problem of language and meaning becomes important. Every group,” he continues, “develops its own ‘idelect’ or special language. This language will contain certain terms and concepts that are not commonly spoken in other groups. It will contain special meanings attached to everyday words. It will also contain a code, or a set of rules, for putting words together. The language in this sense will have an institutional and historical heritage that must be uncovered. Because every group is a distinct language community, researchers must begin by learning the language that is spoken” (Denzin 1989a: 71-72).

In this text, Denzin is referring to cultural scenes within the broader and presumably uni-lingual social environment. The principles he expresses, however, have even more relevance for a thesis like the present one in which the researcher must negotiate the boundaries posed by traditional language difference. Here, where one is dealing with representatives of an Indigenous community which uses its own traditional language compounded with English, the role of language and the need for linguistic competence on the part of the researcher in the understanding of culturally patterned phenomena assumes an even

greater importance than it does within the social situations envisaged by Denzin. Only with sufficient competence in language can a researcher hope to represent the Indigenous “cultural other” for the purpose of cross-cultural understanding.

This raises the metaphor of dialogue as it is discussed within the continuing discourse of interpretive ethnography. “Dialogue,” in the view of Marcus & Fischer, “has become the imagery for expressing the way anthropologists (and by extension, their readers) must engage in an active communicative process with another culture.” Such dialogue, in the thinking of these authors, presupposes not only the presence of the ethnographer in the subject cultural environment but also his or her capacity to mediate that dialogue and translate it across cultural boundaries. “In cross-cultural communication,” they continue, “and in writing about one culture for members of another, experience-near or local concepts of the cultural other are juxtaposed with the more comfortable, experience-far concepts that the writer shares with his or her readership. The act of translation involved in any act of cross-cultural interpretation is thus a relative matter with an ethnographer as mediator between distinct sets of categories and cultural conceptions that interact in different ways at different points of the ethnographic process” (Marcus & Fischer 1986: 30-31).

#### *NEW NARRATIVE FORMS*

The processes of mediation and dialogue require a rejection by the ethnographer of the representational model of ethnographic discourse which was based, in the view of Tyler (1986: 126), on the “ideology of the transcendental observer.” The canons of scientific realism and

objectivism which, for him, have been “the dominant mode of ethnographic prose,” promoted the “absurdity of ‘describing’ nonentities such as ‘culture’ or ‘society’ as if they were fully observable, though somewhat ungainly bugs.” Instead, Tyler envisages ethnography as a work of “cooperative story making,” one which “privileges discourse over text” and “foregrounds dialogue over monologue.” No longer “cursed with the task of representation,” ethnography, he says, is a “cooperatively evolved text” whose aim is to evoke, in a non-representational way, a world of commonsense reality. It achieves this through a discourse which is at once mutual, dialogical and polyphonic, based on experience-near interpretations of the widest possible spectrum of fragmentary, cultural information (Tyler 1986: 125-6).

According to Denzin, such interpretations in the present era call for new forms of social narrative which are rooted in the community. He claims that these new forms of storytelling reject the visual, spectator models of communication. They are new styles of writing, which regard facts as social constructions, emphasizing “conversation, hearing and listening as the chief participatory modes of knowing and learning about the world” (Denzin 1997: 157-8).<sup>10</sup> As these new styles of writing are germane to the overall perspective of this thesis they need to be considered.

The experience-near interpretations of social events and the concept of “evocation,” advocated by Tyler (1986: 123), may be seen within the context of a “full-scale embracement,” by the social sciences, “of methods of narrative analysis” (Denzin 1997: 127). These methods stand in sharp contrast to the representational models which characterised earlier

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<sup>10</sup> Denzin’s point needs a little clarification here. Fundamental research approaches and informational methods have in fact changed little. What have changed are the ideologies that lie behind the methodologies.

ethnographic and biographical writing. Traditional writers of non-fiction, who adopted a stance of ethnographic realism, sought “accurate representations of reality” in order to ensure the formation of a “correct, accurate and well-informed account.” In their effort to “see things aright,” they adopted a “spectator, ocular, visual epistemology” (Denzin 1997: 157). Ethnographic Realists set out to display a subculture or social world in rich detail. The writers’ participation in the events described was purely passive. Factual accuracy and meaning were presumed to be “self evident and guaranteed in advance” (Denzin 1997: 128). In their search for “true objectivity,” they attempted to place a distance between themselves and those they wrote about, believing that “stories are out there waiting to be told and that the storytelling form will accurately reveal what they have learned “ (Denzin 1997: 140).

The new writers, or “cultural phenomenologists,” took the cinematic society as their point of departure. Using multiple narrative strategies (such as flashbacks, foreshadowing, interior monologues and parallel plots) the technology of the media used the scene, rather than the fact, as the basic unit of analysis. By focusing on the scene or situation in which the event in question takes place rather than on the events or facts themselves, the new writers were enabled to employ narrative strategies as interpretive practices that allowed writers to “bring coherence to their materials” and to “make sense of the world being described “ (Denzin 1997: 130-133).

For Denzin (1997: 133, 156), a leading advocate of the interpretive approach to social texts, facts are not to be used to support a totalizing reading of reality. Gathered through methods of journalistic reporting or ethnographic participant observation, facts are “facticities” or

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“extensions of real life, which have been interpreted (or presented) by the writer.” Within the bounds of faithful observation and reporting and maintaining fidelity to a subject’s thoughts and intentions, “all writing requires narrative construction, fitting statements to contexts and persons and making sense of what was said” (Denzin 1997: 154).

Denzin suggests that a central issue for the new narrative text is to use language to create experience. It is now commonplace, he says, “for cultural anthropologists to be conversant in the experimental narrative tradition and to be receptive to poetry, first-person narratives, short stories and ethnographic dramas” (Denzin 1997: 204). In their effort to write in facts, rather than about facts, the new writers are pushing the boundaries of the “traditional, ethnographic model of textuality” and setting new guidelines for a postmodern ethnography. The representation of lived experience is achieved by moving outward “from a personal epiphanic moment to a narrative description of that experience” (Denzin 1997: 208). To create a sharing in the described experience – to render it authentic, believable and possible – the writer aims to evoke an emotional response on the part of the reader. Narrative truth, therefore, “plunges the reader into a believable emotional world in which past, present, and future merge into a single but complex interpretive experience” (Denzin 1997: 210; cf. Tyler, 1986: 139). Suspicious of any totalising theory, the new experimental texts reject the search for absolute truth. They pursue instead new forms of narrative truth that reflexively engage text, author and reader in an interplay which privileges none of these “as the exclusive locus or means of the whole” (Tyler 1986: 133). While they continue “the ethnographic tradition of representing the experience of others” they also depart from that tradition in “breaking down the moral and intellectual distance between reader and writer” (Denzin 1997: 215).



In their preoccupation with securing objective knowledge about the world and fearing the pitfalls of misrepresentation, ethnographers of the Realist persuasion stood back from their texts. They tried to remain invisible. They felt that any element of reflexivity would be an intrusion of self that would threaten the text's authority and validity. From Denzin's point of view, however, it is impossible for a text not to be reflexive, as a certain reflexivity is embodied in language itself. A narrative text, through its use of language, "positions the writer in the text and uses the writer's experiences as both the topic of enquiry and a resource for uncovering problematic experience" (Denzin 1997: 217). Every text is personal, he explains, and will necessarily bear the traces of its author.

In treating of what they call "the seventh moment" in qualitative research, Lincoln & Denzin reinforce this point of view, referring to the "false dichotomy" which would deny a place to the author in the scientific scholarly text. "The false division," they suggest, "between the personal and ethnographic self rests on the assumption that it is possible for an author to write a text that does not bear the traces of its author." In rejecting this assumption, they cite the opinion of Geertz (1988) that all texts are personal statements. The authors go on to cite a number of ways "to return the author openly to the qualitative research text." Amongst the possibilities mentioned, authors may "engage in a dialogue with those studied." They may also produce narratives of the self or allow their authorial voice to "come in and then go out of the text" (Lincoln & Denzin 2000: 1051). There is, of course, a balance to be maintained. The author's presence in the text must not dominate or marginalise the very object of study. However while it should never become "narcissistic" or "egotistical," the reflexive text, far from challenging "the paradigm of ethnographic research," allows for the

production of works that emphasize the viewpoint and the voice of the researcher (Denzin 1997: 218).

Denzin (1997: 136 et seq.) discusses “novels or ethnographic and journalistic texts of the exegetical, testimonial and notational variety.” He defines the last of these, the notational style, as one in which “the writer stays out of the way” as far as possible. While this is not a style which I have found appropriate, the exegetical and testimonial narrative styles are indeed relevant to this study and I have employed these forms, in the course of this thesis, to represent my role as participant observer and writer and to give effect to my interpretation of the personal and cultural world of Mr. Mippy.

The presentation in this thesis of the life and times of Mr. Mippy, as well as some of the historical and personal perspectives later outlined, might properly be placed under the heading of Denzin’s first classification, which he labels “exegetical” or “expositional” narrative. It is a form which represents a non-fictional universe “waiting to be interpreted” (Denzin 1997: 136). These chapters deal with public and private events and epiphanies in the life of Mr. Mippy and his contemporaries, many of which occurred long before the time of writing and were therefore in no way shaped by my presence or participation. In these areas, various narrative strategies are used to bring life to experiential reality. I have made use of personal interview, relevant documentation, individual and general portraits and scenes, collateral perspectives and statistics – all providing evidence that the events described are authentic and not figments of the author’s imagination. Discursive, factual passages have been intermingled with self-stories, personal memories and histories.

On the other hand, the study also reflects what Denzin describes as “testimonial text.” In treating of Mr. Mippy’s projects and the way in

which he imparted his cultural understandings, the thesis reflects my personal association with him as I shared his cultural knowledge and understandings and worked closely with him in the implementation of his initiatives in the field of community planning and development. While maintaining my stance as a non-Indigenous participant observer, I have allowed my own voice to become a central part of the text as I describe my own experience of and participation in the events narrated. As Lincoln & Denzin (2000: 1049) point out, “the qualitative researcher is not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text.” He or she is “historically positioned and locally situated.” Qualitative enquiry, they suggest, must be conceptualised as “a civic, participatory, collaborative project” which “joins the researcher and the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue.” Enhancing this moral dialogue, my close collaboration with Mr. Mippy and his associates enables me to add a personal and practical dimension to the narrative and to connect autoethnography, a term referred to a little earlier, to the genre of biography. Autoethnography, as Denzin defines the term, denotes “a turning of the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto) while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur” (Denzin 1997: 227). In employing such a perspective, writers connect their personal, autobiographical experience to the ethnographic project.

This perspective is reflected especially in the fourth chapter of the thesis, where an account is given of the development of the Yuat Artefacts Project. As I myself shared fully with the working group in the development of the project, I am able to record my collaborative participation in the events being described, “acting as a medium who registers the effects and meanings of these events for their various participants” (Denzin 1997: 137). The narrative records my experience of

working with Mr. Mippy and his friends and reflects what it is that I learned from them in the process.

The purpose of the foregoing exposé has been to present, in a summary perspective, the history and development of what might be called a “postmodernist” paradigm of cultural research. I have followed its transition from the realist, totalising, representational model to a newer concept of ethnography as a discourse of perceiving the other through experience-near interpretations based in contexts of real-life experience. I have also engaged the newer means of doing ethnography which involves the employment of a variety and multiplicity of narrative forms and strategies, some of which are relevant to the style of this thesis. I return now to tracing the evolution of the methodology adopted for this thesis and continue my explanation of how and why the method of interpretive, ethnographic biography came to be chosen as a means of reconstructing an account of Yuat society based on the perspectives of Mr. Mippy.

#### *TOWARDS A NEW METHODOLOGY*

The social theory which underpins the methodology of interpretive, ethnographic biography ranges beyond forms of qualitative research and methods of narrative analysis. It includes the concept of culture and the new understandings of Aboriginality which are of vital concern to the Indigenous community and which are being elaborated today in the academic world. These new understandings fall within the category of social identity. As it is relevant to my perspective of the meaning and definition of culture, this discourse of individual and community identity is examined briefly here. It is considered further in the third chapter, which addresses constructions of identity in Mr. Mippy’s

Indigenous community, and again in chapter six where it provides an academic context in which to situate the cultural vision of Mr. Mippy himself.

Because of the seemingly wide acceptance within both the academic and the general community of negative views in relation to the question of contemporary Indigenous identity, my research in its initial stages had centred around an attempt to establish what I might then have described as the cultural credentials of the Yuat people. I believed that I could re-affirm their existence as a social entity and what I saw as the continuity of their cultural legacy by demonstrating the degree to which their ancestral heritage (including their language, their genealogical lines, their autochthonous traditions and beliefs) had survived in the face of the deprivation following colonial settlement.

As already indicated, however, such a paradigm of research differs little from the objectivist style employed by the very writers whose views I was endeavouring to refute. In attempting to deliver a definitive or objective account of a regional Indigenous community I was, in the words of Linnekin (1992: 249-250), involving myself in a "reification" of culture and tradition, attempting to present it as a "thing-like bundle of traits amenable to scientific description." Such a stance, Linnekin continues, has been discredited by the contemporary style of ethnography in which culture is seen as "symbolically constructed in the present" rather than as the object of "authentic tradition." In her view, the new ethnographic perspective rejects the concept of culture as a kind of "essential core," constituting a "passively inherited legacy" which is sufficient of itself to constitute a group's cultural identity.

Having accepted this departure from earlier academic traditions and in the light of these new perspectives, I saw the need to formulate a rather different view of the term "culture" for the purposes of this thesis.

Instead of seeing it as a bundle of “authentic tradition” by which cultural identity could be defined (as I had previously thought of it), I came to a definition which would present it rather in Linnekin’s terms. I saw culture as a “symbolic construction” – a function of the consciousness of a society as it responds existentially to its ever-changing environmental context. Rather than being linked to the perception of an essential core of traditional traits, culture in this new perspective is manifested existentially as a personal and social phenomenon. Questions relating to the survival or otherwise of cultural identity are not addressed simply by demonstrating the degree of continuity of ancient languages, customs, beliefs and traditions. They are rather questions of social awareness.

It seems that what some anthropologists of the earlier persuasion had failed to recognise was that Indigenous culture is changed, not necessarily extinguished, under the impact of colonisation. History has shown that all cultures change, not only in the face of colonialism. Human societies have demonstrated a cultural flexibility which allows adaptation to the changing factors within their physical and social environments. The rapid pace of modern technological change, for example, bears witness to a far-reaching and on-going cultural evolution within Western society.

Where a cultural group is faced with unexpected or rapidly changing environmental imperatives, as in the case of post-contact Aboriginal society, there is bound to be, whether consciously or unconsciously, a process of adaptation by which what is old merges with what is new. In spite of the inevitable trauma, the “old” world does not suddenly disappear, leaving some kind of cultural vacuum. It evolves, over time, into a newer cultural environment which, in spite of having undergone radical and perhaps painful transformation, still retains links

with the past and is still fully capable of reflecting its unique genius without losing its defining cultural boundaries.

Beckett was one of the first anthropologists to cut across the notion of an Indigenous cultural vacuum and the theory of the disappearing race. "Aboriginal people," he complained, "are caught between the attribution of unchanging essences (with the implication of an inability to change) and the reproach of inauthenticity" (Beckett 1988: 194). Writing in the same vein, Cowlshaw (1988: 89) complains that "until recently the authoritative voices on the identity of Aborigines have been those of the anthropologists," who invariably used traditional culture as "the mark of that identity." What is needed, she continues, is a wider perspective which identifies culture "as a creative response to the conditions of existence experienced by a group." For Cowlshaw, "the analysis of cultural groups then depends more on the nature of the boundaries and relations between cultural groups than on their defining characteristics." Macdonald (2001: 181), however, questions the kind of analysis which tends to represent the "defining characteristics" of Aboriginality in settled areas as being little more than a reaction to colonial encounter. In Macdonald's view, authors such as Cowlshaw and Morris (1989) have overplayed the "resistance theme" and "have steered away from studies of the internal dynamics of Aboriginal lifeways." I return to a closer examination of these complementary perspectives in chapter three, when considering the question of Aboriginality in the town of Moora. What can be said, in the meantime, is that cultural change within a given society is neither a sign of cultural discontinuity nor a prelude to imminent extinction. On the contrary, it should even be taken as a sign of continuing vitality.

*MR. MIPPY AS A FOCUS OF INTERPRETATION: THE UNIVERSAL SINGULAR*

In reconstructing a vision of Mr. Mippy's social world and in coming to terms with its problems, we must bear in mind that his life, like that of many other Aboriginal Elders of his time, was framed against a background of drastic and in many ways traumatic social and cultural change. In spite of the deprivation suffered by his society, however, he saw hope for the future. Having retained the cultural identity of his earlier years, he was determined to find new ways of preserving and communicating it through a renewal of cultural awareness within his community.

Such was Mr. Mippy's vision. In interpreting that vision, one can perceive, on the one hand, the interplay between his natural and oft-expressed reverence for past tradition and on the other, his recognition of the need for the adaptation of old ways to new conditions. His own words reflect these convictions. He pointed out that his people "*must keep [their] identities and traditional ways*" (Bourke 1990) while at the same time they should not "*stand at street corners 'n peep*" but should "*go with the [white] people*" (State Affair 8 Nov. 1985).

In attempting to evoke the cultural world of Mr. Mippy, therefore, I have not endeavoured (as originally intended) to measure the degree of cultural continuity and change which has taken place in Yuat society since colonial contact. Much less have I sought to arrive at any definitive, comprehensive or encyclopedic account of the Yuat as a cultural entity. What I have endeavoured to do is to reconstruct an account of Mr. Mippy's life according to the "critical-interpretive method" as advocated by Denzin (1989a: 21) which seeks "progressively and regressively to situate and understand a subject within a given



historical moment.” Progressively, the method “looks forward” to the conclusion of the biographee’s life experiences, i.e. the implementation of Mr. Mippy’s cultural vision and education program, while regressively working back in time “to the historical, cultural and biographical conditions “that moved him to conceive and formulate it. In keeping with the narrative forms of interpretive biography, the thesis aims to look within the sequence of events and major epiphanies of Mr. Mippy’s life in an attempt to identify and reveal the factors in his life story which further illuminate an understanding of his own cultural world. The account of his personal life-experiences and understandings is not, then, an end in itself. It acts for the reader as a means of opening up the wider cultural and historical world in which it is framed.

The present study, following forms of interpretive narrative which apply an ethnographic perspective to the genre of literary biography, is designed to widen the window onto this new world of understanding. The genre, or combination of genres, known as “ethnographic biography,” is one that has already been used to achieve similar goals. Herzfeld (1997: 1), writing in the very year that I was developing the methodology for this study, places his work under this heading. He describes ethnographic biography as a style of writing which is “neither a literary biography nor an ethnography, but fuses elements of both. Unlike most ethnographies,” he continues, “it is focused on the life, writings [works] and ideas of a single person... unlike most biographies, it is less concerned with the personality of the central character than with the significance of his life and times for a tangle of intersecting social worlds.” Apart from the fact that this thesis is indeed vitally concerned with the many aspects of its “central character,” Mr. Mippy, these words of Herzfeld may well serve to reflect the rationale of this study. At any rate, the strategy adopted here, as in Herzfeld’s *Portrait*,” constitutes a

concrete application and extension of the dictum of Sartre (1981), as elaborated by Denzin (1989a: 19), that a particular individual both creates and is created by the world or epoch in which he lives; that, when presented as a focus of biographical interpretation, he is seen, if not as a microcosm, at least as a “single instance of more universal social experiences and processes.” It is important, of course, not to overstate the case. Herzfeld (1997: 1, 2) warns that “a single person’s observations cannot substitute for the full description of a local community.” He hastens to add, however, that the interpretation of a life experience, important though it be in its own right as the immediate object of research, may also appear “as a vehicle of other concerns.” Maintaining the metaphor, he argues that “the tactic of ethnographic biography allows us to move along the trajectory of a life that has bisected many histories and of a person who has dwelt in many communities.”

Like Denzin, Herzfeld (1997: 25, 26) has recourse to the perspectives of Sartre in support of his argument. He quotes the opinion of Sartre (1949: 68) that “people of a same period and collectivity, who have lived through the same events, who have raised or avoided the same questions, have the same taste in their mouth; they have the same complicity...” Commenting on this text, Herzfeld contends that “like literary scholars and historians ... ethnographers must infuse unfamiliar contexts with reconstituted reality.” To do so, he goes on to suggest, they must evoke for readers from other “social universes” what Sartre describes as “the taste in the mouths” (a phrase which I interpret as referring to cultural perspectives and life experience) of those who live in the same social context as those they are writing about. In exploring the social and cultural domains of Mr. Mippy’s world, I hope to have provided just such an interpretive experience.

Recounting recent developments in literary, interpretive theory, Denzin (1989b: 8, 9) seeks the support of C. Wright Mills (1959: 6) and others in suggesting that every social study must return to the problems of biography, of history and of the way they intersect within a society. To reinforce this view, he quotes Sartre (1981: ix-x) with words which I consider germane to the philosophy underpinning this thesis. "Man is never an individual; it would be more fitting to call him a *universal singular*.<sup>11</sup> Summed up and for this reason universalised by his epoch, he in turn resumes it by reproducing himself in it as a singularity." I believe that, in the terms adopted by Sartre and Denzin, Mr. Mippy exemplifies this concept of the "universal singular." Just as individual people, in this view, contribute to the creation of their contemporary society, they are also in some measure created by it. Mr. Mippy may therefore be seen as a personal "locus" in whom biography and history intersect. "Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by the universalizing singularity of his projects," Denzin continues, quoting Sartre, "he (man) requires simultaneous examination from both ends" (Denzin 1989b: 9).

In this mode of biographical interpretation which envisages a reflexive interplay between individuals and their socio-historical context, one becomes aware of the convergence of the genres of biography, history and ethnography. Through the contextual understanding provided by this present chapter, the reader is better enabled to interpret and understand the life of this particular individual (Mr. Mippy) and his view of personal and social identity. Reflexively, he himself then becomes a medium, or vehicle through which his cultural world may itself be more clearly evoked.

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<sup>11</sup> I retain Denzin's italics here, but reject the quote's implications of gender.

In the metaphor of the “universal singular,” Mr. Mippy serves both as a lens and as a voice. He is a lens through which I and therefore my readers are enabled to perceive and interpret his cultural milieu as he himself might have seen and interpreted it. His voice is that of an Aboriginal educator issuing from an age-old oral tradition in terms adapted to its modern social context. In the last years of his life, Mr. Mippy was an Aboriginal Elder seemingly poised at the interface of two worlds, confronted with the task of adapting and communicating the old in terms acceptable to the new. Through his educational program, he pursued his aim of finding novel ways of renewing and strengthening a sense of identity amongst his people. During his lifetime, he spoke of the need for a re-awakening of his people’s identity through cultural awareness. At the same time, he would have discerned an improvement in the perception of the wider community towards its Aboriginal minority, together with a consequent decrease in racial prejudice and discrimination. The narrative of Mr. Mippy’s life and vision illuminates the part he played in achieving these outcomes and captures an important historical moment in the life of the Yuat Nyoongara people.

#### *TERMS OF REFERENCE*

During this interpretation of the life and work of Mr. Mippy I have taken care to include within the scope of enquiry the terms of reference used by him and his community in defining local areas of knowledge, understanding and expectation. It has been my experience that the terms which Aboriginal people use to explain and make sense of their world are not necessarily of universal application. Variations may be found throughout Aboriginal communities as to the ways of thinking, working and reflecting which are specific to differing local contexts.

The Moora community, like many others, is one in which factors relating to genealogy and kinship are specific to the region and give rise to unique obligations, values and behavioural expectations. The goals, priorities and aspirations of individuals and family groups are influenced internally by their mutual interaction and by the historical factors which determine their degree of identity with the place. Historical factors may vary from one area to another. In the Moora community, for example, many family histories may be traced through the New Norcia Mission, the Moore River Settlement or the local Reserves. Such common origins provide a strong basis for shared experiences and understandings. In any given area, apart from the unitive influence of common origins, there may be other levels of relationship arising from considerations such as length of residence or the degree of enculturation into the wider society.

Other variations which may affect the Indigenous framework of reference pertain to Aboriginal thought, behaviour and relationships at the interface of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains. This also can vary from place to place. Institutionalised tensions based on social or demographic demarcations may exist to a greater degree in some areas than in others. Where such tensions do occur, however, the presence of respected Elders willing and able to put forward community concerns is of considerable advantage.

Of special importance in the pursuance of Indigenous research involving people, especially where the researcher is a non-Indigenous person, is the support provided by an Aboriginal Reference Group or Steering Committee.<sup>12</sup> I have been fully aware that any interactive research involving Aboriginal issues should acknowledge the role of

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<sup>12</sup> See Interim Research Policy drafts, CAS, Curtin (1996, 1998).

such an Indigenous consultative body in helping such research to be in accord with what are often referred to as Aboriginal Terms of Reference. These Terms refer to the sets of principles, core values and processes which are important in reflecting an Aboriginal, as distinct from a non-Aboriginal viewpoint on relevant issues. As they relate to the construction of meanings, understandings and cultural knowledge within the community they should be given due consideration in the course of an enquiry of this kind.

Without compromising my independence as a researcher I have endeavoured to proceed with due respect to these principles. The consultation process has involved the Mippy Family Reference Group at all stages and I have given the group the opportunity of commenting on personal material contained in the chapters. This policy of consultation reflects my conscious commitment as a researcher to respect the sensibilities of the Aboriginal stakeholders.

#### *THE MIPPY FAMILY REFERENCE GROUP*

In former times, research undertaken by non-Aboriginal academics in an area such as this had often been conducted in a manner that was sometimes perceived as detrimental to Aboriginal interests. Accordingly, the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) at Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia, suggests a new approach to research, the main objectives of which are to ensure Aboriginal ownership and control of research, to facilitate collaboration, negotiation and dialogue in the research process, and to create opportunities and incentives for research participation by the Aboriginal people who are the focus of the research (*Interim Research Policy* 1996). In accordance with these principles and for the purposes of this present study, staff

within CAS suggested the establishment of an Aboriginal Reference Group consisting of members of the local Moora community whose task would be to support and monitor the conduct of the proposed research. On 15 May, 1996, preliminary meetings were held in Moora between representatives of CAS, myself and interested Aboriginal groups within the Moora community.

Further meetings were held in June and July of that year, involving a broad spectrum of Aboriginal people, including some from outside the historic Yuat area. Consideration was given to the scope and title of the thesis and the idea of setting up an "Interim Reference Committee." The idea was formulated that the focus of the proposed research should be a biographical study of Mr. Mippy's life. Discussions emerged in relation to who should be involved in the research and whether the project should serve the interests of the Mippy family. It was decided that the Reference Committee should consist of persons designated by that family. The "Mippy Family Reference group" accordingly held its first meeting at the District Education Office, Moora, on 7th. October 1996 and agreed upon *The Legacy of the Late Edward Mippy* as an acceptable title for the proposed thesis. Owing to the difficulty in arranging suitable times and places for meetings, it was decided at the next meeting on 9th. April that the Committee should operate in future as a "working group" rather than a formal committee, though formal meetings will be held from time to time. An Executive Officer was appointed to liase with me in the conduct of the research.

It was agreed that the use, storage and confidentiality of all research material would be monitored by the Reference Committee which would oversee the development of the thesis. At the direction of the Reference Committee data was to be stored in a secure place for five years. The Committee was also to ensure that all research was conducted

in a manner respecting Aboriginal cultural protocols and with the informed consent of the participants. Written permissions, where required, would be sought from individual owners of relevant information. The use of family names, references to nicknames and conversational speech patterns were subjected to regulation by the Committee.

#### *SUMMARY*

To recapitulate what has already been said, this study seeks to make the cultural world of the Yuat Nyoongara accessible to the reader by directing the focus of research on the lived experiences of one notable individual. By working through the life experiences and cumulative epiphanies of Mr. Mippy, who spent most of his adult life as a respected Elder within the traditional heartland of the Yuat, this study presents, through the techniques of social narrative, an account of his perception of his own world in the context of the larger historical, institutional and cultural arenas in which it was situated.

Following the principles and practices of qualitative enquiry, the thesis may be defined as an essentially ethno-biographical study located within the frame of interpretive Indigenous research. The study draws on existing records to provide the necessary cultural setting and to affirm the historical place of the Yuat people within the wider context of Nyoongar society. Where a wider spectrum of evidence relating to various aspects of cultural understandings and practice is brought within the ambit of this study, its purpose is contextual. It is not intended to serve as an externally derived conceptual yardstick by which to read and evaluate the texts of Mr. Mippy's life experiences, but rather



to enable the location and interpretation of those experiences against a wider historical, cultural and social background.

In Denzin's view, biographical interpretivists must participate in the social world of their subjects in order to elicit meaningful interpretations of human experience (Denzin 1989a: 26). I have followed this model of personal involvement through a long association with Mr. Mippy prior to and during the evolution of his cultural awareness program, studying his language, sharing his feelings and taking part in his activities. Through constant personal association I have been able to document his life experiences, using the strategies of observation and interview to become familiar with the various crises, challenges and turning-points of his life. I have thus been able to relate these experiences to the public institutions so important to his early life and to the attitudes and perceptions which underpinned the cultural initiatives of his later years.

In addition to the multiple narratives encompassed within the life-story of Mr. Mippy, personal histories and self-stories of other associated individuals have been included. Although it has been my intention to keep Mr. Mippy and his interactants at the focus of enquiry, I have not lost sight of the need to situate and understand the Mippy story within other historical frames of reference, taking account of the "forward, temporal dimension" of the interpretive process as well as looking back to the biographical conditions that inspired his future work and vision (Denzin, 1989a: 21).

This chapter has examined the broad field of social theory as a prelude to Denzin's approach to biographical writing. It has traced the discourse of ethnography in the present era and the development of new forms of social narrative which are grounded in the community. It has examined new perspectives of the concepts of culture and identity. Most

importantly, it has introduced the dual genre of ethnographic biography as a means of evoking, through the narrative of one individual life, an understanding of the cultural world in which that life is lived.

An interpretive study of this kind must be related to the world of lived experience and social interaction. In portraying the life and times of Mr. Mippy, therefore, the following chapter is an attempt to capture, bracket and interpret his subjective human experiences within the historical moments that surround them, presenting those experiences as visible, recognisable and comprehensible in terms of everyday life.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE LIFE AND TIMES OF EDWARD MIPPY

“The story tells itself, I might have said, if it were not for the fact that the story never tells itself. It has to be told” (Denning 1996: xv)

In examining the life and background of Mr. Edward Mippy, particularly his earlier years, this chapter presents perspectives on the social and environmental contexts which have contributed to his life experience. Such a purview is of the utmost importance to this study. I believe that the biographical perspectives gained through the following presentation, featuring as far as possible Mr. Mippy’s personal reflections and the self-stories of some of his peers, are useful in providing the necessary frame of reference for placing him at the principal focus of this thesis. Besides allowing for an experience-near interpretation of the cultural milieu in which Mr. Mippy lived and acted, the chapter also traces and examines the earlier factors and epiphanic moments which shed light on his life, his understandings and on the vision of cultural awareness which was to form the basis of his later activities.

It may be useful for the purpose of this preview to regard the first thirty years of Mr. Mippy’s life as falling naturally into three periods, each covering a span of about one decade. The government settlements at Carrolup and Moore River, the nature and origin of which will be briefly examined in the course of this chapter, were the scene of the first period which covers his formative years from the age of about four to

fourteen. The decade of hard experience that followed his release from the Moore River Native Settlement (MRNS) and his abrupt introduction to the wider world – going “*out in the wilderness*” as he himself once expressed it – was the second major period of his life. This was succeeded by another fairly continuous period, again of approximately ten years duration, during which time he returned to live and work at the Settlement.<sup>1</sup> He has described how, in the early 1950’s, after finally taking leave of the place which had been the scene of his earliest memories, he arrived with his young family in the town of Moora, in the Central Midlands. Here he established a permanent home and began what might be regarded as the fourth and final period of his life, culminating with his death in Moora in 1992.

Each of these four discernible periods contains significant experiences which illuminate his story. It is the first three of these, however, which will receive particular scrutiny in this present chapter as having the most relevance to an understanding of his character and outlook. The final stage of Mr. Mippy’s life, what might be called the “Moora period,” was devoted to the implementation of his program of cultural renewal and development. Although this is a most significant period, it will receive little more than summary treatment here as it is intended to provide the context for succeeding chapters.

#### *BIRTH AND FAMILY BACKGROUND*

During the early years of European settlement there lived an Aboriginal/Nyoongar man of great authority who was known as Winjan

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<sup>1</sup> Also known as the “Mogumber Settlement” or “Mogumber Mission.”

(Hammond 1933: 20-21).<sup>2</sup> According to Hammond, he lived in the town now known as Mandurah, W.A. where he apparently died at a very great age. Edward Mippy was likewise born in the town of Mandurah. As he recalled it, he first saw the light of day on 1 January, 1919, "*at a little place called Whitehouse, along the estuary - McLarty's property.*"<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Mippy could give little information about the origins of his father, Arthur Mippy, except that he was partly of Maori descent and could claim old Winjan as one of his forbears. Although the link with Winjan has not been supported by documentary evidence, Mr. Frank Nannup, Chairman of the Winjan Aboriginal Corporation, told me in 1997 that a Winjan-Mippy family connection was widely accepted within the Aboriginal community. In any event, I believe that the life story of Mr. Mippy reveals an air of authority and strength of character which invites comparison with this reputed forebear.

The records of the Moore River Native Settlement<sup>4</sup> reveal more information about his mother's side of the family. These indicate that Edward's mother, Clara Leyland (nee Harris), was born in 1878. The father of Clara was registered as Tim Harris, son of Ebenezer Harris, who is noted as having a white father and a mother of full Aboriginal descent. Her mother, Caroline Mullane, had an Indigenous African father and an Aboriginal mother.<sup>5</sup> According to the records, on 4th. August, 1894, then aged 16, Clara Harris was legally married to Nutty (Natty) Leyland (Laylan) at Busselton. In addition to an existing daughter, Maggie, whose father was said to have been a white man, seven children are listed from this marriage. Their names are given as

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<sup>2</sup> His name is preserved to the present day in the title of the Winjan Aboriginal Corporation which is located in Mandurah, his former territory.

<sup>3</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 1). As to the date, MRNS records indicate he was aged 6 years in 1924, which would make 1918 the year of his birth.

<sup>4</sup> MRNS, Clara Leyland file.

Dora (Mrs. Thompson), Bonnie, Mabel (Mrs. Jack Moore), Lena (Mrs. Billy Wallam), Clara, Jock and Bella. This latter half-sister, Bella, was a good twenty years older than Ned and was the only one to survive him.<sup>6</sup> New Norcia's records reveal yet another child, Sylvester Timothy Laylan, not mentioned in the above list.<sup>7</sup>

Following the death of Natty (Nutty) Leyland, Clara '*skipped the fire stick*'<sup>8</sup> and took a second spouse, Arthur Mippy. It is believed within the family that Arthur, the father of Edward, belonged to the district of Mandurah, though, as stated above, his antecedents have not been discovered. Mr. Mippy spoke of eleven children of this union, two of whom died early. The names of only five are recorded: Alfred, Melba, Bruce, Betty and Edward,<sup>9</sup> the youngest of these, Edward, being the subject of this thesis. Mona, not previously mentioned and another daughter, Maggie, are also referred to in the records.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Mippy was never sure of the exact number of his siblings. In accordance with the "*traditional way*," he never made a distinction between so-called "*full*" or "*step*" brothers and sisters. As he expressed it in later life:

*Oh, I couldn't keep tally of them, most of them are dead, barring the one what's in Lockridge camp, that's Bella, Bella Bropho ... she's me full sister... we got the one mother, so we brothers and sisters within our eyes. We don't go for this 'step' - things like that. We stick to the traditional way of living.*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Oral information provided by the Mippy family.

<sup>6</sup> Bella was married to Mr. Tom Bropho whom I had met in 1958 at the Moora Aboriginal Reserve and was the mother of Mr. Robert Bropho, the well-known Elder and activist. She was said to be more than 90 years old at the time of her death in 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Baptismal Register, NNA; No birth date given.

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Mippy's metaphor for informal matrimony.

<sup>9</sup> MRNS, Clara Leyland file.

<sup>10</sup> Mona was introduced to me by her brother in Port Headland in 1990, as Mona Moramine.

<sup>11</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 4).

The MRNS file also reveals that in March 1921 Clara was sent to Carrolup Settlement with two of her children and the following month was joined there by seven others, including young Edward. Her daughter Maggie's two children, Carrie and Jackie, were apparently also there. Two months after her arrival, Clara is further recorded as leaving Carrolup and is next noted as being in Katanning gaol, where she was sentenced to one month's imprisonment on a charge of "loitering." Discharged from gaol, she was removed to the Moore River Settlement.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, the boy Edward remained at Carrolup. The following recollection indicates that he was there for about a year altogether:

*I was small when I was there, because people used to say I used to go up and walk around the cemetery with no pants on [laughter]. That's the older ones that's tellin' me ... I couldn't recollect any memories from there.*<sup>13</sup>

It may seem strange that one so young should have been left to fend for himself in such an unfamiliar environment, without parental care. In those days however, under official government policy, Indigenous parents had little or no say in the placement of their children. Asked if he had any memory of family members being with him in Carrolup, he replied:

*No, no, only me, I was put in there. I was around three, three or four... I think it was that mum and dad couldn't look after me, couldn't care for me, and whether they were drinking or not I couldn't say that, but for the good of me own health, that's why they took me...*<sup>14</sup>

Haebich (1988: 196) notes that in June 1922 Carrolup was closed, all the inmates being removed to the Moore River Settlement. It does not seem that young Edward was with the other children at this time as the

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<sup>12</sup> MRNS, Clara Leyland file.

<sup>13</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 5).

date of his arrival in Moore River is recorded <sup>15</sup> two years later, on 29th. April, 1924, with the note that he is “to remain at the Settlement.” As will be seen later in the story, he remembered that both his parents were at Mogumber to receive him when he arrived there in the care of a departmental officer and his wife.

The first fifteen years of young Edward Mippy’s life are described in this chapter largely through the medium of his own perceptions. During these years, he saw almost nothing of the wider world, all his experiences being set within the context of the two government settlements at Carrolup and Moore River. As the conditions and circumstances encountered in those places loom large in his memory and in the memories of other former inmates, it is useful to pause here in order to present some perspectives on the origin and development of these two government institutions.

#### *THE NATIVE SETTLEMENTS* <sup>16</sup>

In the early years of the colony, the Nyoongar people of the Southwest of Western Australia, although dispossessed of their lands and traditional life-style and suffering the effects of racial discrimination, were none-the-less able to eke out a living, either through “hunting in the bush or working on pastoral stations” (Haebich 1988: 1). Many took up residence in bush camps and in the environs of Perth and Fremantle. Others were catered for by various missions. By the turn of the century,

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<sup>14</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 1).

<sup>15</sup> MRNS, Ned Mippy file.

<sup>16</sup> Detailed accounts of life in the so-called “Native Settlements” may be found in Haebich (1988 & 2000), Maushart (1993) and Biskup (1973).



there were “two hundred Aborigines living in missions in the south.” Most of these were at the Catholic Mission of New Norcia, which had been established by the Benedictine Order in 1846 to care for the Aborigines of the Victoria Plains area. Other missions included the Swan Native and Half-Caste (SNHC) Home in Midland, opened in 1871, and Ellensbrook, a small farm home on the Margaret River, opened in 1898 (Haebich 1988: 6, 8).

The rising tide of unemployment and poverty amongst Indigenous people, the growing numbers of persons of mixed descent, the increase of discriminatory attitudes and the continuing cruelty, exploitation and abuse of Aboriginal people, were issues highlighted by the Roth Royal Commission which tabled its Report in the West Australian Parliament in January, 1905 (Haebich 1988: 76-82). The result was the proclamation of the Aborigines Act of 1905,<sup>17</sup> the stated aim of which was to “make provision for the better protection and care of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Western Australia” (Haebich 1988: 83). In fact, as Haebich maintains, the Act “laid the basis for the development of repressive and coercive state control over the State’s Aboriginal population.” Under the Act, government appointed officers were given greater power over the enforced assimilation of Aboriginal children. They had the power, too, “to control the movement of Aborigines in settled areas and thereby their contacts with the wider community” (Haebich 1988: 87). Much of this power was exercised in response to pressure exerted by the non-Aboriginal population. Haebich contends that this kind of pressure was a factor in the establishment of the government settlements at Carrolup and Moore River.

Haebich (1988: 144) suggests that, from 1911 onwards, a number of complaints were being heard from the white community, across the

Southwest region, in regard to the presence of Aboriginal people in the towns. Residents of Moora were campaigning to have the local Reserve shifted out of town and in Moora and Katanning, Aborigines were being refused admission to the local government hospitals. In 1914, the author continues, Aborigines from Wagin, Narrogin, Bunbury and Katanning met at the Katanning Reserve in order to defuse the situation by formulating laws to regulate behaviour, but seemingly without long term results. The white townspeople are said to have lost patience with what they perceived as behavioural problems, with the result that, in 1915, the police rounded up all the people at the Katanning camp and forced them to walk to the camping site which had been established on the Carrolup River. At the same time it seems that Quairading residents were bent on the removal of their Aboriginal community from town, and in other centres people were leaving town and moving out to camps in Kellerberrin and Brookton (Haebich 1988: 146-7).

From Haebich's account, the aims of the Chief Protector's Departmental administration from this time focused on the development of a settlement scheme in the south of the State. Accordingly, in 1916, Carrolup Reserve was expanded to ten thousand acres to allow it to become self-supporting and a further ten thousand acre reserve was created on the Moore River near the Mogumber railway siding.<sup>18</sup> According to the same author, this latter was intended to cater for the estimated 400 Aborigines living between Gin Gin in the south to Northampton in the north, as well as "children of mixed descent from the Murchison district" (Haebich 1988: 165). In fact, the net was to be thrown even more widely. Alice Nannup, a young inmate there during the 1920's, referring to the different language groups represented in the

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<sup>17</sup> 5 Edw. VII. No. 14 of 1905.

<sup>18</sup> See map, fig. 3.

Settlement, wrote that “*there were Nor’westers and Sou’westers all mixed in together like up at the compound*” (Nannup 1992: 85).

Children were being consigned to the new Moore River Settlement from 1918 onwards. In Haebich's view, it was these new policies that led to the closure of existing children's missions. The mission at Ellensbrook was closed in 1917. The following year, the inter-denominational Australian Aborigines' Mission society (AAM) began transferring the children from its Dulhi Gonyah Orphanage, which had been located in Victoria Park since 1911, to the new institution at Carrolup. The SNHC Home had ceased to function by 1920. The Department's segregated Aboriginal schools were also closed to assist the funding of the settlement scheme. These closures left the mission of New Norcia as the only Aboriginal mission and educational centre to survive in the southwest of the State (Haebich 1988: 167). Haebich notes that the Chief Protector of Aborigines, A.O. Neville, allowed the AAM missionaries to continue their “guiding and spiritual influence” at Carrolup while the Anglican missionaries maintained a similar pastoral involvement at Moore River (Haebich 1988: 108, 109, 168).

If, as the author claims, it was Neville's policy to relegate all Aborigines to the Settlements, adults as well as children, he met with only limited success. At Carrolup, where Mr. Mippy had his first taste of institutional life, adults were accommodated in a camp located not far from the children's compound, and the same arrangement was to be continued at the Moore River Settlement.

*WORSENING CONDITIONS AT MOORE RIVER*

Haebich (1988: ch. 6) argues that changes in administration policy and the W.A. government's "ruthless emphasis on economy" had resulted in a serious run-down in the development of the Settlements between 1920 and 1926. In 1922, Carrolup was declared closed ostensibly to save money, though the underlying reason for its closure, the author continues, may have been the increasing discontent in Katanning regarding the proximity of the Settlement to the town and the desire of the Lands Department to release more land for farming (Haebich 1988: 195).

The effect of the continuing government policies of segregation and incarceration, together with the closure of Carrolup and the transfer of its people, inevitably placed a serious burden on existing facilities at Moore River which "quickly became overcrowded and run-down" (Haebich 1988: 190). Biskup notes that the Settlement, though originally designed for a maximum of 200 inmates, now had to be stretched (if only temporarily) to accommodate almost 400. He goes on to paint an overall picture of conditions in the Moore River Settlement after the transfer of the first group of Carrolup inmates there in June 1922. Even without overcrowding, he maintains, these conditions would be considered inhumane. "Fenced compound, camp police and the settlement boob" were, he says, part of daily life at Moore River. There was also an acute shortage of water which he describes as "slightly brackish." Further, no one could enter or leave the compound without the written permission of the Superintendent or the Matron. Children were forbidden to associate with adults, even in the dining room. Female inmates were subjected to particularly strict discipline and all age groups were strictly segregated. Children's dormitories, Biskup continues, were locked and bolted from the outside at six o'clock in the evening, even in summer (Biskup 1973: 156-157).

Memories of former inmates, contemporaries of Mr. Mippy at Moore River, graphically illustrate the insanitary and overcrowded conditions. Interviewed on television, 'Nummie' Phillips remembered that, in his day, 50 beds were crammed into one dormitory, while Blanche Quartermaine recalled the stench from the bucket toilet which was situated in a little room at the end (Bourke 1990). An unnamed former inmate <sup>19</sup> interviewed on radio, recorded his impressions as to the hygiene and general atmosphere of depression at Moore River when he arrived there as a young lad:

*I could smell it, half a mile away before I got there. The very strong, almost overpowering smell of 'creosote' mixed with human odours and*

*so on. I was almost shocked by the attitude of the adult inmates - these people just sat there absolutely silent and just stared. It affected me rather profoundly because it was so obvious that they were a people who were psychologically very disturbed (Bunbury 1992).*

The scenario thus presented may help provide an overall picture of the kind of conditions prevailing at the Moore River Settlement at that period. Specifically, it may afford a glimpse of what might have confronted the former residents of Carrolup when they arrived at Moore River at the end of June, 1922. On the day designated for transfer, Haebich writes, all 104 persons then residing at Carrolup including the elderly and the sick, children and a number of "useful" workers, were loaded into two special carriages at the Katanning railway station. The train arrived at Mogumber siding late the following night. Next morning, while "the Aborigines were left to walk the eight miles to the Settlement," a horse and buggy was available to transport the white staff to their destination (Haebich 1988: 197-8). The arrival of the Carrolup community at the gates of their new home marked a defining moment in

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<sup>19</sup> This was possibly Arnold Franks.

the history of official segregationist policy. On that day, the Moore River Native Settlement became the prime focus of the the State's discriminatory legislation. Apart from the cattle station at Moola Bulla, established in the East Kimberley in 1910, it was the only government centre available for the accommodation of Aboriginal children and adults in Western Australia.

*EDWARD MIPPY BEGINS A NEW LIFE*

Young Edward arrived at Moore River two years after the first transfer of residents from Carrolup. It is clear from his own account that his parents, who were already accommodated and employed at the Settlement, were anxious for their youngest son to join them:

*I got a phone call from Mogumber that me mum and dad was there. They wanted me to go to Mogumber mission ... so I was put on the train.<sup>20</sup>*

Recalling his memory of this event he went on to indicate that his mother and father were present to meet him and his minders when the train arrived at the isolated Mogumber railway station:

*I just thought they were some other people when I arrived at Mogumber. They had to posh me up and kid me round before I believed them. I remember getting off the train there and I was really looking for a motor car, and there was a sulky there with a horse in it, and they came over, and a couple of the boys was there to con me into the thing ... Otherwise if I'd 've seen a white man there I might have took off in the bush.<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 1).

<sup>21</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 6).

Mr. Mippy had the following memory of how, arriving at the Settlement, he and his parents were ushered into the office of the Superintendent, who at that time was Mr. Arthur Neal:

*Mr. Neal said, 'right-oh, you'll have to stay... mum and dad, go down to the camps.' There was a fourteen foot fence around the compound. I was fenced in ... marshalled by black trackers...*<sup>22</sup>

In a press report, quoted by Haebich, the Settlement in 1938 was described as little more than a “dumping ground for Aborigines from various parts of the state” (Haebich 1988: 200). The report continues:

*“creche, orphanage, relief depot, old men's home, old women's home, home for discharged prisoners, home for expatriated savages, home for unmarried mothers, home for incurables, lost dogs home and school for boys and girls” (West Australian, 3 Aug. 1938).*<sup>23</sup>

To Mr. Mippy, reflecting on those early years, Moore River was worse than just a “dumping ground.” As he saw it, there was a policy of discrimination woven into its very fabric. It was designed, as Mr. Mippy remembered when interviewed at the scene of his youth, to separate the young from the old and the black from the white:

*It looked like they didn't want 'em to mingle with the white people - they got 'em in one little 'eap. When a family came 'ere, they got as far as the compound where we are sitting now, and that was like, to me it was like a drafting yard. The 'lambs' were kept here 'n the mums and dads were sent down to the camp (Mippy in Bunbury 1992).*

It was very clear to Mr. Mippy that the criterion for the separation of parents from children and of children from each other was based largely on colour. As he recalled:

*They had another draft when they went there [Moore River], the dark ones and the fair ones. Fair ones they'd pick them out and send them to*

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<sup>22</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 8).

<sup>23</sup> For a plan of the Moore River Settlement compound, see Haebich (1988: 179).

*Sister Kate's. It's just like sheep ... they'd say 'oh well, look at your dad. It's got to be that station owner!'*<sup>24</sup>

In Mr. Mippy's perception there was no consideration of a child's Aboriginality or social enculturation in the "drafting" process. The criterion, as he went on to observe, was simply the physical colour of the skin, the eyes and the hair.<sup>25</sup> Because they were fair, he explained:

*They would move them quick, yes. Oh, some of them had blue eyes. There was a girl called ...Trilby. She was white as this little paper, with blue eyes, and couldn't talk English. She came from up, right up further north.*<sup>26</sup>

Like young Edward, the late Phyllis Narrier did not, as a child, have to endure the trauma of separation from her parents. She was born and raised in the Settlement where her father was one of the trackers. She is of prime importance to this biography not only because she was to become the wife of Mr. Mippy and the mother of all his children but because of the important role played by her father at Moore River. It seems opportune therefore to pause at this point and present her story as a parallel narrative, placing her, the first daughter of Mr. Frank Narrier, within the context of her family.

#### *THE NARRIER FAMILY*

On 25th. December, 1927, three years after young Edward's arrival, the birth of a baby girl was recorded at MRNS. The parents were

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<sup>24</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 22).

<sup>25</sup> For official government policy re the "biological absorption of 'mixed race' people," see Haebich (2000: 279).

<sup>26</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 23).



registered as Grace Rose Brown and Frank Narrier.<sup>27</sup> Little appears to be known in regard to the identity of the parents of Grace Brown.<sup>28</sup> We have only the following information from Phyllis that Grace as a young girl was living with her mother in Esperance when she was taken away from her and placed in the care of the Salvation Army in Perth. As she explained to her interviewer:

*She'd been taken from her mother, from Esperance ... and she talk about this Salvation Army people used to look after her ...[in] Perth, yes. And they took her to Moore River Native Settlement ... they put her there.*

Phyllis went on to remember how, as a little girl, her mother first met and later married Frank Narrier. It was 1921, the same year which saw the admittance there of Edward's mother, Clara Leyland:

*They met in the Settlement, see. My mother went to the Settlement when she was a little girl, and my old dad was put in there. That's where they met and they got married.*<sup>29</sup>

Grace's baby, the first of her union with Frank but born before they were married in the church, was given the surname of her mother and registered as Phyllis Brown. In 1940, however, her father had her legitimated and registered under his own family name of Narrier.<sup>30</sup> The same records reveal that a son, Dennis, had already been born to Grace in Moore River in 1922, the father being noted as Thomas Williams.

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<sup>27</sup> According to MRNS records (Grace Brown file), Grace was daughter to Edward George Wilkes and Mary Cecelia (sic) Scribner. However, according to W, a former Settlement inmate whom I interviewed in 1998, there must have been some confusion here between Grace Brown and an earlier spouse of Frank Narrier, known as Grace Wilkes. If this be so, the departmental records are confusing the parents of Grace Wilkes with those of Grace Brown.

<sup>28</sup> One might speculate about a possible connection with a Henry Brown (the only person of that name in the New Norcia records and of Irish descent) who married a Mary Ryder in the New Norcia church in 1897.

<sup>29</sup> P. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990b: 2)

<sup>30</sup> MRNS, Phyllis Brown file.

Another child, Pearl, fathered by a Jack McKean, was brought by her to her union with Frank. As Phyllis remembered:

*Well, my mother must have had me when they wasn't married, and that's how I went by Brown. And Pearlie Brown, yeah, she was a Brown, and Dennis Brown, see ... that's the three of us. She had us three, but she wasn't married then. She was Brown.*<sup>31</sup>

At least from 1937 onwards Frank Narrier, the father of Phyllis Mippy, acted as one of the most notable of the Settlement policemen, known as "trackers," who together controlled every aspect of the inmates' lives.<sup>32</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that he looms large in his daughter's memory. As far as her father's family antecedents are concerned, however, Phyllis's memories provide us with little information. Frank's reticence in speaking about his own parents may have been due to the traditional Aboriginal custom of never mentioning the name of a deceased relative. She recalled:

*No, he never used to talk about it. He was a New Norcia boy ... he was in the orphanage there. I never met his dad.*<sup>33</sup>

While Frank Narrier was reluctant to mention his father's name he seems to have spoken freely enough about his mother. Phyllis, however, had to search her memory for some time before remembering, in the following interview, how he would refer to his mother, using her Aboriginal name:

*He always said his mother was old 'Byool'... I dunno ... 'Byoola.' That's his mother's first name, 'Byoola.' He never spoke about his father's name ... never did.*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> P. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990b: 5).

<sup>32</sup> The camp police or "trackers" were appointed to maintain discipline under the 1916 Regulations to the 1905 Aborigines Act. (Haebich 1988: 204). See this thesis, p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with author, Geraldton, WA, 1997.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with author, Geraldton, WA, 1997.

It should be noted here that Frank's father's name was registered in New Norcia's baptismal records as "William Tagliel Narea, alias Calinga;" his mother's name is given as "Burel," which Phyllis pronounced as "Byool" or "Byoola." The similarity of Frank's maternal grandmother's name, recorded as "Bulumara," should be noted also.<sup>35</sup> Phyllis was able to name three of her father's brothers, Alec, Tommy and Micky. "*I don't know about any sisters,*" she said.<sup>36</sup> An examination of New Norcia's baptismal records reveals no sisters, but two other brothers, Frederick and Anthony.

According to departmental records, Grace's marriage to Frank Narrier was performed not at MRNS but in the town of Moora, by the District Registrar, on 18th. April, 1931.<sup>37</sup> It is further stated that in 1932, a male child, Franklin, was born to Frank and Grace and that a daughter, Erica, was born three years later.<sup>38</sup> In that same year, September 1935, Grace is recorded as having left the Settlement with Erica to join Jimmy Anderson at Walebing, but in less than a week had been brought back by her husband to Moore River.<sup>39</sup> It is noted that, by 1936, Frank had left the Settlement with his wife and baby Erica, and was employed by Mr. Ford of Welford, Wyening. On several occasions thereafter he asked permission for four of his children, Myrtle, Phyllis, Dennis and Pearl to join them there, but there is a note that this request was refused.<sup>40</sup> In March 1937, after a brief stay at Calingiri,<sup>41</sup> it is noted that Frank re-entered the Settlement with his wife, Franklin and Edna. This brief

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<sup>35</sup> See fig. 4, Narrier family tree.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with author, Geraldton, WA, 1997.

<sup>37</sup> MRNS, Grace Brown file.

<sup>38</sup> In an interviews with the author (1997), Phyllis said she had no memory of this alleged sister.

<sup>39</sup> MRNS, Grace Brown file.

<sup>40</sup> Under the 1905 Aborigines Act, the Chief Protector was given sweeping powers over all aspects of Aboriginal life (Haebich 1988: 83).

<sup>41</sup> MRNS, Grace Brown file.

sojourn at Calingiri raises the possibility of a semantic as well as a local connection between the name of that town, which today is the headquarters of the Victoria Plains Shire, and the name of Frank's grandfather, Calinga, who was noted by Salvado, in his census of 1858, as one of the "known Aborigines of Maura or New Norcia and its vicinity" (Green & Tilbrook 1989: 206). It is interesting to note that Frank's father also bore the alias Calinga.<sup>42</sup>

Two months later Mrs. Narrier gave birth to a son, Paul.<sup>43</sup> Frank and Grace Narrier went on to build a family of fifteen children, the names of whom are noted in the accompanying Family Tree.<sup>44</sup>

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This parallel narrative "flashback" concerning the origin and recent history of Phyllis Narrier and her family is helpful in locating Mr. Mippy's future wife within the context of the Moore River Settlement – that institutionalised world which figured so largely in their experience. A significant part of that experience relates to the Moore River Administration and its official policies.

The role of the staff, the concept of discipline, the importance given to such things as recreation and religion, the standard of education in the Settlement routine – all were essential elements in the framework of the Moore River experience. As they seem to have left such indelible memories in the mind of Mr. Mippy they must be considered in some detail as we attempt to construct in our mind's eye, on the basis of these memories, what Tyler (1986: 134) terms a "fantasy reality"<sup>45</sup> of his early life and times.

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<sup>42</sup> Baptismal Register, NNA.

<sup>43</sup> MRNS, Grace Brown file.

<sup>44</sup> See fig. 4. In an interview with me in 1997, the late Mrs. Mippy confirmed this family list, but could not remember the names Erica or Edna among her sisters. However, I

*THE INSTITUTIONALISED WORLD OF EDWARD MIPPY:  
PERSONNEL, DISCIPLINE, EDUCATION, RELIGION, RECREATION & DIET AT THE MOORE  
RIVER SETTLEMENT*

*MISSION STAFF*

As is the case with other institutions, the character and attitudes of the men and women on the staff of the Moore River Settlement set the tone and atmosphere of the place. Surviving former inmates, now in the twilight of their years, still retain memories of individuals who contributed, whether for good or ill, to the conditions of their enforced incarceration. Mr. Mippy's reflections, too, were coloured with his accounts of individual staff members at Moore River.

The Superintendent during young Edward's time there was Arthur J. Neal. According to Maushart (1993: 141), Mr. Neal was by far the Settlement's longest-serving administrator, taking over from John Brodie in 1927 and serving there, with his wife as Matron, until 1939. The author suggests that "like his employees, the trackers – and like his boss the elusive A. O. Neville – Neal has assumed the dimensions of an icon." Mr. Mippy, in the following reflection, described him as someone who, though perhaps larger than life, remained normally in the background:

*Mr. Neal never moved, he sat in his mansion. You never seen him unless [there was] something serious ... they knew that when he came out and spoke, he wanted discipline, and he didn't care how he got that discipline. I don't know whether he was shell-shocked in the Boer War,*

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learned that at least three of the children, besides Phyllis herself, were still living in 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Tyler does not explain the term "fantasy reality," but I take it to mean "the world of the cultural imagination."

*but we used to say 'oh, look out for him.' He might think he's in the war and start beltin' you!*<sup>46</sup>

Mr. Mippy also spoke of a “*second boss*,” an executive officer to Mr. Neal. This man had little or nothing to do with the children but was given charge of the half dozen or so employees who worked in the hospital and dining room, as well as the men from the camp who would go out and cut wood. The children, being directly under the control of the trackers, rarely saw their Superintendent. He was only seen when there were serious matters to attend to. But the children had reason to fear him, as Mr. Mippy went on to explain:

*You never seen him ... when he went to town that's all. We'd make sure that we were standing to attention when we seen him come. He had two dogs there. He'd go 'click'[with his fingers] and the dogs'd go for you.*

When pressed, he admitted that the dogs never actually attacked the children. “*But,*” he said, “*we'd give room anyhow ... we knew them dogs!*” The children would call out “*Mr. Neal's comin', Balayi! Balayi!* [look out! look out!], *Neal comin' ... all back on the verandah.*”<sup>47</sup>

Neal's wife was the Matron at the Settlement hospital. According to Mr. Mippy, her job was to “*go up and check around the hospital and come down and check with the girls in the dining room.*” As he put it, she was “*more of a lady.*” When she came up with her husband, she would say “*hullo*” to the children. “*Old Neal,*” he remembered, “*wouldn't say anything, he'd just walk straight past into the office.*” Like most children, young Edward and his peers were keen observers and formed their own opinions of their guardians. Looking back, Mr. Mippy thought he had “*sized up*” Matron Neal's relationship with her husband. As he expressed it:

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<sup>46</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 45).

*To me, my own opinion was that she had to do what he says. He clapped his fingers - she'd have to jump, or something like that. That sort of a life, I think it was.* <sup>48</sup>

Edward and his peers showed less perspicacity, however, in the case of the popular Eileen Neal Isbister, daughter to Mr. Neal and their school teacher in her spare time. Eileen, being still a boarder at Perth College (Maushart 1993: 153) was still unmarried. She used to receive a regular visitor at the Settlement, though the young man in question apparently wasn't recognised by the children as a suitor, as Mr. Mippy later explained:

*Yeah, she wasn't married. This fellow was comin' down here visitin' her. I remember that, 'cause no one thought in that sort of ... sweethearts 'n that. That's out of your mind. You don't think of that when you're there.* <sup>49</sup>

Another important staff member, recorded in the account given by Maushart (1993: 191), was Sister Eileen Heath. In 1935, "she came on board as Anglican Missionary and most of the recreational activities offered through Neal's administration were a direct result of her personal initiative." Mr. Mippy had fond memories of Sister Eileen. He had the following memory of her compassion for the children, especially when they got into trouble or had to go to court:

*In caring for the Nyoongars - very good, she was, Sister Eileen. If you was in a bit of a muddle or something like that, and looks like a Moora trip, she'd speak up for you, ask for leniency there before we go. Things like that. She was the important person there, really important.* <sup>50</sup>

Last if not least on this list of staff members and employees are the Aboriginal helpers who had been sent to Moore River on parole from

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<sup>47</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 45).

<sup>48</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 46).

<sup>49</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 46).

<sup>50</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 45).

Fremantle gaol. These were accommodated outside the compound and according to Mr. Mippy were put to work under the “*second boss*.” Their assignments included the collecting and chopping of wood or maintenance work on the road from the Settlement to the Mogumber railway station. He continued:

*They'd be put down the camps, and there wasn't any hassles ... the kiddies, or anything like that. Nine times out of ten some of those would know them down the camp and if they come from up north the trackers'd know them, the trackers'd talk to them.*<sup>51</sup>

In the annals of employment, these workers would surely be amongst the least compensated of employees. At the end of a day's toil they each received, according to Mr. Mippy, the sole reward of a stick of tobacco. From the Superintendent down, all the staff members comprising the Settlement hierarchy had their own individual parts to play in terms of the administration of the place and its style of discipline. All of them left the young Edward Mippy with a legacy of indelible memories. Amongst those memories, however, few were more lasting or more significant than those concerning the camp police. These men, charged with the day-to-day discipline of the camp, are still remembered today by Mr. Mippy and other surviving former inmates as “*the trackers*.”

#### *THE TRACKERS*

Amongst the staff members, the men who bore the name of “*tracker*” were the central figures in the day-to-day administration of Moore River. Because of their important role and responsibility in the

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<sup>51</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 47).



area of discipline, these men figured prominently in the memories of Mr. Mippy and the other inmates.

As one of the camp police, or trackers, the father of Phyllis Narrier loomed large in his daughter's reminiscences and anecdotes and those of her late husband. Frank Narrier would have been especially remembered by former inmates who had tried to abscond from Moore River, as it was said to have been Frank's assigned task to track and pursue escapees and bring them back to the Settlement.<sup>52</sup> The other trackers, all from the north-west, were simply responsible for discipline within the compound. According to Maushart (1993: 137) there were only three other trackers in the Settlement apart from Frank Narrier. These were Kingy Hill, Bob Allen and Frank "Bluey" Wallace. Mr. Mippy, however, remembered that there were six in all. He included three additional names – Kitchener, Cudgel and Billy Kimberley.<sup>53</sup>

The tall Aboriginal men with the shiny-buttoned coats are remembered today with mixed feelings by former inmates. Describing them as "the Settlement's in-house police force," Maushart alleges that in spite of the mixture of fear and contempt that they inspired "there were many fatherless children who loved them" (1993: 131). Though he may not have "loved" them, Mr. Mippy at least remembered them in the following favourable terms:

*When your own colour talks to you, there's a bit of principle in that ... See, if we had a white bloke there we'd get up in arms. 'Oh, who's he going to tell?' or 'what's he tellin' me that for?' 'What's that white man tellin' me to do?' As soon as the tracker come over, you'd stand to attention. Yes, you'd stand to attention.*<sup>54</sup>

He went on to emphasise the importance, even the necessity of the

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<sup>52</sup> P. Mippy; field interview, 1997.

<sup>53</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 35).

<sup>54</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 18).

sometimes harsh discipline and supervision exercised by the trackers, indicating that they had his respect:

*If we didn't have them trackers there'd have been a lot of ... a lot drowned down there. They'd've just went down there [to the river] on their own steam. The Superintendent wouldn't be able to look after them himself. Trackers done a mighty job there. They were a bit rough at times but there's times when you got to get rough. I respected them anyhow.*<sup>55</sup>

Memories of the discipline experienced at the hands of these authority figures seem to have remained with Mr. Mippy throughout his life. They are reflected in the views which he was often to express later about the need for discipline within families and in the wider community. His observation that “*there's times when you got to get rough*” reflects a principle that he sometimes put into practice himself, as his family members can attest and as I myself observed on at least one occasion. He admired the trackers for the way in which they not only maintained discipline but taught the children to respect their elders. As he once explained:

*Well, I appreciate what they done to the blokes 'ere ... the old Nyoongar trackers ... I appreciate that ... well, discipline ... although they were from up north - the trackers come from up north - they learnt us you know, not to talk back or anything like that. And they treated us the way they thought was right (Mippy in Bourke 1990).*

In his later years in Moora, Mr. Mippy was often critical of the methods of the local police. He blamed them for unfairly targeting the Aboriginal community, particularly the youth, while at the same time failing to maintain order and discipline by maintaining a physical presence on the streets. To him, the local police did not compare favourably with the Indigenous disciplinarians of Moore River. The

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<sup>55</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 36).

following memory reflects a feeling of nostalgia for the old days coupled with disapproval of current anti-social behaviour:

*That was strict there, that's what I say. I stand around in Moora and think 'if those days were to come back, people wouldn't come down the street.' You know how they go here, they just cut loose here and don't give a damn...<sup>56</sup>*

In later life, Mr. Mippy would tell the children of Moora about the strict discipline formerly imposed within Aboriginal society for breaches of the law, likening it to the methods used at Moore River:

*That's what they got there, for stepping out of line. They'd take you inside [into the store] and lay you over the flour bag. You got your three lashes ... that was the discipline.<sup>57</sup>*

These words reflect a frequently expressed desire on his part for a return to stricter measures of discipline. It wasn't surprising, therefore, that he often spoke approvingly of the kind of punishment meted out at the Settlement by the trackers. In his view, if children stepped out of line they should always expect an appropriate punishment. As the staff at the Settlement controlled every facet of the inmates' lives, it is to be expected that much of the childrens' experience related to the attitude and disposition of individual staff members. From the evidence it would appear that the quality and attitude of the administrative personnel at Moore River remained a primary focus in the recollections of inmates and was as important as any other single factor in setting the tone of life for those under their care.

What has been presented to this point, in examining the areas of administration and policy, is an account of the role and influence of various members of the Settlement staff, from the Superintendent down to the trackers, who held sway during the time of Edward Mippy. Taken

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<sup>56</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 18).

as a whole, the memories constitute an important collection of personal experiences and perceptions. They therefore represent an important “lens” through which an interpretation may be formed of the nature and quality of daily life for young Edward in particular and through which a better understanding may be gained of the vision and activities of his later life.

The experiences of Mr. Mippy and his contemporaries reveal how the discipline affected the children within the compound in different ways and in varying degrees. As can be seen from his later memories, young Edward considered himself to be insulated to some extent from some of the trauma of institutional life through being placed directly under the protective mantle of his parents. While some children had parents in the camp, others were virtually orphans. Age, too, would have been an important factor and one would expect that children who were older would have been better able to fend for themselves. There is evidence too that the conditions endured by the female inmates differed significantly from those of the males. As the girls occupy a unique place in Mr. Mippy’s recollections I believe they deserve special consideration.

#### *THE GIRLS’ EXPERIENCE*

Although all the inmates of the Moore River Settlement were kept fully occupied during most of their waking hours, the greater part of the domestic work fell to the girls. Speaking to his interviewer, Mr. Mippy remembered that “*they all have their jobs to do*” in the mending room or the sewing room. “*If the bigger girls wanted help,*” he said, “*the ones from the school would go over*” in order to assist with the mending, sewing ,

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<sup>57</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 19).

washing, hanging out the clothes and ironing.<sup>58</sup> He said that it was Matron Neal's job, with the help of the trackers, to round the girls up at about 4.00 p.m. to help prepare tea in the kitchen:

*They got to get tea ready. They didn't call it 'tea,' we knew what it was ... same old bread and scrape!*<sup>59</sup>

One consolation for the girls on sewing duties was that they didn't have to depend merely on "*bread and scrape*." They received extra food. Mr. Mippy remembered that the twelve or so sewing room girls were the only inmates to get meat in their dinner.<sup>60</sup> Maushart (1993: 136-7) suggests that the girls in general endured much at the hands of the trackers. She records the following memories of Phyllis Narrier regarding the Settlement dining room where meals had to be taken in strict silence:

*They had trackers there to come and watch, and this tracker, he was always goin' for my little gang, and yet two of them little girls was his nieces ... he used to always hit us. Whosever lips he see moving, he'd just come and whack us with a strap right across our back.*<sup>61</sup>

Phyllis feared the trackers, even her own father whom she regarded, even in later life, as a harsh man. "*I can remember him belting me with this big green stick,*" she remembered. "*My old mum just sat down. She couldn't say nothin.*"<sup>62</sup> As she observed on another occasion, "*he was a hard man, ole Frank!*"<sup>63</sup> Although many boys absconded from Moore River, the girls seem to have run away even more frequently, perhaps because they generally had less freedom than the boys and less variety of employment. In the opinion of Maushart (1993: 150 et seq.), girls often

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<sup>58</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 20).

<sup>59</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 20). "*Bread and scrape*" was the popular name amongst the inmates for their daily diet of bread dipped in fat.

<sup>60</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 20).

<sup>61</sup> P. Mippy; quoted in Maushart (1993: 103).

<sup>62</sup> P. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990b: 61).

ran away to look for boyfriends by reason of the fact that young men, because of departmental policy, were in short supply in the Settlement.

The Benedictine Mission of New Norcia is cited by Maushart (1993: 153) as a popular destination for run-aways. Many girls had boyfriends in the mission as a result of frequent visits to the Settlement by its football team. According to Phyllis, another destination was the Aboriginal camp at Walebing, 30 km. due north of New Norcia, where there were scores of men in those days, many of them being friends or relatives. *"We used to run away [to Walebing] in Mogumber... along the river and run away,"* remembered Phyllis.<sup>64</sup> Bella Ashwin is mentioned as another girl who was keen to get to Walebing. She apparently wanted to see Joe Yappo who was in Walebing after spending his boyhood years in the New Norcia boys' house. Her escapades were not without result. Joe and Bella eventually married in the Moora Catholic Church and settled in a house just across the road in Kintore St. where, as I well remember, they established a large family and lived for the rest of their days.

According to Phyllis, *"Ole Frank"* was in no hurry to catch girls who absconded from the Settlement. *"All his people was there too in Walebing,"* she remembered. *"Ole Alec Narrier was there, that's 'is brother... Oh, big mob of us ... Andersons, Indiches ... all shearing."*<sup>65</sup> Rarely harsh with runaways, Frank seems to have been severe when it came to punishing his own daughter for running away. *"Oh, he was hard on me,"* Phyllis recalled.<sup>66</sup> Like other young women at the Settlement, Phyllis is recorded as running away *"more times than she can remember."*<sup>67</sup> On

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<sup>63</sup> Field interview, 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Field interview, 1997.

<sup>65</sup> Field interview, 1997.

<sup>66</sup> Field interview, 1997.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Maushart (1993: 159).

one occasion when her father caught her at Walebing, she suffered serious consequences: “*he belted me right back to the Settlement,*” she remembered, “*... put us in the 'boob.'* We was locked up ... three days, bread and water.”<sup>68</sup>

It would appear, from the many similar incidents recounted by former inmates, that females were not spared the punishments meted out to the boys. Moreover, besides being loaded with all the domestic chores, the girls at Moore River, as explained earlier, had a much narrower spectrum of opportunity in the area of skills training and life experience. Life was hard for the girls for other reasons too. While there are recorded instances of sexual harassment at the hands of certain members of the white male staff, if any girl was unfortunate enough to fall pregnant, she was always treated as the guilty party and punished accordingly.<sup>69</sup>

The inside of the compound prison, known to all as “the boob,” was as familiar to the girls as it was to the boys who were unlucky enough to be incarcerated there. Unlike his wife-to-be, young Edward never numbered amongst the latter. Nevertheless, as we will see, the children’s jail was a well-remembered feature in his later memories.

#### *THE BOOB*

There were two prisons known by the children as “the boob.” The smaller of the two was the place where children were often punished for more serious offences such as attempting to escape. According to Mr. Mippy the punishment for absconders was a few days there in solitary

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<sup>68</sup> Field interview, 1997.

<sup>69</sup> P. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990b: 14 et seq).

confinement on bread and water. Maushart describes this smaller boob as a small prison in which “the combination of solitary confinement, pitch darkness and insufficient water or sanitary conveniences created conditions far harsher than in any conventional lock-up” (Maushart 1993: 157). This description accords with the following memory of Mr. Mippy:

*They had a boob there, right against that church what I was tellin' you ... you just go in there - punishment! Food was taken over to 'em, the same old 'bread and scrape' thing. You couldn't lay down, you were standing up there ... you could sit down.*<sup>70</sup>

The boob was sometimes used as the only alternative to a hiding, but before putting a child in there, the trackers would have to obtain approval from Sister Eileen. Mr. Mippy recalled:

*It's either that or a hiding, so Sister would have to toss between those two... It's a toss between that boob or the cat o' nine tails, so you had to think quick. For a couple of hours kiddies'd be put in there. Yeah, just to know that if they do it again they'd go back in there.*<sup>71</sup>

Mr. Mippy remembered that for more serious offences, requiring longer periods of incarceration, children would be placed in the larger boob, a solid structure made of stone. This latter is one of the few original buildings still surviving to the present day and one which is still shown to visitors. An incident is recorded involving the larger prison during the time when John Brodie was superintendent. In 1926 a young man named Norman Gidgup who had allegedly stolen a packet of cigarettes, was tarred, feathered and paraded through the compound. As one of the spectators, Mr. Mippy had the following memory:

*He'd have been about nineteen or twenty. He ran out [of the boob] naked, and he looked like a feathery bird, all this stuff on him...*

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<sup>70</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 62).

<sup>71</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 47).



*Whatever you'd think you had to keep it to yourself. Otherwise, you'd be in it.*<sup>72</sup>

This was an isolated case but one which constituted extreme cruelty in the view of Chief Protector Neville, who lost no time in sacking Brodie (Maushart 1993: 150). Fortunately though, according to Mr. Mippy, the young man concerned seems to have survived without permanent ill-effects.<sup>73</sup> The harsh treatment meted out at the Settlement certainly left bad memories with the children. However, instances like this were apparently rare and Mr. Mippy was adamant that it was the poor food rather than the severity of punishment that did the most damage to the health of the inmates. He could remember no-one dying of ill-treatment at Moore River, although, as he said, some did succumb to various illnesses:

*... no, not through ill-treatment. It's just sort of hoopin' cough and 'flu 'n that, knocked us over* (Mippy in Bourke 1990).

In the eyes of the Administration, severe physical punishment and incarceration were no doubt an integral part of the educative and disciplinary process. Maushart (1993: 146) quotes a former inmate, Eric Conway, as claiming that *"there were thrashings every day."* The same witness, however, is said to have voiced appreciation for some of the lessons that were *"forced down his throat"* at Moore River. These, Conway continues, were of a practical nature, like the *"teaching of manners, learning to be punctual and to be responsible for things."* Mr. Mippy too approved of such practical lessons in social behaviour and reliability just as he expressed his admiration for some aspects of the disciplinary regime. As a parent, in later life, he would impress on his own children

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<sup>72</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 61).

<sup>73</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 61).

the importance of such social graces as those mentioned above. On the other hand he attributed his poor grounding in literacy and numeracy to the low standard of education received at the Settlement. His deficient formal education remained one of the great regrets of his adult life and it was something he often referred to. It was his opinion that, during his years as a ganger on the railways, his limited educational background stood in the way of his further promotion. In the following section, a glimpse is provided of official policy in relation to the education of Indigenous people at the Moore River Settlement. It is clear that education in reading, writing and arithmetic was low on the list of priorities.

#### *STANDARD OF EDUCATION*

An opinion expressed by Superintendent Brodie in 1926 and quoted by Maushart (1993: 55) that Aboriginal people have “the mind of a child” and that a school education was not of much benefit to them, may be seen as reflecting the official, long-term neglect of Aboriginal education. In 1921, Fred Aldrich, then Deputy Chief Protector of Aborigines, ordered that “children be taught only reading, writing and basic monetary values to Third Standard” (Haebich 1988: 191). In the light of such a policy, it is no surprise that Mr. Mippy considered the schooling arrangements for the children at the Moore River Settlement as less than satisfactory. “*I didn't have the opportunity of learning,*” he remembered. “*I only went to third standard*” (State Affair 8 Nov. 1985).

Young Edward had a mixed experience of his years of schooling, though he said that on the whole he really enjoyed it. His later memories

include the following description of a typical day in the Settlement classroom:

*Well school - we liked it, but it wasn't long enough and the teacher didn't know much. I couldn't even add up ... how many times that goes into that! I used to do a bit of cheating... and the teacher caught me. She got me by the ears. I was lucky I didn't go over to the trackers. They stand there and watch the school.*<sup>74</sup>

While admitting he was never any good at arithmetic, he shared the children's love of singing. "We'd rock the house down," he remembered. However, while there might have been enough arithmetic and singing, there was a complete lack of any education that was oriented to Aboriginal culture. His disappointment in this regard, as revealed in the following observation, may have helped fuel his later ambitions in the area of cultural awareness at school level:

*There was nothing like going out tracking or anything like that. Nothing like 'well, tomorrow we'll go out and do a bit of bushcraft,' walking through the bushes or nothing.*<sup>75</sup>

The recorded memories of Sister Eileen Heath, who spent many years in the Moore River Settlement, would tend to reflect in general terms the experience of inmates like young Edward Mippy. She also regretted the low standard of education at Moore River, revealing, as follows, that the schooling of the more than one hundred Settlement children was entrusted to only one or two teachers:

The teachers were not Education Department teachers, they were not trained teachers. We had two teachers most of the time, about 150 children. The highest grade they would have achieved would have been grade four. There was a constant turnover of teachers, and the children didn't complete the normal education. I felt that a lot of the children there and a lot of the people had so much good in them, and so much could

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<sup>74</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 29-30).

<sup>75</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 3).

have been done if they would give them the right opportunities (Heath in Bunbury 1992).

The deficiencies in their formal schooling made it all the more important that young Edward and his companions should receive at least the sort of practical education that would prepare them for the rigours of life outside the compound fence. Unfortunately for the children, such education was sadly lacking at Moore River. Most, including Edward, had ultimately to learn by hard experience within the Settlement and especially in the world outside, in the so-called “school of life.” As access to formal education was denied to Aboriginal children in the wider world (Haebich 1988: 136-143), this personal experience was the only real education some of them would ever receive.

#### *WORK EXPERIENCE AND THE SCHOOL OF LIFE*

After their three or four years of rudimentary education, the boys were usually put to work on the farm while the girls were given work in the sewing room or the kitchen. As already observed, life at the Settlement seems to have been more restrictive for girls than for boys, many of the latter being selected to go up north to work on the stations. According to Mr. Mippy, no options were available in regard to work and at the end of their few years of schooling the young inmates had to accept whatever employment was assigned to them. While at the Settlement, he maintained, they had little training in trades or skills:

*School - I went to third standard. That's as far as I got. When you're into fourth standard you was ready to go and work. They'd send you up north.* <sup>76</sup>

Mr. Mippy's wife, Phyllis, who was actually born in the Settlement, had the following memory of how some of the boys including her own brother Denis remained away on these assignments for months on end:

*Yes, they used to go drovin'. I remember him [Bill Myer] and my brother, Denis Brown - they went together, drovin... and they used to stop there for six or seven months, drovin'. Certain ones used to be sent on the stations... they picked certain ones and sent 'em out.* <sup>77</sup>

In a taped interview with Mr. Mippy in the early 1980's <sup>78</sup> the late Mr. Bill Myer of Moora reflected on his early years in Moore River. Bill and young Edward were contemporaries at the Settlement and the two were to remain life-long friends. He remembered how, after arriving there *"in the thirties,"* he went to school for a few years and then was put to work in the Settlement store for about six months. After that he recalled going down to work on the Settlement's farm at Shanaway where he and two other inmates milked the cows and attended to the garden. His memories seem rather positive. *"It was alright, you know,"* he admitted to his friend, *"I liked the place. Anyhow, they got me goin' up north then."*

In the course of his interview, Bill Myer explained how, at the age of thirteen, he had worked on a station near Meekatharra for twelve months on a salary of five shillings a week. He remembered at least five droving trips undertaken during the next few years including work at Cue, Austin Downs and Braeside stations. After each of these excursions he returned for a time to Moore River where he would resume work such as cutting wood and carting gravel with other boys,

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<sup>76</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 25).

<sup>77</sup> Field interview, 1997.

including Edward Mippy. No doubt there were some inmates like young Edward who never had to experience such enforced excursions, but these would have been the exception rather than the rule. It was the Superintendent who selected individuals for work experience and decided where they would go and what they would do. The individual boy or girl had no say in the matter. In the words of Mr. Mippy, the Superintendent would simply call them into his office:

*He'd say, 'right, you leavin' next Saturday,' or goin' out to Miling somewhere. 'You goin' out there to drive a tractor...' or 'you're goin' up north to such and such a station.'*<sup>79</sup>

There was a stipulated rate of pay for such tours of duty, but the money was rarely paid in full, if it was paid at all. Mr. Mippy related how he once accompanied a young man by the name of Philips to the headquarters of the Aborigines' department which was situated at that time in Murray St., Perth. The young man had just returned from up north where he had been working for two years or more on a cattle station. He demanded his pay, but all he could get out of the clerk in the office were some second hand clothes. With a touch of humour, Mr. Mippy went on to explain how they had both been hoping to go to the pictures in the city:

*He [The clerk] didn't give him any money. I kept saying, 'look, go on, ask him for money. How you going to take me to the pictures?' [laughter]. He doesn't know how much he earned, he'd been up there for a couple of years at least. That money ... he never seen it, didn't know where it was goin'. And all they done was fed him on the station. When he came and asked for it, he was rejected.*<sup>80</sup>

The girls fared no better than the boys in this regard. According to our informant, they would be sent out as cooks or domestics to various

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<sup>78</sup> Recorded interview (Mippy 1986).

<sup>79</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 37).

<sup>80</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 37).

farms or stations. “See,” explained Mr. Mippy, “they’d ring up and they’d say ‘I want a cook’ round the shearing time on the stations.” Exploited and treated as ignorant, the girls, he remembered, received very little of the stipulated wage:

*Well, they more or less looked at us as ‘trumbies’<sup>81</sup> ... didn’t know nothing. You take the sewing room girls, and they were big girls, gettin’ up towards womans. They, you know, didn’t get fully paid. They sent [them] out to stations cookin’. Some stayed for four years. They’d give them so much, so much for a month and say ‘it’s cut out.’ No one was keeping their books for them. Mr. Neville’s mob in that office!... a lot of them girls got done in. A lot of them’s dead now anyhow, but they got done in, right, left and centre. That was Mr. Neville - he was bad on that, very, very bad.<sup>82</sup>*

According to Reynolds, Mary Bennett, a feminist activist who was promoting the rights of Indigenous females in the 1930’s, strongly advocated the provision of education and training for Aboriginal women so as to enable them to achieve economic independence. Reynolds quotes Bennett in suggesting that “economic dependence is at the root of all evil.” Such was clearly not the view of A. O. Neville. On this and other issues, Bennett came into open conflict with Neville at the 1934 Royal Commission on Aborigines (Reynolds 1998: 238).

Up to this point in the narrative of Edward Mippy’s early experience, the spotlight has fallen largely on the more negative side of life within the confines of the Moore River Settlement. The recorded reflections have emphasised such things as the harshness of discipline for both boys and girls, the poor standard of education, the almost complete lack of skills training and the unfair treatment received during what work experience the inmates were given. The memories of former residents, however, reveal that the religious, emotional and physical

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<sup>81</sup> Nyoongar term for “ignorant people.”

<sup>82</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 38).

needs of the children were by no means entirely neglected. Sister Eileen Heath was one member of the staff who made a lasting impression on young Edward Mippy. She was the person entrusted with providing a spiritual and recreational dimension to what may have otherwise been a much more bleak and spiritless existence.

*RELIGION AND RECREATION*

Daily life at the Moore River Settlement included church activities as well as recreation and entertainments. These areas went hand-in-hand, not only because Sister Eileen Heath had control of both spiritual and recreational arrangements, but also by reason of the fact that the Superintendent, as Maushart suggests, “tended to regard ‘entertainment’ and ‘religious instruction’ as two sides of the same coin.” The same author quotes Neal as boasting that “with the exception of Saturday night, there is some form of entertainment or religious instruction every night. Amusements take the form of dances (weekly), gymnastics, plays (natives’ own make-up), lantern lectures, drill and club swinging” (Maushart 1993: 191).

As described by Mr. Mippy, there were two churches in the compound. The smaller one, about twenty five feet by sixteen, stood right next to the smaller gaol or boob. Services were held there twice a week, he remembered, usually conducted by Sister Eileen. The larger of the two churches is still standing today and is one of the few original buildings remaining. Mr. Mippy described his experience of it in favourable terms:



*Going into the big one ... we thought we was just it - number one - in the singing and everything ... the boys singing one paragraph and the girls singing the other one.* <sup>83</sup>

To provide for the Catholic children, one of the priests was regularly supplied by the New Norcia monastery to celebrate Mass at the Settlement. Indeed, as a young student at New Norcia in 1957, I remember myself accompanying one of the priests there on one occasion. The attendance was good, though in the following recollection, Mr. Mippy identifies reasons for attending that were other than religious:

*They was Catholics ... we became Catholics when they came from New Norcia. We became Catholics because they used to bring apples over [laughter]. We'd join them for a feed!* <sup>84</sup>

The Church of England minister also came to hold services, and later the Methodist minister when the Methodist Church, as the result of a government recommendation, was given control of the former Settlement which then came to be known as the Mogumber Mission. <sup>85</sup>

Even though in later years Mr. Mippy's religious activities were confined to Moora's Aboriginal Catholic Community he regarded himself as formally belonging to the Uniting Church, <sup>86</sup> perhaps because it was as a Methodist that he had been baptised and married at the Settlement. At the personal level, he often spoke of God, whom he called *Maman*, an Aboriginal word meaning "father." *Maman nakamoo noonda*, or 'God bless you' <sup>87</sup> was an expression in his traditional language which

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<sup>83</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 43).

<sup>84</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 44).

<sup>85</sup> In 1951, the W.A. State Cabinet adopted a recommendation by the then Minister for Native Affairs (Mr. Doney) that the Moore River native Mission be closed and handed over to the Methodist Overseas Mission, which was to use the station principally for Aboriginal children as an agricultural school as well as a general school (Maushart 1993: 269).

<sup>86</sup> In 1974, the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in Australia combined to become the Uniting Churches of Australia.

<sup>87</sup> literally, "God look upon you."

he sometimes used and which he seems to have coined himself. He spoke in the following terms of the religious attitude of his parents, who saw to it that he was baptised:

*They believed you know ... what the people tried to teach them they believed. I was baptised in the river there. They used to have a tub dragging behind. Old padre's there with his trousers tucked up ... dip your head in and out! ... They reckoned that was great.*<sup>88</sup>

As well as church services, there were also entertainments such as dancing. On an occasional Saturday night, or "once in a blue moon" as Mr. Mippy put it, there would be a dance held at the Settlement, organised by the people themselves. Some of the kids, except those classed as the poor ones, were able to dress up. "If they had relatives down the camp who had a bit of money saved up," he remembered, "they'd buy clothes for them." A telephone call to New Norcia would, he said, bring a couple of Aboriginal musicians over for the occasion:

*One of the Jetters and another bloke called Paulie used to come over from the Mission. [They used to play] the violin and the accordian. Kids only came there till eight o'clock, I think it was ... then they all had to go back to the dormitory and left the big people dancin'.*<sup>89</sup>

In relation to sporting activities Mr. Mippy spoke of such games as hockey and football. For the former, the children had to make their own hockey sticks. Using the same methods used by their forefathers in making their boomerangs and spear-throwers, they would select a piece of green jam-tree wood (*mangart*) and bend and fashion the thicker end after softening it in the fire. He remembered how they played according to their own rules:

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<sup>88</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 44).

<sup>89</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 41).

*"There's none of this blowin' the whistle and getting in the front. The strongest survived, fittest survived. Mainly then, you're running in sand, you didn't have any turf... tearin' through the sand!"*<sup>90</sup>

He continued, giving the following explanation of how the most popular game, football, was played amongst themselves and against teams from New Norcia.

*Football ... we used to play New Norcia there. New Norcia used to come over and play us, then we'd go to New Norcia. Once a month you could get them over... They'd come by truck and we'd go over there by truck.*

In spite of the attitude of the girls who, as he said, *"would be barracking for New Norcia,"* he went on to say that the Settlement team often proved superior. *"We thought they were good,"* he boasted, *"but we used to beat them."*

Important as were the church services, recreational and other activities in the memory of Edward Mippy, few things assumed such importance as the question of the institutional dietary regime. His description of the quality of the food and drink supplied to the children constitutes a devastating indictment of the standard of child care at the Settlement. In speaking to former inmates, I have generally found the Moore River menu to be one of their least pleasant memories. The centrepiece of Settlement diet, universally known to the children as *"bread and scrape,"* often figured in their recollections and was often referred to by Mr. Mippy. As he remembered it, the food that appeared in the children's dining room was of such poor quality that, had it not been supplemented by the children's own ingenuity and from traditional sources (i.e. the bush), it was doubtful whether any of them would have survived for any length of time in the Settlement. Even without further commentary, the following recollections speak for themselves.

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<sup>90</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 53-54).

*THE SETTLEMENT DIET:*

Mr. Mippy was critical, not only of the quality of the regular diet supplied at Moore River, but of its quantity. In his view, there had never been enough of either food or drink. He gave the following description of the children's dining room:

*You all sat on a long table, along the side. There were stools, not chairs - sit along, pass this and pass that ... Time the milk got to you, there might not be any left for you.* <sup>91</sup>

It seemed that anyone who missed out on the milk would find little consolation in the soup. The regular soup, remembered Mr. Mippy, was “so thin you could see through it! You could see where a couple of peas had been, or meat. It was water!” In hindsight, his wry sense of humour enabled him, as usual, to see the funny side: “Blokes should have bottled some of that up ... seeing is believing you know!” <sup>92</sup> Besides being watery, the soup often had doubtful origins. Alice Nannup, who was a contemporary of Mr. Mippy, had the following, even less pleasant, memory:

*for the soup they'd cook up these awful sheep heads. First they'd skin them, but never take the eyes out, then they'd split them down the middle, give them a quick rinse and throw them in the copper. Sometimes those sheep heads had bott-fly in their noses but they wouldn't worry about that. They'd just throw it in and we'd see that in our soup* (Nannup 1992: 64).

Varying perspectives on this “delicacy” may be gained from past pupils of Moore River’s nearby institution, the New Norcia Mission. Reminiscing on their childhood experiences, some still speak of the

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<sup>91</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a:12).

sheep's head broth that was regularly served at New Norcia in the children's dining rooms. Some past pupils still hold unpleasant memories of it, though there is at least one who actually looked forward to it. A former inmate who worked in the St. Joseph's kitchen in the 1950's spoke of helping in its preparation. The sheep's head, as she remembered it, was always well cleaned before cooking. The monks in the monastery got the broth, while the boys and girls were served with the meat soup. *"We used to fight over the tongue,"* she recalled, *"that was the best part."*<sup>93</sup>

Mr. Mippy and former inmate, Mr. Bill Myer, often spoke to me of the dish that comprised the staple diet at the Moore River Settlement. This unattractive food was immortalised in a popular song, well-known by former inmates, which I often heard Mr. Mippy sing in later years to the children of Moora:

*There is a happy land, far, far away,  
Where we get bread and scrape, three times a day.  
Bread and butter we never see,  
No sugar in our tea  
While we are gradually starving away.*

While supplies such as butter, sugar and meat were available for consumption by the white staff, the Aboriginal inmates saw none of it. Speaking of conditions in the 1920's, Biskup (1973: 156-7) describes the weekly food allowance granted to the camp Aborigines as "little more than a weekly ration of one and a half pounds of sugar, eight pounds of flour, four ounces of tea, one stick of tobacco, and three and a half pounds of meat, mainly kangaroo or brush flesh caught by the Aborigines themselves." Meagre as this allowance was, it was far superior to the children's fare. Apart from the inevitable "bread and

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<sup>92</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 25).

<sup>93</sup> May Taylor (field interview, 1999).

scrape,” Mr. Mippy had the following memory of an inferior kind of porridge being served up in the children’s dining room:

*Well, the normal food was ... if you could call it ... was just that bread and fat and porridge. Porridge was underdone, or wasn’t done properly ... we didn’t like eating it.*<sup>94</sup>

Sometimes, when the children were allowed to go down to the camp for an hour after tea, their parents would provide them with a more substantial meal. As he pointed out:

*I’ve seen them there and heard them say ... so and so’s coming from the compound and we’ll make a big feed ready, see. They’d have that ready for that kid, have a good feed. If that kid had a mum and dad what didn’t think like that, the next door one would make a lot of tucker and say ‘come over here and have some.’ Yeah, they knew that only that bread and scrape was up there. They’d go back with a full tummy, put it that way.*<sup>95</sup>

His account of the frequent visits paid to the Settlement by the Chief Protector, A. O. Neville, reveals the double standards employed by the administration in regard to conditions in the camp, particularly the standard of nutrition. These visits were considered very important by the staff and every effort was made to make a good impression. In preparation for such visits the children were put to work tidying and raking up all around the compound. As Mr. Mippy put it, “they” [the staff] were out to “cover up for themselves.” Not only were these occasions heralded by the flying of flags, but the regime of watery soup, underdone porridge and “bread and scrape” was suspended for the duration of the visit. He recalled the scene:

*When you see a flag you say, ‘oh, visitors today.’ Half a day off from school ... all clean up. Stand in a row so they can drive down between youse. When he came, we did have a bit of different tucker... Oh! We had a good feed. We wouldn’t have that old watery soup with that,*

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<sup>94</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 11).

<sup>95</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 34).

*we'd have good soup. They just put on a front, see, while he's there - cover up for themselves. We even have this on - tablecloth! When he's not there, we didn't have a tablecloth. It's just 'cover up, the boss is coming.' After that it was back to your 'bread and scrape.'*<sup>96</sup>

None of the children dared to complain to Mr. Neville about the food and conditions. Perhaps they believed he wouldn't have wanted to know. Mr. Mippy continued:

*...[he would] just come over and give us a pat on the head. Oh, he'd pinpoint one or two of them and say 'how're you going? Do you like it here?' and all that. Well, the kid would say 'like it' whether he did or not. He'd be frightened of him; he'd have to say 'yes.'*

Mr. Neville was not popular amongst the children who referred to him derisively in private as “Mr. Cup and Saucer Face.” They might have liked him even less had they realised the degree to which he was exploiting them, as Mr. Mippy explained:

*... well, if they knew what they know now, or the older ones knew, they'd have walked out of there if they had the power to do it. He got all the cream, that's why he got those kiddies there. Money - Mr. Neville's got it! He got that flash house up in Kalamunda, the flashest house there.*<sup>97</sup>

Despite the benefits flowing from Mr. Neville's visits and other such extraordinary opportunities, it seems that the principle of “survival of the fittest” might well have been applied to Settlement life at that time. “The strongest survived,” as Mr. Mippy himself later put it — “that was the attitude there.”<sup>98</sup>

The purpose of this present chapter so far has been to present an overall perspective of life in the Moore River Settlement. The picture thus evoked through the memories and perceptions of young Edward Mippy and others who experienced life in the institution over a

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<sup>96</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 23).

<sup>97</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 24).

<sup>98</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 11).

relatively long period, portrays the wretched conditions to which the inmates were subjected. Through the eyes of former inmates, the chapter contributes an understanding of what life in the compound was like, in particular revealing significant experiences in the early life of Edward Mippy which illuminate his life and his later undertakings.

Authors like Maushart (1993: 125-206) and Haebich (1988: 199ff.) complement Mr. Mippy's perspective, suggesting that the Moore River Settlement was the inevitable result of government policy. They argue that it was founded on the concept of racial discrimination, directed to the ultimate objective of assimilation and dedicated to the repression, in adults and children alike, of any manifestation of Aboriginality and cultural identity. In the view of these authors, the Settlement could only have appeared to its Aboriginal community as a hostile and alien environment. The evidence would suggest, however, that the cultural identity of the inmates was not to be destroyed as easily as might have been anticipated. It would seem that the children were not content to remain mere pawns of the system, quietly passive and robbed of all initiative, but were surprisingly proactive in the pursuit of their own interests.

Closely regimented as they were by trackers and other staff members, the children nevertheless had an astonishing degree of freedom from official constraints. Forced back on their own resources, they made the most of their many opportunities to interact, not only with their families but with each other, finding "their security and nurturing from their own peer group" (Maushart 1993: 205). In so doing, they mutually reinforced the very sense of identity and cultural knowledge which government policy was so intent on removing. Nowhere was this more evident than in their efforts to supplement their poor diet with



traditional foods from the surrounding bush. In this, as will now appear, they were surprisingly successful.

*BUSH TUCKER AND THE TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLE*

In reminiscing about conditions at Moore River, Mr. Mippy often spoke to me about hunting and gathering in the bush around the Settlement with his parents or with the other children. Maushart (1993: 120) suggests that, apart from the immediate practical aspect, this was one of the ways in which the children could experience something of their traditional Aboriginal lifestyle. The youthful Edward was particularly well placed in this regard as both his parents were resident in the compound and he often mentioned going out with them on foraging expeditions. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of traditional bush foods in the life of the children at the Settlement. Fruit or vegetable food were rare commodities in the dining room and in Mr. Mippy's opinion it was the availability of what white people today refer to as "bush tucker" that kept them from serious malnutrition.

*I don't know how they [the children] got fat or what they had to keep them fat. The main thing was Sundays. He [the Superintendent] let you go out Sundays and we lived on berries ... yeah, I still reckon the food we used to get from the bush kept us survived there.<sup>99</sup>*

Young Edward, for one, never forgot these bush lessons. They proved to be an important part of that cultural education which in later years he was to pass on to a younger generation. The children used to pick many kinds of berries on these excursions. Having no bags to put them in they had to stuff them inside their shirts. Until well into old age,

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<sup>99</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 12)

Mr. Mippy, like his late wife, was able to recall the memory of the different types of berries available for picking. As he explained it:

*There's thirty different types of berries. The main one is what we called 'sandplain' berries - some of them call them 'golberries.' You can scoop those up, put 'em in here [pointing to his shirt, laughing] and you were right out like that! ... you'd never go hungry.* <sup>100</sup>

Mr. Mippy had the following explanation of how children were taught by their parents to identify edible bush foods and to distinguish them from others that were noxious:

*There's things you can't eat in the bush. See there's butter berry, emu berry, ball berry, swan berries and emu berries - you can eat them. They're very good, they're quite safe. And you got the 'kamarks.' They're like this, long things like, all little seeds in them. They're like jam when you eat them.* <sup>101</sup>

Phyllis too spoke of going for berries with the other girls before the bell rang for school in the morning. As they were always in danger of being caught, they had to practice a degree of shrewdness. She had the following account of how they had to sneak out, in order to avoid the all-seeing eyes of supervisors and trackers:

*When we get the berries we have a good feed and when the bell ring we all rush in the dormitory ... just crib our berries in the bed. Then after school when the dormitory door open we all rush for our berries and have another good feed.* <sup>102</sup>

The children looked forward to Sundays when they could be with their parents or other families from the camp. By taking children out with them in order to go foraging in the bush for their traditional food, the "campies," as Mr. Mippy recalled, were thereby able to augment the diet of the needy ones:

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<sup>100</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 13).

<sup>101</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 55-6).

<sup>102</sup> P. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990b: 76).

*On Sundays you went out, you conn'd your way into a family what'd take you; you can eat till you bust, they'd make sure that you had a feed.*<sup>103</sup>

Mr. Mippy remembered that “*there were lots of other things you could eat*” besides the berries. The underground tuber called “*kano*” was excavated from mid-winter onwards. All kinds of fish were caught with lines and home-made spears; birds were hunted with stones and shanghais. Animals there were too, such as kangaroos (hunted by the children as well as adults) and rabbits. “*They even killed them yornas, bobtail,*” he remembered, “*if you want to have a feed.*”<sup>104</sup>

Maushart (1993: 120) insists that more was at stake here for the children than their lifestyle. Her argument reinforces Mr. Mippy’s opinion that, had it not been for their access to “bush tucker,” the children of Moore River would have suffered even greater detriment to their health than they did, owing to their dependence on inappropriate food. “The children needed bush tucker,” she observes, “to supplement a grossly inadequate diet.” For Mr. Mippy and doubtless for other former residents, over-dependence on processed foods continued to be a problem, aggravated in later years by their almost total separation from their pristine diet and lifestyle. While in the Moore River Settlement, the children at least had some access to their traditional foods. Illnesses such as cardio-vascular disease and diabetes afflicted Mr. Mippy in later life and were partly attributed by his doctors to unsuitable diet. I have known many others in Moora who suffered likewise.

In 1994, while I was employed by TAFE under what was then known as the Aboriginal Access program, an arrangement was made with the local office of the Department of Health & Family Services to

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<sup>103</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 13).

<sup>104</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 21).

provide a course in nutrition for my Indigenous students, some of whose parents were contemporaries of Mr. Mippy at Moore River.<sup>105</sup> In the course of this program it was impressed on the students that, for Aboriginal people, the move from traditional tucker to white people's food had been in the past and is still considered today a major cause of damage to health. From the following reflection, it would seem that Mr. Mippy himself was well aware of this factor and the harm brought about by unsuitable diet. *"It's when we switched over to the white people's food, you know - that's the thing that knocked us about"* (Mippy in Bourke 1990).

Although young Edward shared the lot of his contemporaries in regard to the inadequate diet, he admitted that he was a privileged child in many other ways by reason of the advantages enjoyed by his parents. These advantages should be borne in mind by the reader as they have a bearing on his later perspectives and his interpretation of some aspects of life and conditions in the Settlement.

*YOUNG EDWARD: A PRIVILEGED INMATE*

In later life, Mr. Mippy was always the first to admit that he was spared much of the harshness of life at the Settlement. As he had been placed directly under the care of his parents who were employed within the compound, he had little to fear from the punishments imposed by the trackers. However the following remarks make it clear that he was kept firmly under control by his parents, his mother in particular, whom he regarded as kindly but firm:

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<sup>105</sup> The course was conducted at the Moora campus, C.Y. O'Connor College of Technical and Further Education.

*I'd get enough from me mum. She only spoke once to me – I knew what was coming if I didn't move. I'd get a clout; yeah, I'd get a clout! Father used to go beyond mum. He'd give you a hiding, so he left me mother to it. But I never used to talk back – I knew what was coming...*<sup>106</sup>

An outside perspective on the character of young Edward's mother is provided by Alice Nannup who was resident in the girls' dormitory during the time Clara had charge of it. From this description by Alice of "Nanna Leyland," as the children called her, we gain another glimpse of a person who knew how to be strict but who was also known for her kindly disposition:

*In the girls' dormitory we had an old matron-mother, old dormitory mother they called her. We called her Nanna Leyland, and she was a beautiful old lady you know, but strict too ... She wouldn't yell at us if we made any noise, she'd use her stick. She had a big stick, and she'd hit the wall three times ... When she got to the door she'd say 'galahs live outside - people live inside. I'm looking after little kids next door and they need their sleep. If I hear another word I won't hit the wall, I'll come in and crack every head in this room. So just be quiet!' And she would have done it too! (Nannup 1992: 64-5).*

The voice of "Nanna" Leyland as she restored order in her dormitory on that typical night in Moore River, resonates with the voice of her son Edward in his later years. On many an occasion and in similar circumstances I myself heard the latter, with a firmness tempered by affection, exercise his authority over children placed under his charge. In the above snippet from Alice's personal memory, one can almost hear from the mouth of his mother the same dry wit, the same air of authority, the same expectation of instant obedience.

Apart from being directly under the care and control of his own parents, there was another reason for the privileged position enjoyed by young Edward. This was the nature of his parents' employment and

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<sup>106</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 19).

their status within the camp compound. His mother and father both held responsible positions. He told how his father was in charge of the bakehouse, while his mother Clara was the girls' dormitory attendant. He described how, as a child, he wasn't allowed in the boys' dormitory and either slept with his mother or sneaked through a window and got into a spare bed in the girls' quarters:

*Mum and dad worked in the bakehouse. Well, we got first preference. We were the breadmakers, so I used to work with them. See, then mum got the job being caretaker for the girls' dormitory. They built a little place around the side for her, so I stopped with her there and I wasn't with the kiddies until we went to school.*<sup>107</sup>

When young Edward was of school age, he was required to join the other children every day in doing the chores around the compound. He explained how, after school, while his companions were raking the compound and emptying the laundry pans, he himself would be working at the bakery under his parents' direction:

*You had your jobs to do. Well, I had my chores at the bakehouse getting the wood in. I'd get a couple of the other kids in with me. The other kids would work either carrying the bread, of course, to the dining room, getting ready for tea. Some would go to the white staff and they'd get them in there, bringing in wood or something like that. Each one had a place to go.. the ones that missed out, they just sat around and waited.*<sup>108</sup>

Because of his parents' position, young Edward was usually better fed and dressed than the other children. In some ways, he remembered, it was a mixed blessing:

*I didn't want to be different, because they'd be looking sideways at me ... but I was cared for better than them ... I was the 'poshy' one ... I was dressed up!*

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<sup>107</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 8).

<sup>108</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 32).

He went on to explain how, not wanting to be different, he would often take off the good clothes his mother had dressed him in and put on “the khaki, dungaree things” the other children used, “just to be not niggled at!”<sup>109</sup>

If working in the bakery was a privilege, his duty of distributing the rations to the “campies” was a personal responsibility which might indicate something of the trust in which he was held by his parents and by the authorities. Alice Nannup has the following memory of sharing this responsibility with a companion whom she referred to as “a boy named Edward:”

*Every morning I'd get up and go to breakfast, then I'd go straight over to the office. A boy named Edward and I used to work in the store weighing up the rations - like sugar, tea, flour - and handing it out to the camp people (Nannup 1992: 71).*

Mr. Mippy's memories reveal a certain compassion shown by himself and his parents for the less fortunate children. The privilege of being in the bakehouse enabled them to provide kids with extra tucker. Many children used to flock around the bakery and some of them, selected by the trackers, were allowed to help out by greasing the bread tins, as he described in the following recollection:

*The kids, they'd come and they'd want a feed, see, and they used to grease the tins for us. I'd say, 'you want a feed?' 'Yes.' 'Well,' I said, 'don't grease the tin because you've got to clean the tins after and it would all stick to the bottom' ... They'd be sitting there eatin 'round the corner, yeah!'<sup>110</sup>*

Young Edward was only sorry he couldn't invite more children in to help clean the tins. “I was sorry you know,” he went on to say, “we'd've liked to have taken the lot in.” One of the special privileges he shared with his parents and several other adults was a regular weekend excursion to

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<sup>109</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 21).

Regan's Ford where they used to camp out and have plenty to eat. Again he expressed his concern for the other inmates and remembered that he was often allowed to take another boy with him:

*I'd have liked to have taken all of them with me. I had the privilege of going Friday afternoon after school right down to Regan's Ford, that's twelve odd kilometers. Mum and dad would have everything ... oh! you'd have a big feed up. We had to get home Sunday night, ready for school.* <sup>111</sup>

In later years, when visiting Regan's Ford with me in the company of some of Moora's Nyoongar children, Mr. Mippy would entertain us with stories of his experiences there and tell of the catfish he and the boys used to catch in the river. As he explained in the following interview, they used to go to the Superintendent to trade in the fish for extra food supplies:

*We used to camp out there and then we'd get those catfish - oh! big ones. We'd take them in to Mr. Neal, give him half a dozen, so he'd tell us to go into the store and get jam, and butter, what the others couldn't get, to replace the fish.* <sup>112</sup>

From the selection of reminiscences presented above, it would seem that Mr. Mippy's experience of the harshness of the Moore River Settlement may have been mollified somewhat by the special privilege and status enjoyed by himself and his family. Nevertheless, it is significant, within the context of those reminiscences, that both he and his parents saw their advantageous position as an opportunity to benefit others less fortunate than themselves.

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<sup>110</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 28).

<sup>111</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 9).

<sup>112</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 10).



## VALUABLE INSIGHTS

In expressing their memories, former residents of the Settlement reflect some important insights and social values that were gained as a result of their experience and their need to survive under harsh conditions.<sup>113</sup> Mr. Mippy, for instance, saw some positive aspects to life in the Settlement, especially in relation to the value of discipline as exercised by the trackers and in making use of opportunities for sharing and cultural learning. The shared suffering and hardship, discernible in the experiences of inmates at Moore River, had consequences of a kind which would not, I suspect, have been foreseen by government policy. However traumatic the experiences, they served to emphasise, in the perception of many former inmates like

Mr. Mippy, a vital cohesion of culture and identity and helped to reinforce the sense of compassion, interdependence and social responsibility which was already a hallmark of Aboriginal society. Young Hazel Anderson's mother, for instance, said she "*felt a special responsibility*" towards the compound orphans. "*Look, Hazel,*" she advised her daughter, "*you must learn to love, you know, 'cause they got nobody ... you got your mum. They got no mum ...*"<sup>114</sup> Alice Nannup too, is witness to the existence of a spirit of mutual consideration and cooperation within the compound. She speaks of certain arrangements by which the dormitory girls and their matron, young Edwards's mother, would help each other by providing additional supplies for each other. She recalled:

*Nanna Leyland used to give us her dog, Brindle, to go bush and get a kangaroo for her. There'd be me, Melba, Ruth and another Melba*<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Some memories of Mr. Mippy and former inmates have been drawn upon by Haebich (1988) and Maushart (1993) in their treatment of the Moore River Settlement.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted by Maushart (1993: 169-170).

<sup>115</sup> Possibly Ned's sister; see this chapter, p. 2.

*and we'd go out along the river hunting, just us girls, taking the butcher's knife and everything. Then, after we'd given her the brush kangaroo, she'd make a beautiful big stew and a damper for those girls that did the hunting for her. She'd bring in that special food at night ... (Nannup 1992: 65).*

Mr. Mippy once asserted that “*the strongest survived*”<sup>116</sup> at Moore River. However it seems that, besides physical endurance, the “survivors” of Moore River had often to exercise a certain shrewdness in meeting their own and others’ needs. The following recollection shows the importance they attached to making the best use of opportunities as well as offering each other mutual support. In the Settlement store, where she was employed with young Edward Mippy every day after breakfast, Alice found opportunities to supplement the meagre food allowance. One such event, recorded by her as follows, calls to mind the gospel parable of the “unjust steward” who set aside the rules of his master in order to advantage himself and his client:<sup>117</sup>

*When Nanna Leyland came to get her rations I'd always put a little extra in and hand it over myself. I gave her a tin of baking powder once, just a little tin. I stuck it in with the flour so you couldn't see it. Sometimes I'd give her a little bit extra rice or salt or whatever, because that's how we would work it. She'd have extra and then she'd cook something to bring into the dormitory and feed us at night (Nannup 1992: 71).*

Unlike the case reported in the gospel, however, it is unlikely that either Alice or Clara would have received the Superintendent’s approval for their shrewd behaviour. The examples recounted are amongst others throughout this chapter that do afford a glimpse of the mutual interaction and sharing that existed in the Settlement. One of the paradoxes of life as revealed in the inmates’ memories, I believe, was that the positive interaction, operating across the various sections of

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<sup>116</sup> See this thesis ( 2: 85).

Nyoongar society and between the diverse Aboriginal groups represented there, coexisted with an official strategy of “divide and conquer.” Amongst the children in particular and between them and some of their carers, one detects an experience of positive values and relationships. One of the values of most importance to Mr. Mippy was that of Aboriginal cultural awareness and identity. The continuing dynamic of cultural education within the confines of the Settlement, as revealed in his memories, flew directly in the face of the official policy of the Native Affairs Department which was to “contain” Aboriginality among the adult population and to eradicate it altogether among the children (Maushart 1993: 168). The fact that the Settlement environment, despite all of its “Europeanising” influence, could not prevent a man like Mr. Mippy from valuing and communicating his cultural understandings, indicates the extent of the failure of this official policy and leads us to enquire further into the phenomenon of cultural transmission as it operated at Moore River.

#### *CULTURAL EDUCATION*

Apart from the fostering of social values that occurred within the daily routine of life within the camp boundaries, there was also a concern shown by many of the adults, including young Edward’s parents, for maintaining and passing on their cultural traditions. Maushart quotes Mr. Mippy’s memory of how his father made a special effort to instruct some of the compound inmates by taking them out on bush excursions and teaching them bush skills and Nyoongar language. “Ned proudly remembers,” she observes, “that his dad always made a

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<sup>117</sup> Gospel of St. Luke, 16: 1-8.,

special effort to ‘adopt’ some of the compound orphans, teaching them bush skills and Nyoongar language. Decades later,” she continues, “Ned would carry on that tradition, teaching Aboriginal culture to children in the Moora school” (Maushart 1993: 169).

Mr. Mippy’s background in traditional culture will be dealt with in a later chapter in relation to his cultural awareness program. Suffice it to say here that he was aware of the part played by the older generation in keeping traditional knowledge alive and its importance for the maintenance of cultural identity. As he recalled:

*On Sundays, we used to go out and get our traditional stuff, with our mums and dads. Yes. Berries and that ... that's the reason why I'm trying to carry it on now ... get the younger ones to follow on. That's the reason I stick to it. Without our identity, we're nothing. That's how I think about it* (Mippy in Bourke 1990).

Concern for the preservation and transmission of traditional or “bush” knowledge was uppermost in his mind. Besides being an important element in his concept of Aboriginal identity, the knowledge and love of the natural environment had, in his view, a very practical dimension. Sometimes, as he related, it was a matter of survival:

*If a Nyoongar starved in the bush, I don't know how that Nyoongar has been brought up. He's forgotten about his culture. That's the reason I like going to the school now, taking kids out ... teaching them and showing them what they can eat and what they can't.*<sup>118</sup>

Mr. Mippy was always grateful to his parents, particularly his father, for teaching him what he knew about the bush. Under his father’s tutelage, he proved a willing pupil in the art of following tracks. He had the following memory of how he learned how to catch foxes and kangaroos, how to preserve their skins and how to extract the sinews from the kangaroo:

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<sup>118</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 13)

*Soon as I knocked off from school I'd go with him. We'd get the dogs and go with him. We used to catch a fox to get a bit of money ... seven shillings a pellet [sic] we used to get ... [we would] skin them right down and peg them to the boards. That's the way I learnt tracking. And we used to get the sinews out of the tails, kangaroo tails. We'd live in the bush ... me and dad'd live in the bush. He'd have a shovel on each shoulder in case we got a big haul ...*<sup>119</sup>

I believe that what is known of young Edward Mippy's various experiences in the harsh environment of Moore River can shed much light on his later understandings and can help us, retrospectively, to gain a better perception of the inspiration and cultural vision which are revealed through his later activities. In what concerns the content of that cultural vision, the lessons learned at his father's side were never to be forgotten but were to be given expression by him in later years when implementing his program of cultural awareness in the schools.

In addition to the foregoing examination of Mr. Mippy's experiences at the Moore River Settlement, other perspectives are introduced to enhance, extend and clarify Mr. Mippy's accounts and to enable his experience to be situated within the broader context of institutional life.

#### *MOORE RIVER: OTHER PERSPECTIVES*

Perceptions of any place can be expected to vary according to the particular perspective of the observer. Joan Wardrop's interpretation of the evidence suggests that, in relation to Moore River, the view of the policy makers would have been very different from that of the inmates. For Chief Protector A.O. Neville and his administration, says Wardrop,

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<sup>119</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 14).

Moore River would have presented a reasonable solution to the perceived racial problem in Western Australia. She argues as follows:

It was used as a place to send people ... to keep them all together in one place where they would be more manageable. I think that the policies seemed to be justified at the time ... the policies that established Moore River itself (Wardrop in Bourke 1990).

Wardrop clearly sees a degree of self-justification on the part of those who conceived and implemented the Settlement program. She goes further, however, in making the following suggestion that, even at the present day, there exists a variety of opinions amongst former inmates:

For some people, whose families were also there, there are very good memories, as most of us tend to have good memories of our childhood. For people who were sent there as children, away from their families, their memories are not so good. There are other people who simply cannot talk about Moore River. It was a hell on earth for some people, and for children growing up there who had some spirit and who were intelligent, this was a very difficult regime to live under (Wardrop in Bourke 1990).

One way or another, the memories of Moore River seem indelibly imprinted in the minds of many former inmates. Maushart proposes that these memories indicate the presence in Moore River of a “rich, improvised culture of childhood” and a certain “indestructible spirit” in which, she says, the children “found their security” (Maushart 1993: 204-5). When harking back in later life to his experiences in Moore River, Mr. Mippy’s reflections were often sad and tinged with nostalgia. He expressed his feelings as follows:<sup>120</sup>

*We miss the olden days, you know, the days where we were so happy there. Oh!... the memories, you know, from when we was a kid there, it’s hard to describe. We got that yearning sort of feeling in us. We*

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<sup>120</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 59).

*shut our eyes and we can picture what went on there. Those days will never [emphasis] ever come back - but they're still in our mind, they're in our memories. If we could only turn back the clock, what a wonderful thing it'd be ...*

What conclusions may be drawn by the reader on the basis of the differing perspectives of the Moore River Settlement as revealed throughout this study? Maushart (1993: 163) answers this question by suggesting that “life at Moore River was as complexly textured as everyday life anywhere else.” The author goes on to contrast two differing points of view. On the one hand, she speaks of “the worst of times.” From this perspective, Moore River is presented as a government institution, characterised by severe punishments and a harsh, impersonal lifestyle. On the other hand, she continues, there were “the breaks from the normal institutional routine that helped make Moore River a bearable and, for brief moments, even a glorious place for the children who called it home.” Embracing both perspectives, the memories of Mr. Mippy and some of his contemporaries may often seem ambivalent. Judging from the recorded evidence, however, it would seem that if the Settlement were ever anything like a “home” for its inmates, it was the human interaction between the children themselves and the attitude of at least some of the people involved in their care who helped to make it so.

In order to continue developing a more comprehensive interpretation of the experience of Mr. Mippy and that of so many other inmates of Moore River, it may be helpful to pause at this point to throw the spotlight briefly on its close neighbour and counterpart, the Aboriginal mission at New Norcia. This was an institution which had an important place in the world of young Edward and his contemporaries. The Moore River children were made aware of the neighbouring mission through regular visits by various New Norcia chaplains and through

their not infrequent interaction with their mission counterparts at the sporting level. There were some children who had experienced life in both institutions, while some in Moore River had family relations in New Norcia.

While it is not the business of this thesis to make comparative judgements about the merits or demerits of these two controversial places, it is worth presenting something of the diversity of viewpoints.

*NEW NORCIA: THE SISTER MISSION*

The Mission of New Norcia held a significant place in Mr. Mippy's memories. He often spoke of it as a kind of yardstick in relation to his own early life experience. It should be considered here, from various perspectives, as an important feature of his extended institutional landscape.

Haebich (1988: 168) points out that the Aboriginal mission at New Norcia, 37 km. to the east of Mogumber, was the only institution to survive the centralising policy of the Western Australian Aborigines Department. As in the case of the Moore River Settlement, variations exist in the perceptions of former inmates regarding the New Norcia Mission. One viewpoint would be that of some of my own associates at New Norcia, especially the older missionaries who had been involved in New Norcia's child care and education program. For them, the Mission could be expected to emerge favourably from any comparison with Moore River. In their thinking, New Norcia, unlike Moore River, offered opportunities for a reasonable education at both primary and secondary levels. They would speak of the existence of some better facilities and conditions, such as in the areas of dress and food. Such missionary



perspectives seem to receive some support in the following reminiscence of Mr. Mippy:

*They had better living and better school in there [NewNorcia], and they did see butter on their bread. We used to say 'butter and bread comin' to play bread and scrape ...' They came there [to Moore River] with ties on and everything and we didn't know what a tie was.* <sup>121</sup>

I knew the late Benedict Drayton as one of fourteen Indigenous children whose parents lived and worked at New Norcia. All of them spent their school days in the so-called Orphanages at the New Norcia Mission. Ben himself was a resident in St. Mary's for several years from 1954 onwards, while his sisters were amongst the girls at St. Joseph's. During the course of an address delivered at New Norcia's Annual Studies Day in 1992, he had this to say about the vision of the mission's founder, Bishop Rosendo Salvado:

*The vision of the great man Salvado has changed the whole aspect of Aborigines within the south-west of this state, from being outcast by the white settlers to the beginnings of education and working class people, the bonded friendships, the close relationships with the mentors of the day, to the whole range of discipline, religious instruction and the Catholic upbringing ... a lot would be lost without his intervention. To this point the Aborigines owe a lot to his vision, teachings and goals, over the period of their time at New Norcia (Drayton 1993: 30).*

In the course of this address, the speaker <sup>122</sup> went on to give his version of how life at New Norcia was organised. Sport, he said, was an important feature of mission life. There was “*football, cricket, netball, hockey and athletics. On numerous occasions the school excelled in many sporting events against other schools*” (Drayton 1993: 28). On weekends and feast days, he continued, the Aboriginal boys were allowed to go on bush walks, while the girls went in their own separate groups. Participation in church services involved compulsory attendance daily in

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<sup>121</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a:53).

their own chapels and in the pro-cathedral church on Sundays and feast days. *“There were many positives and negatives for students and it was those who could cope with the system that were able to conform.”* Drayton (1993: 30) went on to quote a favourable comment from a student from the 1930-40's: *“I am glad I went there, it made me what I am today.”*

There was, however, another less favourable side to the picture as viewed by him. The boys, he said, had to assist at the morning Mass of the Benedictine priests which took place around 6.00 a.m., summer and winter. This was followed by a breakfast which he considered less than satisfactory, after which there were a number of chores, followed by a walk to school. The breakfast, he remembered, consisted of:

*... no more than a plate of porridge or sheep's head broth or weeties. Following breakfast, chores had to be done on a roster system. This included washing dishes, sweeping floors, etc. School [co-educational] was approximately 1 km. away which meant we had to walk, in bare feet, again in weather conditions that were at times hard to cope with (Drayton 1993: 28).*

He explained how a large part of their schooling seemed to be taken up with learning hymns and singing in Latin. He recalled how he sometimes found it hard to understand the supervising Sisters because of their Spanish background, while many other pupils were punished, unfairly in his eyes, for not understanding directions given. He complained that most pupils did not proceed beyond grade seven, when the boys either left New Norcia or accepted employment on the mission farm.

As was the case in the Moore River institution, the workload of the girls in New Norcia appears to have been much heavier than that of the boys. Ben Drayton recalled the following memory of the girls heavy

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<sup>122</sup> Born in New Norcia in 1946, Benedict Drayton died in Moora in 1997.

schedule which combined domestic chores with a good deal of outside work:

*There was cooking, washing, ironing, sewing and other chores ... Apart from this there was olive gathering, picking oranges from the orchard and cleaning the pro-cathedral.*

He went on to pin-point neat handwriting as the main factor in his choice for admission to St. Ildephonsus' secondary college, controlled by the Marist Brothers. "However," he asserted, "this was not enough to improve my learning ability. I simply was not prepared properly in most subject areas and was like a fish out of water" (Drayton 1993: 28). A reference was made by Drayton to the large number of children, brought in to the mission at an early age, who allegedly lost contact with their identity and family background. In a recorded interview and speaking in the same context, Rose Willaway, born in New Norcia and a former Mission inmate, also remembered children "taken away from their parents ... put in New Norcia when they were little, and they didn't even know who their parents were until they left New Norcia" (Willaway in Hodson 1992).

In the course of his recollections, Mr. Drayton points to differing reactions to the regime in New Norcia's institutions. The inmates who suffered most, he says, were those who could not cope with the system. He recalled that:

*those who were constantly on the wrong side of the priests and nuns, found it a hell on earth. Some comments I heard were: 'It was like being in hell, I did not know that sheep had anything but heads, because that is what I saw in our broth, [and another comment] 'My brother and I hated the place with a vengeance'.*

Continuing in similar vein, he spoke as follows of the long-term effects of early traumatic experiences:

*Trauma would have touched everyone's heart in their time at the mission; and even today I see young Aborigines pass on through*

*alcoholism etc., and I believe it is due to the past experiences (Drayton 1993: 28).*

Drayton felt that New Norcia played an important part, not only in terms of his education but in preparing him, as he put it, for “*that long journey into the future:*”

*The days I spent at school and in the workplace have given me that urge to continue to better myself and my family, to enable me to work for my people whom I know through first hand experience have suffered a great deal in the two hundred years of white settlement. One will always remember the first twenty one years of my time at New Norcia, the good times, the sad times, the people I have met and the education I received. The independence, religious background, discipline and the mechanism to cope, have all been instilled in me for that long journey into the future (Drayton 1993: 30).*

Another perspective is provided by a former inmate of New Norcia, interviewed by me in 1999, who told me he had been unhappy at the Orphanage there and had absconded in the mid 1950's. He was later apprehended and relocated to the former Moore River Settlement which, by that time, was operated by the Methodist Church under the new name of the “Mogumber Mission.” According to this inmate, conditions at the old institution had improved dramatically under its new missionary administration. Good meals (including a substantial breakfast) and good clean bedding were amongst the features he remembered. He had few good memories of his time at New Norcia, however, alleging that the conditions there had compared very unfavourably with those at the Mogumber Mission.

In the minds of former inmates, each of these two institutions has good and bad memories. Some children fared better than others and allegations of physical abuse have been made by former residents. However, whatever view the reader may adopt regarding the merits or demerits of the Moore River Settlement vis-a-vis New Norcia, the

evidence suggests that both places had implemented a similar social philosophy which was premised on the inevitable demise of Aboriginal culture, the intrinsic superiority of all things Anglo-European and the ultimate goal of racial assimilation. While New Norcia and the Moore River Settlement were undoubtedly different in many ways they were fundamentally similar in that they were “institutions” rather than “homes.” Conditions for Aboriginal children placed in missions, government institutions and children’s homes were often very poor and experience has shown that many such children subsequently suffered greater disadvantage in later life than those raised in their own communities (*Bringing them Home* 1997: 14-23).

*TIME FOR LEAVING: A DEFINING MOMENT FOR EDWARD MIPPY*

For the youthful Edward, the Moore River Settlement was experienced as a place of personal deprivation and hardship, which imposed on him a style of life which was at once alien and insulated. As he prepared to leave the place of virtual incarceration where he had spent his formative years, he was on the threshold of a very different world. It was like going “*out in the wilderness*,” as he later phrased it – an experience which remained in his memory as a major epiphany or turning point in his early life. We can deduce from the records that he would have been ten years old when he left Moore River briefly with his mother for a month's holiday at Busselton. Apart from his confirmation at the hands of Archbishop Le Fanu on July 29th. 1931, there is no further entry in the records until the note which records his departure from the

Settlement with his mother on 21st. December of that same year.<sup>123</sup> Now almost fourteen years old and finally released from Moore River, Edward apparently went to live with his mother and her friend Arthur Harris at North Perth. He was to be away from institutional life for more than ten years.

The reported frequency of absconding from the Settlement would indicate that the poor conditions there, together with the overly harsh and restrictive regime, enhanced the prospect of finally taking leave of the place. For many inmates, on the other hand, there was the fear of an even harsher world outside, coupled with the loss of old associations. As young Edward remembered it:

*That hurt a bit too, by going away. I was leavin' me friends. And ... that's more or less sendin' us out in the wilderness..* (Mippy in Bunbury 1990).

While the two institutions responsible for his upbringing may have left Edward Mippy ill-prepared for life in the wider Western Australian society, he was, nevertheless, to prove an adept pupil in the school of life. As he later said more than once, *"I learned by mingling with people."* After leaving the Settlement, he remembered moving around the country for some time with his parents, often living in the open and taking what limited work was available. Conditions during the Depression of the nineteen-thirties presented difficulties for many, but times would have been especially hard for Aborigines who, under the application of the Aborigines Act of 1905, were restricted to Reserves and deprived of freedom of movement (Haebich 1988: 3). Mr. Mippy later remembered, as follows, the famous six o'clock curfew which was by then already in force:

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<sup>123</sup> MRNS, Ned Mippy file.

*There was places where ... out at six!, out at six! Get your tucker by six ... and out! If he caught you there, he'd rough you up, the police. P'rhaps throw you in! I know that was there, 'cause I ran with the ones ... I kept sayin', you know ... 'out! C'mon, look, get your tucker and get!' Well, see, we didn't have any legal aid, we had nothing. Nothing! If they said 'shift!' you shifted (Mippy in Bunbury 1990).*

Haebich (1988: 287) indicates how, as the Depression grew worse, Aboriginal people became increasingly dependent on meagre government rations. She reports that, in 1931, the number of Aborigines in receipt of rations in the town camps increased by more than 400%. Not surprisingly, many unemployed Aboriginal people finished up back at Moore River – the place from which, only a few years before, they had gained their freedom. Mr. Mippy recalled:

*Well, in my opinion ... if they weren't there they wouldn't get a feed. They just said, 'oh well, we goin' to the Mogumber mission [sic]. At least we'll have a feed there.' Outside they'd be battlin', battlin'... it was really battlin'.*<sup>124</sup>

While it was true that people could “get a feed” by returning to live at the Settlement, they nevertheless received precious little reward for their labour. Our informant remembers how the men from the camp were sent out every day to collect firewood “with a four wheeled dray,” with “one of the horses in the shafts.” They would go out into the sandplain to collect blackbutt wood. For this work, he continued, they would receive “a stick of tobacco, about two inches long:”

*... that's all, a stick of tobacco. They'd have to cut it down fine with a knife. If you used that before morning, you've got to wait till morning for another smoke.*<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 36).

<sup>125</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 33).

It should be remembered that, in those days, power was given to Neville and the Aborigines Department to regulate almost every aspect of an Aboriginal person's life. As Maushart (1993: 272) points out, the State Government had an "astonishing degree of control over the major decisions of Western Australian Aborigines in everything from employment and accommodation to religion and marriage." Even the adults at Moore River had no say in the timing, nature or location of their employment. Although the destitute received food and lodging in the Settlement, they had to accept any work the Superintendent might demand of them. As Mr. Mippy remembered:

*In there [they were better off] until such time as someone ring up there for a man, see ... Seeding time they'd get jobs there. He'd come there, and there's no good saying 'no'; he'll tell you. 'You are going!'*  
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While they were living outside the Settlement, Mr. Mippy and his parents seemed to have avoided such coercion. Nevertheless it was a hard life and they certainly knew poverty. Speaking in his later years on ABC Radio, Mr. Mippy recalled his experiences during that time:

*We were actually fringe-dwellers from that time on. Well, I put myself down as a 'scrounger.' All I lived on was selling bottles, scrap metal, 'n anything what I could sell, propsticks, cobweb brooms - we used to make them for the ladies. The main thing there was props, selling propsticks. And mind you, that was hard. My dad used to carry six ... forky sticks, six of them - I'd only carry two! I'd get rid of mine, and he'd say, 'oh well, take some tucker home to mum' (Mippy in Bunbury 1990).*

Selling propsticks was, it seems, a trade commonly practised by Aboriginal people at that time. Morgan (1987: 262) quotes the following memory of Gladys Corunna, a contemporary of Mr. Mippy:

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<sup>126</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 36).



*It was terrible in the nineteen thirties, the Depression was on and people were so poor, especially Aboriginal people. They would come along the river, selling props. These were long, wooden poles people used to prop up their clothes-lines ... I think they liked calling in ... my mother was allowed to give them a cup of tea and a piece of cake or bread.*

Mr. Mippy often spoke to me in later years of how, after his release from the Settlement, he had camped in the open with his parents in the Upper Swan (Caversham) area, in Perth's northern outskirts. In showing me areas around Harrow Road and Arthur St. where the bush had been thicker in earlier days, he remembered how the family had sometimes slept there at night behind windbreaks, with little shelter from the rain. Although life was hard, he appreciated the opportunities it presented. He recalled:

*I went to school there [at Moore River] till I was..fourteen or fifteen. Then mum and dad decided to go down to Caversham ... Arthur St. Caversham ... we used to camp out in the bush there.<sup>127</sup>*

While other inmates who were sent out to work from the Settlement had no option but to go where they were sent, Mr. Mippy remembered that he was able to go with his parents when they went grape-picking in the Upper Swan:

*Mum and dad spoke up for me, see ... we went down in the sulky, rubber-tyred sulky. When we got there, all me sisters was there, camping.<sup>128</sup>*

Working alongside his parents and sisters, young Edward learned how to pick grapes, how to prune, "how to tuck them in" and "how to pollenise them." They would have "just on four weeks doing all those jobs," he remembered. Property owners who were pleased with their seasonal work would assure them of a job the following year. He spoke, too, of

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<sup>127</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 25).

<sup>128</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 38-9).

how the physical conditions, though harsh, presented opportunities for learning. Tracking through the bush, setting up camp, sitting around the campfire at night, these experiences presented an ideal setting for his continuing cultural education. He often paid tribute to his parents, especially his father, for much of the language, folk-lore and the stories of the Dreaming that he was later to pass on to the children of Moora.

While the available details of Mr. Mippy's life from 1931 until his return to the Moore River Settlement in the early 1940's are somewhat sketchy, some information can be supplied from records as well as from personal interviews. The former reveal that on 1st. April, 1937 he went into employment with Mr. Vincent Tarco of Lake Bidby, via Lake Grace, on a wage of 12/6 per week. A memo recorded in his departmental file states that 7/6 was to be subtracted from this amount and allocated to the Aborigines Department for the upkeep of his mother. The latter may have already been living in Jolimont, though her whereabouts at that precise time are not recorded.<sup>129</sup>

His official departmental file indicates that he left Mr. Tarco's employ of his own accord and in breach of his contract of employment. For this misdemeanour he was reportedly sentenced at Wagin and served a term in York Gaol. After his release it is noted that he lived at the York Reserve in the camp of Tommy Kickett. By July 1937, Mrs. Clara Mippy was living at Jolimont, and her son joined her there. The file states that, having left Perth in September of that year, he arrived in Newdegate near Lake Grace and that on 10th. May 1938 he took employment with S. Clarkson at Southern Cross. On 15th. December he seems to have made a brief visit to Moore River, and returned to Perth the same day. In April the following year the records reveal that he was denied rations in Perth for refusing to accept employment.

From his own account, Mr. Mippy was living at Swanbourne, a Perth suburb, when he applied for a job with Bell Brothers. He was accepted. He had the following memory of how, while still in the company's employment, he decided to join the army at the outbreak of World War Two:

*Bell Brothers were at Guildford then, behind the clock. So I shifted up to Guildford and stopped there with me friends ... went to work there, then the army. I went down to Claremont where they was signing them on.*

He added that he was keen to enlist, and had hopes of going overseas. At the interview, he went on to explain, he and other potential recruits were required to strip naked and line up for a medical examination:

*... so me and one white bloke, come from up north, they were lining us up there and they were all sitting there like magistrates. I looked - I seen Bell Brothers sitting there! [He said] 'Mr. Mippy, you can get your clothes, but remember you're manpowered with Bell Brothers.'*<sup>130</sup>

Mr. Mippy's military aspirations being thus frustrated, he had no option but to return to work with Bell Brothers. Not long afterwards, however, as the Japanese were launching their aerial attacks on Australia's north, he was sent by his employers to Onslow to work on the military airfield there. He recalled his experiences:

*When the Japs come in they bombarded Onslow ... yeah, they got down as far as Onslow runway too. We were sent up there with Bell Brothers. They had runways like this [gesturing]. They'd build a 'bun' around it ... we called them 'buns,' for the aeroplanes to go under - right up high so the shrapnels or whatever you call it wouldn't hit the plane. They'd pull a big net over it and to you or anyone else it'd just*

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<sup>129</sup> MRNS, Ned Mippy file.

<sup>130</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 39).

*be like a big hill there. Put spinifex back on top ... couldn't see it from on top. Yeah, we done a lot of that work there for them.*<sup>131</sup>

The length of time spent by Mr. Mippy in Onslow is not known. On his own admission, however, he had earned some spending money up north and his thoughts now turned to romance. Not long after his return south we find him back at the scene of his former incarceration where he began renewing some old friendships.

#### *THE RETURN TO MOORE RIVER*

Phyllis Narrier's departmental file records that she returned to Moore River with her parents in 1937. The time of her future husband's return to Moore River is not shown in the records but the evidence suggests that he arrived back there in the early 1940's after leaving his job at Bell Brothers. His late wife recalled that she was about 15 years old when she began her association with him. He would then have been aged 24.<sup>132</sup> As he later explained:

*... I went back there to Moore River. See, we made a bit of money and I wanted to go there and flash it around. I thought 'that's where all the girls is' - and I picked up with me wife. That was the time I went back and got married.*<sup>133</sup>

It would seem that Mr. Arthur Mippy snr. and his wife Clara were already back in Moore River at the time of their son's arrival there. Neither the reason for the parents' return nor the exact date are recorded but it is possible that the difficult social conditions prevailing during the Depression may have influenced their decision (Haebich 1988: 284 et

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<sup>131</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 40).

<sup>132</sup> P. Mippy; field interview, 1998.

<sup>133</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 26, 40).

seq). From what Mr. Mippy said in later years in a radio interview it would appear that his own motive for returning to the scene of his childhood, besides wanting to find a wife, was his desire to be near his mother. As he put it:

*I had my mother to think of. She finished up going back to the Mogumber Mission, to look after the girls in the dormitory (Mippy in Bunbury 1990).*

The departmental files record that, in 1943, Phyllis gave birth to a son whom she named Robert. Sadly, however, the baby contracted meningitis and died the following year at Perth Children's hospital.<sup>134</sup> During the following year Mr. Mippy was occupied in the Settlement's carpentry workshop under the careful eye of a man called Jim Ashe, from nearby Koojan. Mr. Ashe taught them how to use "calsomine"

paint, how to clean their brushes, how to work with wood and many other things. "What he learnt me," Mr. Mippy recalled, "is still in my mind:"

*I was working, I was a painter when I met me wife ... painting buildings and making trellis works and ones like that. Jim Ashe was the white bloke used to come from Koojan, he learnt us how to do it. He was very good. He used to drink a little bit and he had blood pressure ... he'd make us work. You didn't go there and play around. We was numbered off. I had an overall with number 'one' on ... and there was seven of us working with him.*<sup>135</sup>

Though Mrs. Clara Mippy was old, she was still working in the bakehouse when her health began to deteriorate. Significantly, her son was busy helping to make coffins when, on 29<sup>th</sup> June, her condition suddenly worsened. The news of her death, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1944,<sup>136</sup> caught

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<sup>134</sup> MRNS, Phyllis Brown file.

<sup>135</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 26-7).

<sup>136</sup> MRNS, Clara Leyland file.

her son quite unprepared and was delivered, as he expressed it, in unfortunate circumstances:

*I was working with Jim Ashe when she passed away. I was a carpenter. We was makin' coffins, an' all that. He said to me, 'you'd better go up there and measure Clara Leyland' ... 'cause she went by 'Clara Leyland.' I said, 'hey!, that's my mother.' See, that's how ... you didn't know - you was away from them. Well, I just stopped ... I looked at 'im. He said, 'well Ned you'd better go home. Go back down to the camp' (Mippy in Bunbury 1990).*

The circumstances surrounding this event may well be interpreted as a commentary on the ignorance and lack of sensitivity prevailing within the institutional administration at that time. It was as if no importance were attached to those cultural understandings and attitudes which were of such vital importance to the inmates. He recalled:

*It was a shock ... there's no messages brought down ... we were soundly believing that as soon as anyone in our family or family tree dies, somebody's got to go to wherever that next of kin is and tell them, if they have to walk all night or get in a car and go.<sup>137</sup>*

Too upset to view his mother's body, Edward sent another one of the workers to do the measuring. Aboriginal people in those days generally considered it *wara*, or *woonatj* (bad luck) to go near a dead person, and Reynold Mogridge, he remembered, was no exception:

*I sent Reynold Mogridge, he's dead now. 'Reynold,' I said, 'you go up and measure mum for me.' He was frightened too! See it's 'taboo' ... we don't go near anyone that's dead. That's 'wara' we call that, that's bad .... superstitious.<sup>138</sup>*

Clara Leyland was laid to rest in the Settlement graveyard, where her grave may be seen today next to that of her husband Arthur. In recent times the old cemetery has been reconditioned. Sadly, many of the graves could no longer be identified, even by Mr. Mippy. In

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<sup>137</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 28).

conversation, Mr. Mippy made it clear that the old cemetery was a place that always remained close to his heart. He recorded the following feelings about the graveyards of Mogumber which held the remains of his beloved parents and friends:

*... there's an old one down at Elbow ... place we call Elbow. Any of my people are listening now ... they know where Elbow is. They should shed a few little tears when they're looking at it. At Elbow they were just wrapped up in blankets ... that's the red, yellow, with the crown on it ... government. [They were] just put into the hole, lowered into the hole, as carefully as you could. Well, the story of the cemetery is that we'd like to see it upgraded, so we can all just come back 'ere and visit our people (Mippy in Bourke 1990).*

The records show that in the year following the death of Mrs. Leyland, the Commissioner of Native Affairs gave his permission for the marriage of Edward Mippy and Phyllis Narrier.<sup>139</sup> The wedding

took place in the Settlement church on 27th. February, 1945. Mr. Mippy remembered what he was doing when the permission arrived:

*I was painting, that's how quick they arranged things there. I was painting, doing the staff quarters. A tracker come and said, 'hey, you getting married this afternoon' [laughter], so I knocked off and went up and got married! One of the Deans from Perth married us.<sup>140</sup>*

Although it is known that by this time Edward's mother was deceased, his father may have been present at the wedding, as were the parents of Phyllis. The ceremony took place in the smaller of the two churches, with "all standing outside waiting." The bride had a new blue dress for the occasion, purchased by her mother, "because," as Mr. Mippy

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<sup>138</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 27).

<sup>139</sup> MRNS, Ned Mippy file.

<sup>140</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 40).

explained, "*we had no money.*" <sup>141</sup> After the ceremony there was a big party with dancing. Everyone in the Settlement attended.

A baby, which they named Edward, arrived towards the end of that year and the birth was duly entered in the register. Unfortunately, the child was not to survive. We learn from the file of the child's death of meningitis at the Perth Childrens' Hospital and his burial in Karrakatta cemetery on 28th. February, 1947. At some unspecified time after the wedding, Phyllis' new husband took up a job in the bakery where he had worked with his father as a boy. "*We was married then,*" Phyllis remembered. "*He used to work in the bakery.*" <sup>142</sup> Her husband once joked about the pittance he received for working there:

*When I grew up and I worked in the baker's shop, makin' bread for the mission, they got generous and gave me 30 cents a month ... a month! ... 30 cents! We were big shots (Mippy in Bourke 1990).*

Eight months afterwards, a child was born to the couple at the Settlement and was entered into the Register as Marguerite Phyllis Mippy. On 3rd. December, 1949, another female child was born and given the name Daphne. <sup>143</sup> Mrs. Mippy told me that she left Mogumber with her husband and two children after the birth of Daphne. She explained that after living in Merredin for about a year they went to Moora where they took up residence at the Moora Reserve:

*We went to Merredin, I think ... I had Margie and Daphie ... We went to Merredin with them two kids, just them two. We came back to Moora to live then.* <sup>144</sup>

Up to this point in the narrative, there has been little reference to

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<sup>141</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 42).

<sup>142</sup> P. Mippy; field interview, 1998.

<sup>143</sup> MRNS, Ned Mippy file.

<sup>144</sup> P. Mippy; field interview, 1998.



Mr. Mippy's father. One can only speculate about the sequence of events in the life of the late Mr. Arthur Mippy snr., up until the time of his return to the Settlement with his wife. Whether he was with her there at the time of her final illness is not recorded. At any rate, Phyllis was quite sure that after the birth of her own two daughters at Moore River, old Arthur remained with them until they finally arrived in Moora. Here they all took up residence together at the Reserve on the edge of the town.<sup>145</sup> The wheatbelt town of Moora was to become the growing family's permanent abode. In many respects, it represents the most proactive period in Mr. Mippy's life-story.

#### *MOORA MEMORIES*

Though born in Mandurah, Edward Mippy would have seen little of the country of his birth, having spent most of his early years in the Carrolup and Moore River Settlements. The town of Moora, sharing with New Norcia a central place in the old Yuat Nyoongara country and a mere 45 Km. to the north of Mogumber, was to remain his chosen place of habitation until his death there in 1992. For a year or two after his arrival with his family and while still living on the Moora Reserve, he was engaged in seasonal and casual farm work around the district. During our travels together in the 80's, my friend would often point out paddocks which he had helped to clear, wells where he and his workmates had drawn water, farm sheds where he had lodged and dams he had helped to excavate during this period. It must have been hard work in the days before heavy machinery.

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<sup>145</sup> P. Mippy; field interview, 1998.

Mr. Mippy said that he was sometimes asked to serve as a tracker for the Moora police during that period. Amongst the cases which he recalled to memory was one concerning the violent death of a woman in the vicinity of the old Moora Reserve. He later explained to me how his investigations were instrumental in bringing the offender to justice many years after the crime. Moora resident June Headland recalls that the year 1951 saw Mr. Mippy employed in Moora with the Midland Railway Company. Moving from the Reserve, she continues, with his old father and his wife and family, he took up residence for a time in the tents supplied by the Company at the northern end of Padbury Street. (Headland 1995: 44). Mrs. Phyllis Mippy recalled that the family did not remain long in the tents. She spoke of her husband's intention to move into a more permanent residence, and this ambition was realised with the acquisition of an existing weatherboard cottage. *"When he got on the railways,"* she remembered, *" 'e had a house in town then ... the old house in Ranfurly St.* <sup>146</sup> This cottage was to be home to them and their numerous family until the house was demolished at the request of the Moora Shire in 1996. <sup>147</sup>

As has already been noted in the story, the first two children born to Mrs. Mippy had died in childhood and two girls, Marguerite and Daphne, had been born in Moore River. A further eight children were to be born in Moora: Elaine, Diane, Roberta, Gary, Dean (dec.), Sylvia, Glenda and Arthur.

The Mippy children remember their father as a firm believer in

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<sup>146</sup> P. Mippy; field interview, 1998.

<sup>147</sup> Surprisingly, the Freehold title (Certificate of Title: Vol. 1921, Fol. 238, Land Titles Office, Perth) was not granted until 14 January 1992, only four months before Mr. Mippy's death.

work and discipline. Interviews with family members would seem to indicate that he was generally fair. But he could be very strict when the occasion demanded and his children still remember how accurate their dad was with a *koondi*, or throwing stick! He held high expectations for his children in sport, work and study. This attitude must have spilled over into his work at Westrail, where it seems he was regarded as a reliable employee (Headland 1995: 46). He always appeared to be aware of the expectations of the local white employers. They expected “reliability,” as he often put it. This was a quality which he valued highly, both in himself and in others. In his view, a lack of reliability on the part of Aboriginal employees was a negative perception held by many in the workplace, often with good reason.<sup>148</sup>

Phyllis stated that Arthur Mippy snr. lived with his son's family until his death, after which his body was taken from Moora and buried in the Moore River cemetery alongside his wife Clara. In 1998, Phyllis provided this verbal epitaph to her late father-in-law:

*He died in Moora, but they buried him in the Settlement. I remember where they buried 'im, too ... where the big blackbutt tree is. He was in Moora with us for a while. 'E was a good old man. He used to have his little drink, you know ... old Ned didn't used to like it! But he was my good company.*<sup>149</sup>

June Headland (1995: 46, 53) recalls that for twenty-eight years Mr. Mippy worked as a ganger for the Midland Railway which, after

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<sup>148</sup> Many Aboriginal people have a perception of time which differs from that of the wider community. They themselves distinguish, with some amusement, between what they call “*Wadjala time*” (literally “white-man’s time,” ie. “clock-time”) and their own cultural concept of time, which they call “*Nyoongar time*.” The latter perception, being culturally-based and largely freed from the constraints of “clock-time,” allows considerable latitude in regard to observing time schedules and is often at odds with the expectations of white employers who would insist on regularity and reliability in the work-place. Mr. Mippy believed that Aboriginal employees should conform to general community standards in these matters. To him, being “reliable” in the eyes of employers was of the utmost importance.

<sup>149</sup> P.Mippy; field interview, 1998.

acquisition by the state government, became known as the Western Australian Government Railways (later, Westrail). He was spoken of as a valued employee. He himself told of how he eventually reached the position of "Trackmaster," exercising authority over a number of track maintenance men, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. He often spoke of the late Hermann Jorissen, a Dutch migrant still living in Moora in 1997, who was scarcely able to communicate in English when given a job on the Moora railway line shortly after his arrival in Australia. Mr. Jorissen once told me how, when harrassed on one occasion by some of his fellow non-Aboriginal workers, he was much assisted by the support and kindness shown to him by Mr. Mippy. Though receiving on retirement a special Westrail Certificate for Services (Headland 1995: 46), Mr. Mippy expressed to me his regret that poor literacy, a legacy of the Moore River Settlement's education policy, prevented him receiving further promotion in the railway service.

In their later years, Mr. and Mrs. Mippy decided to separate. It was a mutual decision, and they remained on good terms, as Mr. Mippy himself explained in a radio interview:

*I'm not with my wife now. She left me about five or six years ago. But we're happy, I go up and see her. There's no problem there (Green 1991).*

While her husband elected to remain in the family home in Ranfurly St., Mrs. Phyllis Mippy went to live in Geraldton where her house became a centre for children, grandchildren and extended family. She remained in frequent contact with her family members in Moora and with her husband until his death in 1992. She herself passed away on 10th. July 1999 in the Geraldton hospital, surrounded by her family.

Mr. Mippy's work as a leader in the Aboriginal community for over thirty years was referred to in a document distributed after his death in

1992. It had originally been drawn up as an itemised “curriculum vitae,” probably composed by Mr. Ben Drayton as Chairman of the Central Midlands Aboriginal Progress Association. The document, which is reproduced in full in Appendix 2, was read in the presence of the Governor on the occasion of Mr. Mippy’s reception of the “Advance Australia Award” at Government House, Western Australia, in 1991. It lists the main achievements and activities of Mr. Mippy over the latter period of his life, between 1959 and 1990. It projects a portrait of one whose life, committed as it was to a wide range of social, sporting, cultural and educational activities, might be considered noteworthy by any standards in the face of the enormous social and economic disadvantages with which he and his contemporaries had to contend. During his later life, his involvement in regional country football administration and his work as an employee of the Western Australian Government Railways gained for him a position of status, respect and responsibility which is still recognised by many within the local and wider communities. (Headland 1995: 53)

However impressive his record of achievement may be, the work for which I believe he should be especially remembered, which has proved a source of inspiration for this thesis, is the part he played in promoting Aboriginal cultural awareness as a means of renewal amongst his own people and as a focal point of reconciliation between the black and white communities. The way in which Mr. Mippy went about achieving his vision of cultural renewal is the subject of the following chapters.

#### *SUMMARY*

This chapter has offered a biographical perspective of the significant experiences which illuminate Mr. Mippy’s life. By presenting

the narrative wherever possible in the recorded words of the subject, as well as those of his contemporaries, I have endeavoured to provide an existential context in which to glimpse something of the understanding and the vision which lie at the basis of his later life and activities.

In order to identify significant sites for interpretation in this biographical panorama, the various facets of institutional life have been expressed as far as possible through Mr. Mippy's personal recollections. His perception of life and conditions in the Moore River Settlement is offset by his view of New Norcia as a comparable institution. His memories, while revealing his convictions about his Indigenous culture, help us discern the roots of his own personal blend of Christian faith and traditional understanding. His words give an insight, too, into the way in which his view of prevailing government policies and social attitudes was conditioned by his personal experiences of disadvantage and racial discrimination. The insights gained by reflecting on these and other perceptions expressed in the life story of Mr. Edward Mippy should help, not only in seeing and interpreting his cultural world as he himself might have seen and interpreted it, but also in acquiring an ethnographic understanding of the social experiences and processes to which he was exposed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MR. MIPPY IN HIS SOCIAL CONTEXT: THE MOORA COMMUNITY

“We make sense of the present in our consciousness of the past” (Dening 1996: xv).

Having offered a perspective of Mr. Mippy’s earlier life history, the previous chapter concluded with a brief introduction to the Midlands town of Moora where he finally settled and where he was to devote the next forty years of his life. The town of Moora and particularly its relationship with the Yuat, its Indigenous inhabitants, assumes great significance here and must be considered in some detail. Also relevant are the factors which led Mr. Mippy to choose this rural centre as the context of his future life and activities.

Edward Mippy’s place of birth and his early life in Mandurah do not appear to figure largely in his memories. Indeed, he seems to have retained little if any recollection of the first few years of his life. There is virtually nothing recorded in regard to his short sojourn in the mission at Carrolup.<sup>1</sup> His earliest memories tend to start with his arrival at Moore River where he experienced a family environment under the care of both his parents. The institution, therefore, which held bad memories for so many and which Maushart ironically described as “sort of a place like home” for its former inmates,<sup>2</sup> was perceived by Edward Mippy as a

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<sup>1</sup> Situated a few kilometers to the north of Katanning.

<sup>2</sup> From the title of her book (1993).

home in the fuller sense of the word. Even in later years, when the Settlement had become little more than a collection of derelict buildings, he was wont to speak of it in quite favourable terms. He loved to revisit the site of his earliest memories when the opportunity arose and would often recall his memory of former inmates and the happy times they had together.

Although life at the Moore River Settlement may have been harsh, unpleasant, even inhumane in many respects, it nevertheless left young Edward with many good memories, coupled with a sense of belonging. He later described how, after leaving there at the age of fourteen, he had experienced the hardships of life in the urban and suburban environment of Perth. During that time he had felt like a "*fringe-dweller*" and a "*scrounger*," as he later put it (Bunbury 1990), so that his return to Moore River in the early 1940's had seemed to him a welcome relief from the comparatively harsh world outside. His return there was, for him, something of a home-coming and marked a major milestone in his life. Back in the Settlement, he was both able to renew old associations and create new ones. It was where he first met his wife, where he married and where he saw the birth of his first two children. It was not Mandurah, therefore, or the land of his acknowledged ancestors that Mr. Mippy saw as his "country." Rather it was the Victoria Plains, the Moore River Settlement and the other centres of the traditional Yuat country that provided the context for almost all the positive aspects of his early experience. It is scarcely surprising then that the area seemed a logical choice as a place in which to settle permanently.

Apart from the Moore River Settlement itself, the only major centres of life in the district were the nearby Mission at New Norcia and the Aboriginal Reserve at Moora, a mere 50 km. to the north. It was the latter which held the most appeal for him and it was there, some time



during the year 1950, he decided to settle with his wife and two young children. Mr. Mippy never recorded his reasons for choosing the wheatbelt town of Moora rather than any other metropolitan or regional centre, but one can identify two factors which may have influenced his decision. The first relates to the family origins of his wife. The reader will remember that Ned had met his prospective wife, Phyllis Narrier, on his return to the Settlement in the early 1940's. As he remembered it:

*... I went back there to Moore River... and I picked up with me wife. That was the time I went back and got married.*<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Phyllis Mippy belonged to a family which had its roots firmly embedded in traditional Yuat country and Phyllis herself, together with her many siblings, could trace her ancestry directly to her great grandfather, listed as "Narea" in the New Norcia census of 1858.<sup>4</sup> Conscious of her forebears and local connections, Mrs. Mippy was especially pleased to receive from me, in January 1998, a copy of the "Narrier Family Tree,"<sup>5</sup> showing the results of my research into her family's genealogy.

During the mid '80's when I lived in Moora as the local parish priest, I often saw one of her brothers, Mr. Frank Narrier jr., walking the streets in the early hours of the morning before anyone else was stirring. He was "*going the rounds,*" as he put it, visiting the houses of his numerous family relations. I have a vivid memory of standing outside the Moora Post Office with Frank, one day in 1986, as he indicated the concrete slabs in the pavement which he claimed to have laid with his own hands. "*This is Narrier town!*" he exclaimed, as he looked up and surveyed his relations amongst the group of Aboriginal people gathered,

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<sup>3</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 26, 40).

<sup>4</sup> Reproduced in Green & Tilbrook (1989: 206).

<sup>5</sup> See fig. 4.

as they did every day, under the town clock. The laws of European government might have it otherwise, but in the heart of Frank Narrier, this was the country of his ancestors.

It is not unreasonable to believe that, in choosing Moora as his final abode, Mr. Mippy was influenced by the strong connection of his wife to the country of her forebears. He would have been aware that, through their mother, his children would share the identity of the local community, while his own ties to the area would also be thereby strengthened. In this connection, information provided by early chronicler J. E. Hammond may not be irrelevant. Recording the reminiscences of Winjan, Mr. Mippy's reputed nineteenth-century forebear (leader of the regional entity referred to by the author as the "Southwest tribe"), Hammond has this to say:

"King" Winjan told me that he had married a woman of each of the neighbouring tribes and created a friendly spirit between the four tribes (Hammond 1933: 21).<sup>6</sup>

It could be argued from this evidence that, in choosing a wife from one of the families Indigenous to the locality, Ned, albeit unconsciously, was maintaining the time-honoured Southwest tradition of forging social ties through marriage.

Another important factor in Mr. Mippy's choice of Moora may have been that the town had then, as it still has today, the highest percentage of Aboriginal residents of any town in the region, if not in the entire Southwest (Haebich 1988: 132). Amongst its residents who, from 1953 onwards, were confined to the Reserve situated 2 km. to the south-east of the town, lived many of his former associates from Moore River. The names of families then resident in Moora, such as Anderson, Indich, Jackamarra, Narrier, Prior, Ryder and Yappo, to mention only a few, are

amongst the names which appear in earlier New Norcia records.<sup>7</sup> The same families had also been represented, together with many others, among the inmates of the Moore River Settlement (Wardrop & Bate n.d.). Edward Mippy, though not himself Indigenous to the district or born to a Yuat family, was identified with the area through the bonds of matrimony. In the town of Moora, he was also among old friends.

In the wider Australian culture a person's place of birth is usually seen as a significant point of reference and an important factor in establishing identity, especially where there is also a family or genealogical connection with that place. The First Australians, perhaps because of their spiritual relationship with the land, attach an even greater significance to the place of their origins. Even when they have lived away from it for many years they will often continue to refer to the region of their birth as their "home" or "country." Such local attachment is referred to by Nyoongar Elder, Ken Colbung (1979: 101), who says that *"people who are not of Aboriginal descent are unaware of the strong emotional feeling we have for a particular place. We see it,"* he continues, *"as part of our spiritual background."*

Writing of his experiences at New Norcia in the 1880's, Bishop Salvado observed that Aboriginal people always retain a special relationship with their birth-place,<sup>8</sup> and for many in the Yuat area

<sup>6</sup> Hammond designated four separate "tribal" regions within Nyoongar society.

<sup>7</sup> See Green & Tilbrook (1989).

<sup>8</sup> According to Salvado, "the aborigines call their birth-place their country" (1883, Report No. 9, NNA; quoted by Gimenes 1958: 304-5). As a specific instance of this traditional natal attachment Salvado cites the case of an Aboriginal, listed as Tacancut, who was at that time resident in the Mission. Originally of the Bindoon clan (See Salvado's census of 1858 in Green & Tilbrook 1989: 207), Tacancut is recorded as having two daughters, listed as Nanguglian (12) and Cayaran (6). Despite his own "outside" origins, the father considered both girls to be "of this country" (i.e., New Norcia) and should be received into the Mission for that precise reason. Salvado notes that the younger of the two was actually born on the banks of the Moore River near the New Norcia monastery.

today the link with ancestral land or place of birth is still very important. According to at least one resident of the Moora area, a person's place of birth is a prime factor in determining a sense of belonging.<sup>9</sup> Amongst contemporary Aboriginal people, on the other hand, there are differing perceptions in this regard. Some may have a special attachment to the country of their ancestors, regardless of where they themselves were born. Others, like Mr. Mippy, consider their "country" to be the place of their early childhood and upbringing, even though it may not have been their actual birthplace.<sup>10</sup>

#### *WHO ARE THE YUAT?*

As neither the life of Mr. Mippy nor his vision of cultural renewal could be understood apart from their social context, it is appropriate to turn the focus of the reader's attention to the Indigenous people with whom he took up residence at the Moora Aboriginal Reserve in 1950. The present section briefly examines some of the literary perspectives in relation to the regional society known as the Yuat and presents a historical purview of some of its families, especially those more closely connected with this narrative. This provides a background for the presentation of some reflections provided by Mr. Mippy's contemporaries in relation to their society and its more recent history.

My early experience with Mr. Mippy and the Moora community does not attest to any use of the title "Yuat," nor could I say with certainty when it was that I first heard the name used. Tindale's famous

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<sup>9</sup> M. Nannup; field interview, New Norcia, May, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> One Aboriginal woman now residing in Perth revealed to me that, as New Norcia was the land of her ancestors, she still regarded it as her "country" even though she had been born in the town of Northam (field interview, New Norcia, 2000).

map of the Indigenous Southwest, showing its fourteen linguistic territories including the one he calls “Yued” and its neighbour, the “Balardong,” may have become more widely known to local people through educational programs at Moora TAFE and the Moora High School.<sup>11</sup> Tindale’s designations were certainly referred to by linguists at language conferences such as the one Mr. Mippy and I attended at Guildford, W.A., in October 1986. Whatever its sources, the name “Yuat,” or “Yuat Nyoongara,” was introduced or re-introduced largely through the influence of Mr. Edward Mippy and has become increasingly recognised and accepted today by the people who regard the Victoria Plains as their traditional area.<sup>12</sup>

According to Berndt (1977: 270), “The Aborigines (Salvado) came among in 1846 were the Yuet (Juet), who occupied the area around New Norcia and Moora, Mogumber and Moore River generally to the coast.” In this reference, Berndt does not mention his authority for the use of the name “Yuet.” Tindale, however, as a result of his research on Indigenous Southwest regional boundaries, was one of the first to use the title and refers to the “Juet” or “Juat” in his maps, using the label “New Norcia Tribe” as an “alternative” title (Tindale 1940: 214). The same author proposes that the meaning of the word “juat” (sic) is “no.” Berndt (1977: 274, n. 5) agrees, adding that “it was quite common for terms like this to be singled out as tribal names distinguishing one group from others which used different words for (in this case) ‘no.’”

It is difficult, however, to find corroborative evidence for the theory that the word “Yuat” was employed in traditional times, at least by the

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<sup>11</sup> See fig. 1. Tindale’s map (1940) is also reproduced in Green (1984: 9).

<sup>12</sup> The name “Yuat” is used in the title coined by Mr. Mippy to designate Moora’s Aboriginal Arts and Crafts workshop (viz. “Yuat Nyungara Kaat-Maya”) and was also used in the title “Bwuradjen Yuat,” the name originally adopted by New Norcia’s Aboriginal Community group.

people at the New Norcia mission, as a self-descriptive title. There is evidence on the other hand that, like the Aboriginal boy Conachi, whose opinion is quoted by Salvado (*Memorie* 1851), the people of New Norcia described themselves as “Jun-ar” (Nyoongar) rather than by the name “Yuat,” or by any other alternative designation.<sup>13</sup> The word “Nyoongar,” Douglas suggests, was used by the people of the Southwest “as the name of the people, the name of their language (both the original language and the later development after contact with English) and as an adjective describing their country, their way of life and other features of their culture” (Douglas 1976: 5). Mr. Mippy, too, invariably used this name (Nyoongar) in collective reference to the people of Moora and the Southwest in general.<sup>14</sup>

Some interesting information as to the title used by the New Norcia Aborigines is revealed by former Benedictine archivist and historian Dom William Gimenes. He offers the title “Murrarra-murrarra” as the appellation inclusive of all the Indigenous people from Dandaragan in the north to Bindoon and Gingin in the south. Gimenes presents the following argument:

The coastal forests from Jurien Bay downwards to the Moore River mouth were the inheritance of the Dandaraga people who could not cross the river boundaries without trespassing upon the rights of their kinsmen the Bindoon and Gingin blacks. These were the people, about 600 of them in all, not counting the children, who came into contact and under the influence of Bishop Salvado. For convenience sake, these tribes are to be considered as one body and shall be known by the name of Murrarra-Murrarra, or Victoria Plains natives (Gimenes 1958: 120).

According to the evidence supplied by Tindale (1940, 1974) and since followed by others, the Indigenous peoples of the Southwest are

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<sup>13</sup> See Salvado (1977: 58, 100).

seen as belonging to a number of contiguous regions, each of which bears its own designation.<sup>15</sup> While a number of theories and possibilities have been advanced in reference to the origin and significance of these names, it must be borne in mind that almost all such evidence is dependent on non-Indigenous authors. Of these and other names put forward to describe the people of the New Norcia area, the name "Yuat" deserves particular consideration as it has been singled out and appropriated for use as a descriptive name by Mr. Mippy and the Aboriginal people of the subject area.<sup>16</sup> Mr. Mippy had also made use of the word "Yuat"<sup>17</sup> in a linguistic sense, to mean "no" or "not." It is important to enquire, then, as to the meaning and significance given to the name "Yuat" within Mr. Mippy's Indigenous community and its relationship to the more generic title, "Nyoongar."

An answer to this important question may be gleaned from contemporary oral information supplied by the late Mr. Cliff Humphries, a senior Aboriginal Elder of the Balardong society, whose traditional territory shared its western boundary with that of the Yuat. Mr. Humphries was closely associated with Mr. Mippy during the 80's in the cause of the revival and maintenance of the Nyoongar language. According to this Balardong Elder, who resided at Kellerberrin until the time of his death, the term "*Yoowada Nyoongar*" was used by his own

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<sup>14</sup> Mr. Mippy himself used differing pronunciations, e.g., "*Nyoongar*," or "*Noongar*."

<sup>15</sup> See map, fig. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Bates, for example (Bridge 1992:177 et seq.), refers to them as "the dingo totemists of Nyeergu," while Douglas (1976: 5-6) refers to them as a special linguistic group, under the title "Tjapanmay."

<sup>17</sup> There is a certain ambivalence in the spelling of this word. Whitehurst (1992), following an accepted orthography, uses the spelling "*yoowart*" as the Nyoongar word for "no." In Moora, where the word is used as a regional title, the spelling is invariably "yuat."

people to describe a stranger, an “outsider.”<sup>18</sup> Given that the word “Yuat,” used in the linguistic sense of *yoowat*, means “no” or “not” in the language of the Southwest, the term “*Yoowada Nyoongar*” might be interpreted, on this information, as a negative designation used in reference to a Nyoongar person who was not from the particular speaker’s area. This might reasonably indicate that the term “Yuat” was not originally used by the people to describe themselves, but was a name applied to them by Indigenous “others” who regarded the former as “outsiders.”

Such, in brief, is the background to the use of a name. But what information can be gleaned in regard to the people themselves? In the section that follows, I provide a brief introduction to what has been written in relation to the first colonial contacts with the Yuat society and a summary description of their social and territorial history from that time onwards.

## *HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: THE YUAT IN THEIR COUNTRY*

### *EARLY COLONIAL CONTACTS*

Although he was not a Yuat by birth or ancestry, Mr. Mippy’s close association with the Yuat community was consolidated by his marriage to Phyllis Narrier and his subsequent domicile in Moora, a town regarded by its Indigenous community as a centre of local identity.

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<sup>18</sup> Information supplied in 1999 by Tim McCabe, then a researcher at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University, who spent several years researching the linguistic usage of Mr. Cliff Humphries.



Because of this long association, the following introduction to the Yuat people and their early history is important for a fuller understanding of Mr. Mippy's memories and perspectives.

The first recorded colonial expedition to the north of Perth, according to Erickson (1971: 3), was undertaken in April, 1836, by resident magistrate and early settler, George Fletcher Moore. Having given his own name to the river which he came upon to the north of the Chittering lakes, Moore followed it, we are told, until he reached what he described as a "fine pool" called "Koondaby" or "Candoby" <sup>19</sup> by the local Aboriginal inhabitants. In what seems to be the first such recorded interview, he spoke to one of the Aboriginal men whom he met there and asked him directions. Erickson concludes that "it is probable that Moore passed Maurin Pool <sup>20</sup> and proceeded upstream ..." Other explorers followed, but it was left to Salvado and the first Benedictine Missionaries, who arrived at "Maura" <sup>21</sup> in 1846, to document, from their European perspective, the cultural life of the Aboriginal people who inhabited the fertile area centred around the Moore River. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that most of what is publicly known about the early society of the Indigenous Yuat is derived from the recorded observations of Salvado and his early missionaries.

#### *NEW NORCIA AND ITS COMMUNITY*

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<sup>19</sup> This is the location of the present-day property known as "Canterbury," which adjoins the New Norcia property and whose northern boundary lies approx. 1 km. to the south of the township.

<sup>20</sup> This pool was located at the place called "Burrigin" (Gimenes 1958: 118), or "Maura" (Salvado 1977: 56), which was to be renamed "New Norcia" by Salvado

<sup>21</sup> This version of the Nyoongar name was used by Salvado to designate both the river and the place (Salvado 1977: 56).

The spiritual motive for the missionary work entrusted to Salvado and his missionary party was outlined by Pope Gregory XVI during an audience given in Rome on the 5th. June, 1845. In his memoirs, Salvado recalled the words addressed to them by the Pope on that memorable occasion:

Remember all those Apostles who were your brothers, who converted whole peoples and nations to the Faith, and educated them in the ways of civilized life. Remember that you are setting out on the same road as was trodden by them (Salvado 1977: 20).

Salvado would have taken this Papal instruction as a basic charter for his missionary endeavours. His writings reveal, however, that he had some settled ideas of his own about how these aims of "conversion and civilisation" might best be achieved. He was critical of any mission which attempted to create a relationship of dependence with its "native family." He wrote in 1851:

It is undoubtedly the first step to receive natives into the Mission and to instruct and educate them for a certain time; but to keep them permanently in the Mission and totally dependent on it, making them work for it and not for themselves, is, in my opinion, the wrong way of doing them good.

His aim from the beginning, he continues, was to "settle native families as soon as possible, giving each what was necessary for life on the land." The plan he hoped to realise was "to found a village of native proprietors who would be farmers and skilled workmen no less than true Christians." This was the task of the New Norcia Mission, as he saw it, in the face of the rapid and inevitable social and cultural change which was threatening to overtake its Indigenous inhabitants (Salvado 1977: 86).

In the pursuit of his aims, Salvado saw the need for secure title to his Mission land holdings and freedom from interference. Russo assures

us that the Bishop told the Crown Law Department of W.A. that “any resumption of his land would seriously jeopardize the welfare of the native people.” Using his influence with Governor Broome, continues Russo, Salvado secured an assurance from Lord Mayor Shenton in 1891 that the line of the Midland Railway would be altered “by taking it more to the west so that it will now not interfere in any way with you at New Norcia” (Russo 1980: 236).

The provision of permanent accommodation was Salvado’s first priority and on the 9th. May, 1857, he laid the foundation stone of the first of a group of twenty two-roomed cottages (Gimenes 1958: 318). The preservation of law and order within the community being another of the mission’s early priorities, Salvado appealed to the government in September 1857 for the appointment of an Aboriginal constable. Given the option of recommending a suitable person for the job, Salvado chose a man from amongst his mission population who seemed to him to possess the necessary qualities. The man, then known simply by his traditional name, “Narea,” was destined to become the great-grandfather of Phyllis Narrier, the young woman who, 88 years later, was to wed to Mr. Mippy in the church at the Moore River Settlement.<sup>22</sup> This forebear of Mrs. Mippy appears listed under the name “Gnarea” in Salvado’s census of 1858.<sup>23</sup> It appears from the following extract of a letter of reference addressed to Salvado and preserved in the New Norcia Archives that this man was considered very reliable and had accompanied the writer of the reference, Robert Austin, on an expedition into the interior.

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<sup>22</sup> Information regarding Narea’s appointment is provided by Gimenes (1958: 329), who spells the name “Ny-yarea.”

<sup>23</sup> See Green & Tilbrook (1989: 206). Subsequent entries in N.N. records give the name as “Narea” or “Narrier.”

Having interested yourself about my fellow traveller 'Narryer' [sic] I have much pleasure in informing you that being assured of his friendly disposition towards his sable friends and kinsmen I have kept a promise made to him on the Expedition to the North East Interior of this Colony by presenting him with a double barrelled gun complete. Favour me by continuing [to be] his friend and taking care that he does not sell the gun; for I am sure that you will find him a most excellent fellow.<sup>24</sup>

In a postscript to the above letter, the missionary Bishop is warned that "Narryer is very averse to engaging with any person for more than a year." According to Gimenes, "Narryer" belied this reputation by agreeing to the job for ten years. It would appear, however, that this contract was in fact terminated after five years, "for the Benedictine records are silent as from 1858 till May 1862, when Salvado's further request, this time for a white mounted policeman (E. Goodwin) was acceded to" (Gimenes 1958: 329).

"Narryer" or "Narrier" was the first, though not the last, Aboriginal of his family line to act as a policeman. He was to be followed in this profession by his grandson, whose birth was recorded in New Norcia in 1893 under the name of "Francis Tagliel/Burel (Narrier)."<sup>25</sup> We have already seen how this descendent, known as "Frank" Narrier, was the father of Phyllis Mippy and was well known to young Edward Mippy as the chief tracker or camp policeman at the Moore River Settlement during the 1930's. During the years of service of the original Narea (or Narrier) as New Norcia's first policeman, others amongst his contemporaries were encouraged to "settle down as farmers" by the provision, at Salvado's request, of a Government grant of fifty acres of land. According to Russo, the request was granted and

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<sup>24</sup> Gimenes (1958: 329), quoting "Natives" file (1857), NNA.

<sup>25</sup> New Norcia baptismal records.

the Prior of the community, <sup>26</sup> (at the time, Father Garrido), was able to report that “some of the ‘steadiest natives’ were assigned fifteen acres of arable land for their own exclusive benefit, ‘rent free.’” In 1860, in pursuance of this policy, Salvado named three New Norcia residents <sup>27</sup> to begin farming operations at the Mission (Russo 1980: 154).

While catering for the physical and pastoral needs of the adult population, the missionaries placed special emphasis on the care and education of the young. As early as 1847, the second year of the mission settlement, the first children were being entrusted by their parents to the care of the missionary monks. Salvado’s census of 1858 <sup>28</sup> listed the names of 92 “Aborigines of Maura or New Norcia and its vicinity,” 36 of these being designated as children. It is scarcely surprising, then, that the education of the local children entrusted to the Mission became one of Salvado’s primary concerns.

Though begun in 1847, it was not until 1857 that the boys’ institution at New Norcia became fully established. Salvado had been absent, first in Europe (1849-52) and then in Perth where he had acted as Bishop in place of the departed Jose Serra (1853 - 1857). In a letter to Rome (Gimenes 1958: 297), Salvado wrote as follows:

.. Shortly after I settled down here, that is after the 11th of February, 1857, I had seven (7) native boys. These increased to sixteen (16) and now they are twenty five (25), not including six families. <sup>29</sup>

Amongst the first seven boys to be placed by Salvado in the mission hostel was eight year old Tunhel, listed as a son or step-son to

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<sup>26</sup> The title of “Prior” is given to the deputy superior in a Benedictine community.

<sup>27</sup> Russo identifies these as Bob Nogolgot, Benedict Cuper, Tom Yawel and Albert Turgiel.

<sup>28</sup> Reproduced in Green & Tilbrook (1989: 206).

<sup>29</sup> The letter, cited by Gimenes, was addressed to Cardinal Barnabo, Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, on 11th. Feb. 1859, NNA.

Narea (Green & Tilbrook 1989: 139, 206). The birth of another of Narea's sons, William Tagliel Narrier, was registered in the New Norcia baptismal records in 1850. The family line continued at New Norcia with the birth of William's son, Francis Tagliel ("Frank") Narrier, in 1893. All these were housed and cared for at Salvado's institution for boys, which he called St. Mary's. Phyllis, daughter of Frank and wife of Mr. Mippy, was well aware of New Norcia's involvement in her family history. She spoke of her father as a "*New Norcia boy*," although he himself, as she recalled, never referred to his father's side of the family.

*No, he never used to talk about it. He was a New Norcia boy ... he was in the 'orphanage' there. I never met his dad.*<sup>30</sup>

For over a hundred years, from the time of its foundation till it closed its doors in 1974, the so-called "Orphanage" at New Norcia catered for large numbers of Aboriginal boys. After leaving, some of these former inmates remained in New Norcia while others went to live in Perth. Others again remained with their family groups in one of the regional centres, such as Walebing, Moora or Moore River. The career of Frank Narrier, the "*New Norcia boy*" who was to become father-in-law to Ned, has been treated in the previous chapter.

At least in the early years, male Aborigines made up the majority of the Mission population as Salvado believed he could not cater adequately for women or girls. Young girls placed in the care of the mission were initially transferred to Perth where they were looked after by the Sisters of Mercy in Victoria Square. From 1861 onwards, females were catered for at the Mission itself and the first building to accommodate girls was erected on 13 January, 1865 (Gimenes 1958: 319). The New Norcia institutions for girls and boys continued for over a

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<sup>30</sup> Field interview, 1997.

hundred years to cater for the educational and general needs of Indigenous children until their final closure in 1974. The town of Moora, in Mr. Mippy's time, was home to many of its former alumni, including descendents of the Narrier family, as well as to many who were his contemporaries at the Moore River Settlement.

*EPIDEMICS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES*

From the 1860's onwards the ravages of introduced diseases and epidemics coupled with new government policies had a combined effect not only in diminishing the population but in bringing about a substantial change in the character of Salvado's mission. Tilbrook paints a bleak picture of the devastating effects caused by illness in New Norcia:

Salvado in 1863 described the ill health which frequently overtook Aborigines in contact with settlements as a 'fatal melancholy,' attributing this to consumption, bronchitis, syphilis, liver complaints, and 'several other diseases.' However, in sheer scale the measles outbreaks at the mission (and throughout the entire Southwest) in roughly three-yearly cycles from 1860 through the 1870's and 1880's, were devastating ... The measles outbreaks caused the deaths of many of the missions most trained and skilled young people through secondary infections associated with the disease. Other effects were the severe emotional distress felt by Aborigines as they saw loved ones die; the overriding sense of despair being experienced by Aborigines generally throughout the Southwest.. " (Green & Tilbrook 1989: xxvi).

According to Russo, the severe loss of life caused by illness was a considerable setback for Salvado's hopes of building up a large village of Christian Aborigines who belonged to the area. Numbers could be bolstered by bringing in young people from other districts, but Salvado

wanted to work as far as possible with the people indigenous to his region. He was opposed to the Mission becoming an institutionalised centre for detribalised youth and the large-scale mixing of traditions. In 1868 he experimented with the idea of opening other centres, placing small numbers of Aborigines at two mission outposts, one at Wyening, 25 miles east of New Norcia and another at Marah, 40 miles to the north. Russo (1980: 169) believes, however, that “neither of these small missions flourished, as there appears never to have been more than a handful of natives at either place.”

Hasluck suggests, on the other hand, that, in spite of this depopulation, events from the 1860’s onwards were mostly a blessing in disguise for New Norcia. The Mission’s increasing involvement with the dominant society and the loss of its former isolation, rather than being a setback, opened the way for further progress. The loss of life through illnesses and epidemics, he argues, “tended to cancel out some of the most promising results of the earlier labour and shape the mission’s new role as a refuge for the dispossessed.” Hasluck continues, proposing that it was during the last quarter of the nineteenth century that New Norcia played its most important role:

From the material point of view, New Norcia played its biggest role from the eighteen-seventies to the end of the century. During that period it gathered into their own community the natives who were being displaced by settlement and helped them to learn white ways – e.g., training the farm hand, teaching the children to read and write, and adding to their respect for themselves by such accomplishments as cricket and playing in an orchestra, while behind all the work was the idea of their reception into a faith where, in doctrine at least, all men are children of the one Father (Hasluck 1942: 98).

One might argue with Hasluck, a benevolent though confirmed “long-time public advocate of assimilation” (Haebich 2000: 423), in his



suggestion that “many deaths” could be a sort of blessing in disguise, helping to “shape the mission’s new role.” He does admit, however, in the text quoted above, that his was a “material point of view.” Russo reflects a similar non-Aboriginal viewpoint in agreeing with Hasluck that the last twenty years of the century were a time of the “greatest prosperity” for the New Norcia Mission. Several Aborigines, Russo argues, were farming their own land in the 1880’s and were well able to provide for their wives and children. He qualifies this, however, by observing that while “there was evidence of Aborigines imbibing European culture in working the land,” they acted rather as “share-farmers” than as “independent proprietors” (Russo 1980: 239).

I believe that terms like “prosperity” and “progress,” as used in this context, call for further elaboration. In the section that follows, I proceed to examine the ambivalence or ambiguity of colonial and missionary perspectives in this regard.

*THE MISSION IN HINDSIGHT: THE AMBIGUITIES OF PROGRESS*

In writing of these early years of New Norcia, one is led to reflect on the ambivalence of Salvado’s position. As a missionary, he was faced with the inevitable contradictions arising from his links with white colonial society. While working to counteract what he saw as the “unworthy treatment” meted out to the Aborigines and the “degenerate” condition of those “who frequent the towns and white settlements” (Salvado 1977: 117-118), he and his missionaries were inevitably part of the very colonising process which gave rise to the evils which he deplored. In taking steps to insulate the mission residents from the traumatic impact of an alien world, was not Salvado himself seen as part

of that world and its cultural values? By teaching the Indigenous people the skills of the white society, its social ethic of work and profit, its economy based on agriculture etc., was he not introducing them to practices which lay at the very heart of their own dispossession? It is useful to try to evaluate Salvado's Mission from the standpoint of Indigenous people and to enquire what might have been their perspective of the mission's aims and activities.

From the Aboriginal point of view, for instance, the concession of comparatively small grants of land for the purpose of enabling "the steadiest natives" to farm "for their own exclusive benefit" (Russo 1980: 154) would scarcely have been seen as either a generous concession or as a just and fair exchange. The land which was being conceded to them was, after all, only a tiny fraction of what was theirs in the first place. Again, it may be argued that the appointment of Narrier as the first Mission Policeman, while doubtless intended by the missionaries as an important step in the "civilising" process, would have become necessary only because of the disruption to traditional life, law and values which had been brought about by white settlement.

In the light of this ambiguity, therefore, we might ask how well the goals of the Benedictine missionaries were distinguishable in the Indigenous mind from those of the colonisers. The missionaries directed their efforts to persuading the people to abandon their nomadic lifestyle, to accept the Christian faith and to begin adapting to the settled life of a mission environment. Yet the land which was allocated by the government for these purposes was already theirs under traditional law. One might well ask whether the missionaries themselves, in the eyes of the Aboriginal people, were not seen as participants in the very cultural deprivation they were trying to avert.

The ambivalence of the missionary in the colonisation process has its parallel, too, in the lives of the Aboriginal people. Generations of the Narrier family, to take only one example, showed their acceptance of the new lifestyle and its demands by settling at the Mission, entrusting their children to the care of the monks and accepting important roles within the white society. Following in the footsteps of his grandfather, Narea, who became New Norcia's first policeman, young Frank Narrier was to accept the position of "Tracker" at the Moore River Settlement. In the year 2001, a great grand-daughter, Stephanie Mippy, was exercising a similar role as a member of the West Australian Police Force. Yet, despite its history of enforcing the white man's law, the family has not relinquished its cultural identity and a sense of ownership of their traditional country. In recent times, descendants of the same family have been amongst those seeking to establish claims to traditional land in the area.<sup>31</sup> A similar ambivalence can be discerned in the recorded perspectives of Mr. Mippy. As I have noted, he once stated, while addressing a group of children, that he had learned to live with the whites by mixing with them (*State Affair* 8 Nov. 1985).

He also spoke favourably, in the following terms, of Christian missionaries who had worked with his people in bringing them what he saw as the benefits of faith and material assistance:

*We have to thank you Church people ... you looked for the Nyoongaras, you went out to them...*<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, he deplored the degradation of his country which had occurred as the result of white settlement:

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<sup>31</sup> Early in 2000, a group calling itself "Yued," including members of the Narrier family, lodged a set of claims to traditional land through the Aboriginal Advancement Council (information supplied by M. Drayton, Bwuradjen Yuat Inc.)

<sup>32</sup> E. Mippy; field interview, 1990.

*The farmers ... they've taken all the scrub they could find, they've cleared it 'n chopped it all down...*<sup>33</sup>

His most caustic remarks were reserved for the intransigence of government in relation to the return of traditional land. He often spoke of his failure to have the old settlement site at Carramarra, west of the Moora townsite, returned to its former status as Aboriginal reserve. Despairing of these attempts, he once remarked to me that *"the only land we Nyongars will ever get is a little plot in the cemetery."*

Pausing here at a significant moment of change in our historical narrative – the last years of the nineteenth century – and looking back at what Hasluck (1942: 98) describes as an era which defined New Norcia's role as "a refuge for the dispossessed" and which cleared "the way for progress," we leave some questions unanswered, perhaps unanswerable, on behalf of the people who gave the Mission its purpose. If there was "progress," then how are we to define it? From whose point of view was it progress and for whose benefit? Whatever the answers provided in relation to these questions, they can hardly fail to reflect the ambivalence discernible in the minds and in the lives of missionaries and Aborigines alike.

In the historical account of the Yuat people from 1846 to the turn of the century I have outlined some of the major factors in their social and cultural evolution and have indicated some of the ambiguities arising from their contact with European missionaries. I now resume the narrative at the dawning of a new era. It is an era fraught with both challenge and trauma for the ancient people who still claim the Victoria Plains as their home.

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<sup>33</sup> From self-recorded audiotape (Mippy 1986).

*EXODUS FROM NEW NORCIA: THE YUAT "DIASPORA"*

After the death of Bishop Salvado in 1900, a new Spanish Superior, Father Fulgentius Torres, assumed charge of the Mission at New Norcia. Being newly arrived from Europe, Torres was unfamiliar with Australia's colonial history and the cultural needs and expectations of its Indigenous people. His European monastic background coupled with the rapidly changing social, economic and pastoral climate in Western Australia opened the door to a new set of challenges for New Norcia's residents.

However, the new policies and directions set in train by Torres were not viewed favourably by everyone. New Norcia's new missionary commitments in the Kimberleys, its new emphasis on education for the broader community and a substantial reduction in its land holdings and farming activities led to a diminishing of its former missionary priorities. Haebich (1988: 17) cites "conflicts with the Aborigines Department over Mission subsidies" as a further exacerbation of the problems of New Norcia's local Aboriginal population. She suggests that, for these and other reasons, "New Norcia's Aboriginal residents were now encouraged to move off the mission and to find work with farmers in the surrounding district, leaving their children behind to be educated in the mission orphanages." She continues:

Most did so quite willingly, no doubt attracted by the higher wages offered by local farmers and believing, as they had been taught by Salvado, that New Norcia would always be their home. It soon became evident that this was no longer the case. To their dismay they found that their visits were not encouraged and their access to their children was strictly curtailed. Parents who insisted on taking their children out on holidays were told that the children would not be allowed to return to the mission (Haebich 1988: 17).

Residents began to voice their displeasure at these departures from Salvado's former policies.<sup>34</sup> Feelings came to a head in 1907 with a physical attack by a group of thirty-two Aborigines on New Norcia's mission institutions. The insurrection, as described by Haebich (1988: 18), was led by three representatives of New Norcia's old families, George Shaw, Emmanuel Jackimarra and Lucas Moody, each of whom received three months imprisonment for their actions. The complaints made by former mission inmates were apparently given support by a Departmental Travelling Inspector who "reported in 1911 that only ten Aborigines were in regular employment at New Norcia and other Aborigines were not welcome there at all" (Haebich 1988: 19).

The first decade of the century, therefore, saw an unprecedented exodus of New Norcia's traditional residents who, like Indigenous groups elsewhere in the Southwest, were forced to form permanent camps on the fringes of towns. Many found work or residence on the outskirts of the Perth metropolitan area, while others went even further afield. The most serious problem encountered by the State's Aboriginal population at that time, resulting partly from the increased restrictions and controls imposed under the Aborigines Act of 1905, was unemployment. As Haebich (1988: 120) indicates, the provisions of the Act relating to permits only "served to create impediments for employers and over the years reduced the Aborigines' chances of finding work."

A certain Billy Narryer, of untraced identity but presumably a descendent or relative of New Norcia's first policeman, is mentioned as

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<sup>34</sup> Haebich (1988: 17) quotes Harold Willaway to support the view that the policies of Salvado were set aside after the latter's death. She also suggests "there was some criticism of the mission's changing emphasis in the Perth press," citing a letter to the *Morning Herald* (March 1904) which "attacked the mission authorities ..for neglecting their responsibilities towards local Aborigines."

an example of the injustices that occurred under the permit regulations. It appears that, in 1915, Billy travelled from Perth to Meckering looking for work, only to find a “harsh and offensive employer” who refused him his wages (Haebich 1988: 121). While the resolution of this matter is unknown to me, the case is interesting as it identifies a member of the Narrier family amongst the victims of the social injustice of the time.

Aborigines were among the first to suffer from the effects of the declining rural economy during the late 1920’s and this led to an increase in the number of Aborigines camped in the vicinity of the towns (Haebich 1988: 228-229). Some Yuat people who had been displaced from New Norcia found an alternative place of residence at Walebing, a traditional camping site situated on the Great Northern Highway, about 30 km. to the north of New Norcia. It was the wheat-belt town of Moora, however, located 25 km. further to the northwest, which together with Katanning was to become one of the largest concentrations of Aborigines in the south of W.A. (Haebich 1988: 132). Our attention now turns to the origin and growth of the Aboriginal settlements in the Victoria Plains, focusing on the main regional centres of Moora, Walebing, Mogumber and Koojan.<sup>35</sup>

#### *ABORIGINAL RESERVES OF THE VICTORIA PLAINS*

Just as Mr. Mippy came to identify himself with the Yuat society through his marriage and life-long associations, so also the Yuat people, in their turn, retained their identity with the country of their forebears. In order to understand more fully the context of Mr. Mippy’s later life experience, it is helpful to trace the demographic profile of the Murrarra-

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<sup>35</sup> For the relative location of these rural centres, see maps (figs. 2 & 3).

Murrarra, or Yuat, as they moved outwards from their traditional centre at New Norcia.

In her history of the Shire of Victoria Plains, Erickson (1971: 72) records that “the townsite of Moora was gazetted in April 1895, but for some years it remained a small settlement, consisting of a galvanised iron hotel, a small store and post office (1896) and a police station (1897).” According to Laurie (1995: 84), it was not long before locally employed Aborigines together with displaced residents from nearby New Norcia began to take up residence in the town. Haebich informs us that the towns of Katanning and Moora attracted the largest concentrations of Aborigines. She notes that while numbers at the Katanning camp increased from forty in 1911 to two hundred in 1913, the Moora camp, during the same period, grew from sixty to two hundred and forty inhabitants:

Moora was the major town in the Midlands district. It provided an alternative centre for Aborigines previously attached to New Norcia where they could get medical attention, rations, stores, find entertainment and take part in local sporting activities. Many of the men were employed at the railway yards in town and on nearby farms. In contrast to Katanning, there were no mission activities or school facilities for Aborigines in the town. Despite their continued conflict with the New Norcia mission authorities, most parents continued to send their children to the mission orphanages to be educated (Haebich 1988: 132-133).

In her book *‘Aborigines of Moora,’* June Headland, former inmate at New Norcia and long-time resident in Moora, records her father’s memories of the town in earlier days. “*Aboriginal people,*” she writes, “*used to camp in areas scattered around town.*” She makes mention of the many “*water holes*” and “*wells*” to be found in various parts of the town which were “*significant spots remembered by Edward Headland when he was a young lad.*” Family names such as Spratt, Narrier, Anderson, Headland,



Yappo, Warrell, Wyatt and Boota are old Aboriginal families mentioned by Headland who are worthy of inclusion amongst the pioneers of the Moora District (Headland 1995: 63-75).<sup>36</sup>

One of the best known of these early pioneers was Alex (Alec) Narrier, uncle to Phyllis Mippy, who like his brother Frank had been brought up in the New Norcia boys' institution. While Frank Narrier was acting as camp policeman at the Moore River Settlement, Alex remained in the Walebing area, employed for the most part on the property belonging to the Lefroy family, situated some forty kilometres to the north of New Norcia.<sup>37</sup> In the following excerpt from her book, Headland presents her father's memory of the late Alex Narrier:

*Alex Narrier known to the Aborigines as "Grey Horse" come [sic] from a family of Narriers who date back to the early 1840's. The Narrier name changed over the years from Tagliel - Narea - Narrier. Alex and his brother Frank became respected elders in their community. Frank was a black tracker assisting the police, but Alex had other interests.*

After explaining how Alex had a love for grey horses, two of which he used to enter in local race meetings, Headland concludes her account with a brief description of his later years:

*Alex worked around the Walebing area for many, many years. He had a large family from three marriages. Alex and his third wife Lena retired to live in Moora, they lived in Clarke Street until his death and Lena and her children then moved to a house in Melbourne Street until she retired to live in Perth (Headland 1995: 65).*

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<sup>36</sup> These family names, with the exception of the last mentioned, are also to be found in the old New Norcia records. See Green & Tilbrook (1989).

<sup>37</sup> I often spoke with Alex (Alec) Narrier in New Norcia in the 1950's and 60's. It was said at New Norcia that Alex was aware that he could easily "pass for a white man," but that he was resolved to "stick to his own people," as he once put it. According to the records he was "Born 1887 to Joseph Clinch and Maggy Pural (sic)," Joseph and Maggy both being Aboriginal (Green & Tilbrook 1989: 12). Alex died in 1967.

Although Alex Narrier and his contemporaries may have felt at home in the Victoria Plains, they nevertheless had much to suffer from racial discrimination and intolerance. Some elements of the region's white population wanted to see the Aboriginal community removed from Moora altogether. Things came to a head in 1916 when, under pressure from some of the townsfolk, the Department gazetted a camping reserve at Karramarra Well, about eight km. to the west of Moora. The Aboriginal people refused to go and listed their objections in a letter to the Department (Haebich 1988: 144). Although initially there was official conflict over the proposal to set aside Karramarra as a proposed reserve, the place had for some time been a "de facto" camping site for a number of Aborigines. Voicing her father's personal memories, Headland records that Karramarra Wells was the place where the Aborigines had been directed to camp. She continues:

*The Aboriginal people weren't happy with the situation [and] many of them preferred to live closer to town because they had further to go for work, food and medical. Whilst living at Karramarra, William Headland, the eldest of the Headland family, was born in 1911 (Headland 1995: 10).*

In regard to the Moora town camp, Haebich records that in the year 1922 the Department received complaints from both police and townspeople about the lack of hygiene in the camp. They also complained about the degree of feuding that went on amongst the families. As to the latter complaint, it might have been pointed out that inter-family tensions and rivalries were not unknown in the wider society and were probably neither more nor less common in Moora than in any other Aboriginal town community.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> During the 1980's, Mr. Mippy's services were sometimes enlisted by the Moora constabulary in an effort to settle disagreements between local families.

The complaints levelled against the inhabitants of the town camp in 1922 had almost immediate results. According to Haebich:

The Moora reserve was then cancelled and Aborigines still working in the district were directed to camp at the reserve at Karramarra Wells, several kilometres from Moora. Some families subsequently moved to a public reserve at Walebing, a little closer to town, while others moved across to the Northam district (Haebich 1988: 233).

The centre at Walebing,<sup>39</sup> 23 km. to the southeast of Moora, together with a smaller camp at Koojan, 20 km. to the south, had long been in existence and had probably been traditional camping sites for the Yuat people long before white settlement. The transfer of some families to Walebing, in particular, signalled a renewed importance for that centre after the closure of the Moora camp. It is desirable, therefore, to cast a glance at what has been written of the history of these alternative centres.

Salvado's census of 1858 listed 59 Aboriginal people as belonging to Walebing, an area which Laurie (1995:7) describes as having been "an important camping and burial site." The author further asserts that "most of the locals agreed that there were 'hundreds' in the general area." Haebich (1988: 290) agrees, stating that "Aborigines first began camping there on a permanent basis after the break-up of the Moora camp in the early 1920's." Laurie continues her description of the camp at Walebing and another to the west of it which was called "Karra":

There were a substantial number of Aborigines living in the Walebing area when Phil Sandland arrived in 1908. Quite a few worked at 'Walebing' and others took seasonal jobs crutching, shearing and droving, or went hunting for game. Many of these men and women (the latter generally working as domestic servants) were valued workers, as was Charlie Kelly, who

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<sup>39</sup> Or "Wilbing," as Salvado spells it; See Green & Tilbrook (1989: 209).

married Mary Clinch. The Kellys, who lived in the Miling area, were a well-respected couple. Another was Paul Peramino who, like Kelly, was brought up at New Norcia. The Aborigines who lived west of Walebing were known as 'Karra' men. Karra Hill was just behind the 'Burrabidjy' homestead, but the people took their name from the Karra soak. This was a small waterhole nearby where initiation ceremonies were held for young boys entering their manhood. However, the practice of their customs had already started to dwindle when Phil Sandland arrived, ie. in 1908 (Laurie 1995: 118).

The evidence suggests that Lefroy's property at Walebing had been the site of an Aboriginal camp long before the closing of the one at Moora. In recording her father's birth at Walebing, Headland takes pains to mention the presence there of a traditional burial site whose existence appears to have given added significance to the place. To her contemporaries, she writes, it was a "*special camping spot*" – a place where Yuat ancestors had lived and died:

*Ted Headland (Snr) was born on 20 July 1916 at Walebing on the Lefroy's property whilst his parents were employed there. The Walebing camps saw a vast number of Aborigines coming and going during these years. It is said that several graves are still to be found at this special camping spot. People were buried in places wherever the situation arose. Walebing reserve has a special interest to the Aboriginal people of Moora because many of their ancestors lived there (Headland 1995: 15).*

In 1930 Neville ordered the closing of the Walebing camp "as he was convinced that residents were harbouring escapees from Moore River." By 1932 he had his way and the remaining residents "were obliged to walk to Moore River" (Haebich 1988: 291). The prohibitions issued by the Aborigines' Department, however, had little long-term effect. Escapees from Moore River were still being reported at Walebing during the Depression years (Laurie 1995: 181). In 1936, Neville again had to declare the camping area at Walebing a prohibited area "in an effort to stop Aborigines there from harbouring female escapees in their

camps" (Haebich 1988: 313). What Neville and others in the Department failed to recognise was the importance of traditional camping places like Walebing to the Indigenous people of the area. Such places were sites which, for centuries and for untold generations of Yuat people, had seen the full cycle of life, from birth to death.

As noted in the previous chapter, the old camp at Walebing also held a special place in the memories of Mrs. Phyllis Mippy, as it had been home to many members of her own family. Whenever she absconded from the Moore River Settlement (which she did in the company of other young girls, on a number of occasions) she would head along the river and make straight for the Walebing camp. According to Phyllis, her father, Frank Narrier, was in no great hurry to apprehend the escapees, as *"all his people was there too in Walebing: 'ole Alec Narrier was there, that's 'is brother ... Oh, big mob of us,"* she remembered, *"Andersons, Indiches ... all shearing."*<sup>40</sup>

In spite of its popularity with the local Aborigines, the camp at Walebing was finally dismantled in the early 1950's and its community relocated. Most of the people began taking up residence on eight hectares of scrubby land, three km. south of the Moora townsite, which was officially gazetted as an Aboriginal Reserve on 16th. Jan. 1953. For twenty five years, until its closure, this camp was known as "the Moora Reserve" and during that time was to remain the only officially approved site of habitation for Moora's Aboriginal community.<sup>41</sup>

To the west of Walebing and 20 km. due south of Moora on the Bindoon Road was Koojan, another small congregation of Yuat families. Though Koojan is not mentioned in Salvado's population census of 1858,

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<sup>40</sup> Field interview, 1997. Frank was presumably pleased to have an excuse for visiting his relatives, but this did not deter him from punishing his daughter for absconding!

<sup>41</sup> Information provided by the Reserve Section, Dpt. of Land Administration, Perth.

the families there, continues Headland, were amongst “the earliest of Aborigines” in the district. In the following reference, Headland refers to this small Aboriginal settlement as “The Koojan Lot:”

*Koojan was a property owned by the Padburys in the 1890's. Many Aboriginal families lived in this area. Koojan was probably a busy little place in those days with the large homestead, Post office and school and a large number of employees ... Families such as the Ryders, McIntoshes and the Brockmans were camped at Koojan south of Moora (Headland 1995: 69).*

The Settlement at Moore River, situated 30 km. due south of Koojan and 20 km. to the southwest of New Norcia, has already been encountered, in the previous chapter, as the social context of young Edward's early life experience. Erickson (1971: 189) maintains that, having been set aside in 1916 as a new Reserve “to absorb natives from the overcrowded reserve at Moora” the Moore River Settlement served for over 30 years as a major centre of Indigenous population as well as a place of incarceration for children like Edward Mippy.<sup>42</sup> It continued as the official centre of government segregationist policy until its closure in 1949 and its re-institution as a mission for Indigenous children from all parts of W.A.

The Moore River Mission was finally closed in 1965. After my arrival in New Norcia in 1957, I found most Yuat families in the region to be located in one of two places of habitation – their original centre at the Benedictine Mission and the Town Reserve at Moora. At that time, the Aboriginal inhabitants at New Norcia, apart from the children resident in the two institutions, were housed in five monocrete bungalows situated to the north of the townsite. This small housing estate had been built by the Benedictine Community to house the remaining families still at the Mission. The dwellings were of a transitional type and were

designed to replace the twenty-two stone dwellings built exactly a hundred years earlier by Salvado to convert the nomads of the Yuat country to a settled European lifestyle. In 1957, five families by the name of Taylor, Willaway, Ryder, Drayton and Cooper were still resident there and all had employment at the Mission. These were old local families whose names are prominent in New Norcia's historical records.<sup>43</sup> I remember other seasonal employees coming and going during the 50's and 60's while members

of old local families, such as Jackamarra, Spratt, Indich, Yappo, Anderson and many others, worked from time to time on the farm and in the flour mill and bakery. The children of these families were still being educated in the institutions for boys and girls established by Salvado, together with varying numbers of resident boys and girls from other parts of the Southwest, some placed there by their parents and others as wards of the State.

With the closure of the children's residential schools in 1974 and the departure of most of its Indigenous families, New Norcia virtually lost its former missionary character. While only a few Aboriginal people remained living at New Norcia, a wish to maintain links with the old Benedictine Mission and its community was expressed by several former residents. In 1996 a large convocation of Aboriginal people with ties to the area travelled from Moora and other centres to help celebrate the 150th. anniversary of New Norcia's foundation. In 1998, through the initiative of a group of Yuat people, the "Bwuradjin Yuat Aboriginal Corporation" was formally registered with the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations. This representative body, with over 30 financial members,

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<sup>42</sup> Re the origins of the Moore River Settlement, see also Haebich (1988: 165).

<sup>43</sup> See Green & Tilbrook (1989).

has the permanent use of premises at New Norcia <sup>44</sup> and is open to membership, not only by individuals representing local families but by all people who wish to preserve their connection with New Norcia. <sup>45</sup>

#### MOORA AND THE YUAT COMMUNITY

This chapter has already described how, with the final closure of the old Walebing Reserve in the 1950's, Aboriginal people began settling at a site which came to be known as the Moora Aboriginal Reserve. Situated to the southeast of Moora township, the Reserve was officially gazetted in 1953. From the beginning, conditions in the camp were sub-standard. Once described by Community Welfare officers as "disgusting and deplorable" (Headland 1995: 12), the camp was lacking in basic amenities and received little improvement during the twenty-five years of its existence. Headland re-visits the history of the Reserve through the recollections of her father, Mr. Ted Headland, a contemporary of Mr. Mippy's and one of the town's senior Indigenous Elders. She speaks briefly of the Moora Reserve and of the town's earlier Aboriginal housing areas.

*The local farmers were dependent on Aboriginal labour in many cases and therefore weren't keen to totally remove the Aborigines from the town altogether, but instead they demanded that the Aborigines be forced to camp together at sites set aside specifically for this purpose. The Government complied with their demands and hence town reserves were gazetted around the country. Apart from the Karramarra Wells*

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<sup>44</sup> i.e., the former St. Mary's Aboriginal Boys' Orphanage.

<sup>45</sup> The Corporation holds regular meetings and a number of reunions have been organised. On 1st. October, 2000, for example, the Corporation organised a gathering of over two hundred Aboriginal past pupils who took part in a service at the old mission cemetery. A bronze plaque was erected to commemorate the hundreds of Yuat people who were buried there from 1847 to the present day.



*reserve there was the town reserve No 23666, south of Moora town site, at least three kilometres along the hillside of the present hot-rod track. The Moora reserve would have been much more suitable than the Karramarra Wells and Walebing reserves because of the closeness of the town and facilities that they were able to use (Headland 1995:11).*

From 1944 onwards, Aborigines had become eligible for full citizenship rights under certain strict conditions, but it was not until the 1960's that they received the right to vote in elections and to drink alcohol. "In 1963," Laurie reminds us, "the section of the 1905 legislation which made the Commissioner for Native Welfare the legal guardian of Aboriginal children was repealed. Up until that time," she continues, "he could still legally remove them from their families if he wished" (Laurie 1995: 258).

In 1965, there were signs of a general change of attitude towards Aboriginal people within the wider community.<sup>46</sup> In that year, Laurie continues, "the Moora Shire Council approved the erection of the first of several 'proposed timber framed transitional homes' for an Aboriginal family. This was erected on Lot 139 off Clarke Street." Reflecting a local Aboriginal view of this pilot program, Headland writes that "*progress was made when the department of Community Welfare built four houses in Clarke Street Moora for Aboriginal people to shift from the reserve. People were chosen to make this big move from transitional style housing to conventional .*"

<sup>47</sup> The author hastens to add that the Clarke Street accommodation was itself considered transitional. "These houses," she continues, "*were a stepping stone from the native reserve and then when it became appropriate for these people to shift to town, they made a further and final move*" (Headland

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<sup>46</sup> As the result of a national Referendum, the Commonwealth government enacted legislation in 1967 to enable it to assume full control of Aboriginal Affairs in Australia.

<sup>47</sup> Although she mentions the names of those selected (i.e., three families and one individual), the author does not give reasons for the choice.

1995: 15, 16). In reference to this final move, Laurie quotes the then Moora Shire Clerk, Neil Warne, as follows:

In later years the State Housing Commission (SHC) increased its stock of standard residences in Moora and Aboriginal people who met the necessary criteria were able to apply for occupation of these. In 1978, following close negotiations and with the support and cooperation of the Moora Shire Council the Aboriginal reserve east of Moora and the Clarke Street 'transitional homes settlement' were closed and all buildings on them demolished. All residents of the two areas were re-housed in new SHC/Aboriginal housing homes in Moora which had been built on sites jointly approved by the Housing Commission and the Council. This was the end of an era – but one which provided the potential for a new beginning for the Aboriginal families who moved into the town (Laurie 1995: 258).

During the 1970's and 80's, a degree of racial tension and other social problems were showing themselves within the Moora township. Both the Moora Community Advancement Group and the town's Aboriginal Elders accordingly saw the need for the establishment of programs for youth activities and more recreational facilities for the adult members of the Aboriginal community. According to Laurie, "a partial solution to the problem was found in 1980, when an Aboriginal community (progress) centre was opened at the north end of Padbury Street." Referring to the Yuat Community's artifacts workshop,<sup>48</sup> Laurie adds that "a display of Yuat arts and crafts was subsequently set up in this building and offered for sale." These initiatives, she continues, plus "increased work prospects in the 1980's and 1990's," have contributed to a greater degree of social tolerance (Laurie 1995: 260, 263).

It is perhaps surprising that neither Laurie nor Headland makes any direct reference to the role of Mr. Mippy in establishing the Yuat arts and crafts project. Headland, however, was well aware of his

involvement with the project and makes specific reference to the significance of the latter to the town's Indigenous community:

*One particular group in Moora is the Yuat Artifact group, who will benefit with new facilities at the near completed premises of the Central Midlands Aboriginal Progress Association to promote their artifacts and crafts which will be made on the spot in town. This will give the Aborigines their pride, build up their self esteem and bring better relationship between the wider community (Headland 1995: 20).*

In a section of her work which describes "Moora elder Edward 'Ned' Mippy" as a "recipient of the Advance Australia Award for his many years of service to the Aboriginal community," Headland sets out, in general terms, some of the achievements for which Mr. Mippy received official recognition. These include, at least implicitly, his role in establishing the Yuat Artefacts group and its "new facilities" (Headland 1995: 53).

Together with the other sources cited in the course of this chapter, the independent voices of Headland and Laurie, presenting views from both sides of the cultural spectrum, have helped extend the narrative of the nature and origin of the people amongst whom Edward and Phyllis Mippy came to live, work and raise their family. Having addressed some perspectives as to the post-contact history of the Yuat and their continuing identity as a people despite their historical diversity of locations, we turn now to consider constructions of Aboriginality within their community.

#### *ABORIGINALITY AND THE MOORA COMMUNITY*

If an understanding of Mr. Mippy's concept of Aboriginality requires some comprehension of his socio-historical context, the

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<sup>48</sup> See the following chapter for a description of the Community Development program

following question is also relevant to the present enquiry. How, from a historical perspective, was the concept of Aboriginality constructed within the rural community of Moora? In particular, how was it perceived and expressed during the life of Mr. Mippy? I proceed to address these questions in the light of some perceptions of cultural dynamics within Moora's Indigenous community in the early 1950's and in the years following.

Like Mr. Mippy himself, most of the older individuals amongst Moora's inhabitants had been subject to a long history of cultural and social upheaval. Whether as inmates of institutions such as the New Norcia Mission, the Moore River Settlement, or as children growing up in the marginal environment of town reserves, all had seen the great change in traditional practices which previously had been central to Aboriginal life. Cowlshaw (1988: 91), reflecting her experience of rural communities in New South Wales, indicates that not all of this deprivation can be attributed to "European interference or attempt at suppression." She maintains that "in an embattled situation, traditional sentiments, ideas and practices" become "the focus of conflicts." She continues to speak in general terms about the dynamics of cultural trauma and change in Aboriginal communities, suggesting that Elders could sometimes be as unwilling to impart traditional teaching as children were to accept it:

In some situations the old people refused to teach the younger ones either the specific esoteric knowledge of ritual and religion or the kinship rules and language. In some cases the younger people refused to learn them (Cowlshaw 1988: 91).

As children in institutions and missions such as New Norcia, many of Moora's Indigenous parents had been taught to turn away from their

own culture and conform to the ways of the white people. They had been warned not to “go back to the bush,” to forget about their traditional language and to “learn to speak properly.”<sup>49</sup> Such lessons had been well learned. As a result, a generation of children had grown up, not only ignorant of Indigenous beliefs, rules and language but with attitudes of shame and denial in relation to Indigenous knowledge in general. As parents in their turn, many had passed these attitudes on to their own children. I know of one Indigenous mother at New Norcia, for instance, who used to say to her children: *“marry white; don’t go backwards!”*

Mr. Mippy was aware that the cultural negativity that existed throughout Nyoongar society was also a problem within his own community. When, in 1985, he erected two traditional *maya-maya*, or Yuat-style huts, in the grounds of the Moora Catholic Church, I heard him spoken to by one of the local Elders. *“You are trying to take us back to the old days,”* she said ... *I’d like to put a match to them.”* One year later, at a meeting of the St. Joseph’s School Board, two Aboriginal observers expressed disapproval of the Indigenous language and cultural program being sponsored at the school by Mr. Mippy. In the presence of the board members, they informed Mr. Mippy and myself that we were *“filling the children’s heads with rubbish.”*

Attitudes of cultural shame, ambivalence and denial, exemplified by these anecdotes, were still evident in the lives of many Aboriginal adults in the town of Moora during the early 1980’s. It should be noted that such attitudes, while they have by no means entirely disappeared, have considerably diminished as a result of influences such as that of Mr. Edward Mippy. They are a consequence, not only of the denigration of

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<sup>49</sup> These are expressions used by missionaries which I myself heard at New Norcia in the 1960’s.

Aboriginality which people experienced in the former missions and settlements, but of the prejudice and discrimination which is still being experienced in everyday social intercourse.

Dispositions of cultural inferiority on the part of adults are readily picked up by children. Mr. Mippy often lamented that the enthusiasm for cultural learning exhibited by them at primary school age almost invariably diminished as the children approached adolescence and came under the influence of peer pressure at school and within the wider community. Even the children of Edward and Phyllis were not insulated from these influences and some of them later regretted not taking advantage of the opportunities they had, during their youth, of absorbing more of their father's culture. Daphne, one of the eldest, wrote of her early home experience. *"As we grew up,"* she recalled, *"I remember how Dad used to speak his traditional language, tell stories about the old days, his culture and Dreamtime stories."* Continuing, she admitted to some feelings of regret in regard to missed opportunities for cultural learning:

*At that time I was only young and did not let it all sink in, but now I look back and I am sad because I didn't write them down to pass on (McBrearty 1998).*

Opposition to the cultural shame which he observed within his society was a constant factor in Mr. Mippy's educational programs and his instruction to the children often reflected this concern. As he once expressed it:

*'Koorndany' is 'shame'... that's the word the Aboriginal doesn't like ... 'Koorndany!' When an Aboriginal says 'kooandany,' there's no ways you can get 'im to move (State Affair 8 Nov. 1985).*

Cultural attitudes such as these, however, were not universal. Within the community at large, a range of views existed towards what

were perceived as traditional forms of knowledge. The hostility and indifference encountered in some quarters was balanced by overt support in others. Mr. Mippy, moreover, saw hope for the future in new cultural attitudes such as those he was sponsoring in the local schools. We have already seen how, when asked by an interviewer whether “there was a lot of shame in the community,” he replied with optimism:

*Well, not now that we're gettin' 'em ... at that convent school. We're gettin' 'em there goin'. I'd like to get 'em at the state school, mainly the high school (State Affair 8 Nov. 1985).*

In spite of the “internal conflict” which is an inevitable consequence of the processes of “constructing, reconstructing, and dismantling cultural determinants,” Cowlshaw (1988: 90, 92) argues that differentiation and reaction within cultural boundaries can operate for Aboriginal people as a “positive force” in “the creation of their own identity.”

If, as the author suggests, culture is a “creative response to the conditions of existence,” it follows that even “defiant reaction to rejection” in the form of what she calls “oppositional culture,” helps define the boundaries between cultural groups (Cowlshaw 1988: 89, 97). Examples of oppositional culture could be drawn from many Indigenous communities in settled areas. Excessive drinking, the prevalence of petty crime amongst the youth, the prestige of being gaoled, the “rorting” of unemployment benefits – all these could be mentioned as examples of the reactions of Aboriginal people to “white” cultural practices.

In addition to cultural changes brought about by socio-political and economic pressures, Cowlshaw (1988: 92) sees more positive influences at work. She points to the “subtle and pervasive understandings” of the Indigenous society of earlier times that can continued to flourish in such communities. In her view, the uniqueness of family relationships,

concepts of kinship and sharing and methods of socialising children are “the most widely recognised” examples of continuing traditional values that help preserve and reinforce the cultural boundaries of Aboriginality within the wider rural society.

Macdonald, on the other hand, is critical of the emphasis placed by Cowlshaw and Morris (1989) on the role of social repression in the construction of Aboriginal identities, arguing for a somewhat different understanding of the question. For Macdonald, Aboriginality is not a bundle of traditions handed down from one generation to another. Nor is it in the nature of a “continuum,” as Berndt (1963: 386) proposed, ranging from “traditionally oriented” lifestyles to those which are “to all intents and purposes European” and destined over time, in Australia’s settled areas, to become progressively less meaningful in Aboriginal terms. Moreover, it cannot be explained, as Cowlshaw would have it, as a manifestation of social resistance – a construction of colonialism. In Macdonald’s perspective, it is “the product of people’s interactions with each other and their environments.” It is a dynamic process, based in change which “happens everywhere as a normal part of cultural process.” In her view, Indigenous lifeways involve a continuing dialectic between change and flux on the one hand and the “higher order structures of morality, value orientation and social relatedness that are enduring ...” (Macdonald 2001: 182, 188).

For his part, Mr. Mippy was unaware of the academic discourse surrounding his cultural understandings. However, social and environmental interaction of the kind envisaged by Macdonald was an integral element of his cultural strategy. Fully committed to the preservation and transmission of his traditional culture as he saw it, he nevertheless saw the value, both for himself and for others, of “*mingling with the people,*” or “*going with the crowd,*” as he put it (*State Affair* 8 Nov.



1985), in serving the interests of personal, social and cultural adaptation and survival. When speaking to youth, he advocated the values of the wider community, encouraging them to adopt habits of industry, reliability and regularity in the work-place. Realising the important role of sport in building Indigenous self-esteem and in assisting the process of reconciliation, he helped organise Aboriginal football teams and actively supported their involvement in district competitions. While he himself had been denied "*the opportunity of learning*" (*State Affair* 8 Nov. 1985), he promoted higher education, urging teachers, when the opportunity arose, to cater for the special needs of Aboriginal children in the classroom.

The task of conforming to the dominant society in a way that does not betray one's own inheritance and cultural origins is a challenge constantly held out to all Indigenous peoples who have suffered the social trauma resulting from colonial dispossession. Mr. Mippy well knew the cross-cultural tensions which beset an Aboriginal striving to achieve a place in the white man's world while at the same time hanging on to his perceived cultural heritage. It was, however, a challenge he consciously met and negotiated. As a man of his time, his social and cultural profile differing little from that of his peers, Mr. Mippy, like most of his contemporaries, was required to live in two worlds – the world of the wider society and the world of cultural values passed down by Elders. The task was not an easy one, requiring constant adjustment and compromise. But, as the reader could observe throughout the course of this study, it was one in which he was eminently successful.

*THE WORLD OF EDWARD MIPPY*

The aim of this section has been to present, from a social and historical perspective, a credible picture of the local community adopted by Mr. Mippy, amongst whom he raised his family and developed his cultural initiatives and in the context of which his life was both developed and reflected. From my own experience <sup>50</sup> the archival records of New Norcia and the genealogical dictionary compiled by Green & Tilbrook (1989) have been used in recent times by individual members of the contemporary Moora community as a guide in tracing dates and other details of their genealogical and family histories. Likewise, the records of the Moore River Native Settlement <sup>51</sup> have been useful here, especially in yielding information about the genealogy of the Narrier family. In tracing the direct line of descent of Phyllis Mippy from her Yuat forebears, the available archival and literary sources have provided an unbroken thread of Yuat history from 1858 to the present day. They offer a perspective of the Yuat as a continuing entity and may be seen as an independent witness to their claimed identity as a people.

While the traceability of ancestry may have a vital bearing on the search for individual or family origins, the process of verification through genealogy has not been the focus of this chapter. Its purpose has not been to valorise the identity of the present day Moora community or to prove its genealogical continuity with mid-nineteenth century Yuat forebears. My experience suggests that Aboriginal people in general neither need nor seek self-vindication through an appeal to the literary record. Already sufficiently self-aware and reflexive, the Yuat society in particular seems assured of its social and cultural identity. Interacting as I did, on a regular basis, with the families of the Moora and New Norcia area over a fifteen year period, I was impressed

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<sup>50</sup> As a teacher with Moora TAFE, 1990-1995.

<sup>51</sup> MRNS records are now held by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs,

with their strong sense of oral family history and found that individual members, apart perhaps from seeking the details of family lineage <sup>52</sup> from the available records, felt little need to prove anything about their regional ancestry. Mr. Mippy's concept of personal and social identity is of the utmost importance in this regard. He was widely known throughout the Indigenous southwest and was personally acquainted with most of its leading families. Though admittedly not a Yuat by right of birth, he considered himself part of that community through his marital and family connections as well as through his life-long residence in and involvement with the region. As one of the Moora community's respected elders, he knew the family history of every long-term resident in town and was in no doubt as to who "belonged" to the region and who did not.

One day in 1991, during a break in activities in the "Yuat Artefacts" workshop, I took the opportunity of putting some questions to Mr. Mippy and a few of his co-workers including Mr. Fred Mogridge, who at the time was floor supervisor at the workshop. I asked the group whether they could formulate a list of the family names which might be regarded as Indigenous to the local area. They did so, and showed no hesitation in accepting some family names while rejecting others. Though Mr. Mippy insisted that their list was incomplete, it consisted of a total of no fewer than forty-three families, all of which were said to have a historical connection with the Yuat area. In her published historical account (1995) June Headland, Mr. Mippy's younger contemporary, has included many of these same names in her list of local Indigenous families. In addition to her references to Mr. Mippy, she has

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<sup>52</sup> While employed as a lecturer with Moora TAFE (1991-1995), I was often able to help Aboriginal students in reconstructing their individual "family tree."

included brief histories of a number of these families and individuals, both living and deceased.

The historical background of Mr. Mippy's chosen community has so far been examined from a largely non-Indigenous perspective. It should not be allowed to conclude, however, without a comment from within the community itself. The following words, from the pen of Moora's Indigenous historian, June Headland, not only affirm the origins, identity and demography of the Yuat, but reflect an awareness of the unique relationship of the people with their country:

*The tribal name for the Nyoongars around Moora area is called 'Yuat'... The Aboriginal people lived and roamed around the area of the Moora District [including the] populated areas of Berkshire, Walebing and Dandaragan. The families that live in Moora today are from Ancestors which drifted from Dandaragan, Mogumber and New Norcia ... The Yuat people today remember their origins and traditions for the land was first given to them. The land is their mother and they still belong to her (Headland 1995: 8).*

Besides providing a synopsis of the Yuat people's historical background, this chapter has considered the significance of the Moora community in the life of Mr. Mippy and the social interaction so important in the construction of regional identity. It has examined the dynamics of Aboriginality in the Moora district and has related it to the wider academic discourse of Aboriginal ethnography in regional Australia, addressing the question of the nature of cultural awareness, transformation and continuity in settled areas. The understandings thus gained provide a necessary context for the following chapters which document the practical ways in which Mr. Mippy set out to implement his vision of cultural education.

## CHAPTER 4

### **YUAT ARTEFACTS PROJECT: GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT: 1985-1995 <sup>1</sup>**

The previous chapter sought to offer a range of perspectives intended to broaden our understanding of Mr. Mippy's life and times and to clarify the legacy of his ideas. This chapter and the chapters following are designed to extend this process. In further presenting his perspectives, they focus on the practical ways in which his initiatives were implemented, offering a deeper understanding of his cultural knowledge and of the vision which inspired his work. In so doing, the thesis extends its ethno-biographical purpose, presenting its subject as a "locus" of convergence in which the genres of biography and ethnography intersect. With Edward Mippy serving as a kind of "window" on his world, the reader is enabled to gain a more personal, experience-near perspective of the Indigenous society to which he belonged and which is today experiencing the results of his legacy.

The major material project envisioned by Mr. Mippy during the final decade of his life was a program of community development which aimed at providing both employment and cultural education in the field of Indigenous arts and crafts. This project culminated in the formation of

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<sup>1</sup> This present chapter is an authorial account of a major community cultural project undertaken by Mr. Mippy and his community. It is a testimonial narrative (cf. Denzin 1997: 137) which connects my experience of working with Mr. Mippy, as participant observer, collaborator and coordinator, with what I was able to learn from him in the course of the project. It therefore places me openly in the text, attesting the unity of my

what came to be known as the Yuat Artefacts Group. Its genesis and development is traced through the following examination of the communal interaction which took place, from 1984 onwards, within the social, institutional and organisational framework of the town of Moora.

*"ME AND 'IM GOES TOGETHER:" A SHARED VISION*

In 1984 the Catholic parish of Moora had begun to experience serious internal tensions and divisions, not the least of which was a growing hiatus between its Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. As Moora's newly-appointed parish priest, I was determined from the outset to engage in dialogue with the local Indigenous community and to establish practical forms of relationship aimed at improving its material and spiritual welfare. Many years experience as a member of the Benedictine community at New Norcia had already given me some experience in working with and for Aboriginal people. Many amongst the Moora community had spent their childhood in New Norcia's institutions and I had known some of them as children. I was confident therefore of finding means that would assist me in identifying and addressing the existential problems in their local community.

The significant improvement which began almost immediately in terms of the relationship between the Church in Moora and the Aboriginal community was due in no small measure to the influence of Mr. Mippy. Our shared vision and expectations and the extraordinary empathy which existed between the two of us from the very beginning constituted a fruitful relationship which was to deepen during the years

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personal and ethnographic self (Lincoln & Denzin 2000: 1047-51) and enabling me to tell of events as I experienced them.

to come. With the benefit of hindsight, the virtual symbiosis which arose between Mr. Mippy and myself appears to me now as an important key to the ultimate outcome of our shared activity. Neither one of us acting alone, without the presence of the other, could have worked as effectively in the twin areas of cultural and social development.

“I’d be no good without you *Koorda*,<sup>2</sup> and you’d be no good without me.” These words of mine, though originally uttered in a light hearted moment, were adopted and often repeated by both of us during those years as a reminder and a reflection of our mutual interdependence. Why did Mr. Mippy see the need for such a partnership? In venturing to answer this question, I call on my experience, both in Moora and in the mission at Kalumburu,<sup>3</sup> that one of the drawbacks encountered by an Aboriginal Elder, who seeks directions or signals new initiatives for the benefit of his own people, is that he is at times too close to his own problems. Almost inevitably, he is hampered by alliances within his own extended family and by their sometimes problematic experiences. Lacking the necessary image of unaligned neutrality, a person in Mr. Mippy’s position can rarely stand apart from the tensions and family problems which often form part of the scene within a local community. Such was the case, I believe, with Edward Mippy. What he derived from his association with me, as a non-Aboriginal person and a representative of the Church, was a perceived status of neutrality. As an “outsider” in terms of the social dynamics of the Aboriginal society of Moora I could well be seen as a person who was positioned outside Mr. Mippy’s community and therefore largely unencumbered by local tensions or controversy.

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<sup>2</sup> *Koorda*: a Nyoongar word for “friend” or “mate.”

<sup>3</sup> I had overall responsibility for this Kimberley mission from 1971 to 1980.

In the context of the wider, non-Aboriginal, town community I was aware of similar advantages. Spiritual, social and welfare activities are generally expected of the local clergyman. The “do-gooder” label, often applied to socially committed lay people, becomes a more acceptable tag of “normal pastoral ministry” for a priest acting within the ecclesial context, even in the view of many who might otherwise have exhibited racist attitudes. If Mr. Mippy needed me, I also needed him, not only as a focus of support from within his own community but as a necessary source of knowledge and authority. His was the cultural knowledge on which I drew; his was the authority, the prestige, the presence, which enabled me to represent the interests of the Yuat community to other Aboriginal people and to the world at large.

For such reasons as these, each of us recognised both the need and the advantage of the other’s involvement. The already quoted, oft-exchanged remark, “I’d be no good without you,” was to my mind an accepted verity of our mutual inter-dependence. Mr. Mippy gave further expression to this shared understanding in the following excerpt from an interview he gave on Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Radio, not long before his death:

*Don’t forget Father Rooney. He fought all the way through for the Nyoongars. Mention ‘im, if you put it in the papers ... Mention ‘im, ‘cause me and ‘im goes together (Green 1991).*

Although I had made Mr. Mippy’s acquaintance some years earlier it was not until my arrival in Moora as resident parish priest that our working relationship began. In those early days, I had no inkling of the path our association would eventually take nor of the part it would play in our attempts to address the social and spiritual problems confronting the Moora Aboriginal Community. What I did perceive was that, to be effective, any local program of community improvement would



necessitate a personal participation in the everyday life of the people on the part of those managing the process. As Marshall & Rossman (1995: 4) have since indicated, an authentic program of community research and development is one which “values and seeks to discover participants’ perspectives on their worlds, views inquiry as an interactive process between the researcher and the participants ... and relies on people’s words and observable behaviour as the primary data.” In his handbook for action research practitioners, Stringer (1996: 35) gives similar advice. He says that in order to address the social and cultural situation of a local community it is necessary to “engage people directly in formulating solutions to problems (confronted) in their community and organisational lives.”

I hasten to emphasise that in 1984 and the years immediately following, I was unable to draw on any formal experience in the area of community research and development, nor did Mr. Mippy and I have any useful model which could have served as a guide in designing a qualitative project. Marshall and Rossman (1995: ix) have since complained that, even in 1989 (the date of the first edition of their handbook), there were “few useful, comprehensive texts” to guide the process of developing qualitative enquiry. It is all the more surprising to me that the informal strategy of social development that was initiated in Moora by Edward Mippy and myself should have followed a pattern comparable to the collaborative methods now being advocated.

By instinct, then, rather than by design, Mr. Mippy and I set out to help the Yuat people to engage in a process of investigating their own problems and needs. It seemed advisable at that time to begin by creating an effective means of social interaction and communication. In setting up such a process, the collaboration of Mr. Mippy was to prove invaluable.

*"SIT DOWN... 'N TALK TO US:" SEEKING A FORUM OF  
COMMUNICATION*

In order to get people *"to see eye-to-eye with us,"* as he once put it, Edward Mippy saw the need for setting up a forum of communication that was both informal and appropriate to all stakeholders. However, a suitable opportunity for such social interaction would have to be found. People did assemble socially in Moora, sometimes in very large numbers, in the aftermath of funerals, at important local football matches, or in private homes for extended family celebrations or all-night card games. Darts competitions at the local hotel were always well attended, while, during the course of the day, informal groups gathered in the small park around the town clock. The nearby Totalisator Agency Board (TAB) centre had its regular punters, from the Aboriginal as well as the wider community. Some social events were gender specific or family orientated, while others were sometimes marred by disputes or disturbances occasioned by excessive drinking. It seemed to me, therefore, that the kind of social interaction we were looking for would have to be created.

As a strict teetotaler, Mr. Mippy had long regarded alcohol as a major problem amongst his people. It is not surprising, then, that he never attended card games and was never seen in the hotel for the popular darts competitions. For the same reason, when he attended funeral "wakes," he would invariably leave soon after alcohol was produced. Anyone taking a drink in his presence ran the risk of receiving a withering glance. His one admitted weakness was betting on the horses and he was frequently to be seen at the local TAB, scanning the racing form and placing bets. His disapproval of alcohol, however, was lifelong and unconditional. Whatever venue of social interaction was to

be finally agreed upon and adopted for the Yuat community, one thing was certain. If it were to involve my friend Mr. Mippy, it would have to be alcohol-free.

The Central Midlands Aboriginal Progress Association (CMAPA), of which Mr. Mippy had previously been a leading member, was one forum in which issues confronting the local community were discussed. However, these meetings were not always well attended and did not seem to constitute a sufficiently representative cross-section of the local population. Meanwhile, my continuing association with Mr. Mippy and other Elders was providing me with a better insight into some of the problems confronting the Moora Community. Mr. Mippy himself, through his expressed concerns, clearly felt a responsibility for social issues but the absence of any effective group dynamic within the community itself made it difficult for anyone to address problems or resolve conflicts as they arose. It was too often left to outside authorities to define problems, formulate solutions or initiate projects.

In his chapter "Setting the Stage," Stringer (1996: 430) suggests that "programs and projects begun on the basis of the decisions and definitions of authority figures have a high probability of failure." His further assertion that such programs are only likely "to generate resistance" reflects a viewpoint expressed by Mr. Mippy, who often criticised the way in which local authorities such as the police, the Shire, school authorities and the Department of Community Welfare (DCW) had interacted with his community in the past. In the following ABC Radio interview, already quoted, Mr. Mippy alluded to the failure of the law of the "*white people*," as administered through various government agencies, to come to grips with the laws and customs of Aboriginal society, particularly in its application to the young:

*You see we can't - well I can't, put it that way - get to white people ... to see eye to eye with us. See what I mean? I'd like 'em to sit down 'n get out under a tree, not in these offices ... 'n talk to us. See what I mean? You've gotta know one another ... You've gotta know what you're talking about. I still say that our laws are stricter, 'cause I've seen it while I was up in Dardadjin ... (Green 1991).*

In expressing these sentiments, Mr. Mippy was lamenting one of the effects of the cultural gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies. Government agencies and departments had, in his view, displayed little understanding of Aboriginal society and its problems and therefore had often been ineffective in trying to address them.

My view at the time was that the establishment of a community-based focus of social interaction within the Aboriginal community would be of great assistance in helping to improve relationships and understandings between the Aboriginal people on the one hand and the institutions and agencies of the wider society on the other. I thought that other favourable outcomes might also be expected. Besides providing an opportunity for religious and spiritual renewal, such a forum could promote the exchange and formulation of ideas. It might also empower the community in taking control of its own destiny and enable it to identify particular problems and seek appropriate solutions.

I had already determined to hold a monthly religious service in the form of a Sunday Mass and I felt that this occasion could also be used to achieve these broader aims. The service would be held on a Sunday evening in the grounds of the Parish House at the Moora Catholic Church and would be open to all members of the Yuat community. This would be followed by an open and informal assembly in the context of an alcohol-free barbecue. When I put the idea to my friend, he readily agreed and volunteered to be of practical assistance and to encourage as

many townspeople as possible to attend. He was to prove as good as his word.

In order to prepare a venue for the proposed gathering, Mr. Mippy helped me to clear a small area surrounded by a patch of virgin bush which was part of the church property. It was a task to which he responded with enthusiasm partly because, as I believe, he saw in the venture an excellent opportunity to showcase some elements of his Indigenous culture. His first initiative was to construct two "*maya-maya*" (huts) in the traditional style which he said he had learned from his parents. To procure what was needed he gathered as many Nyoongar kids as he could find in his ancient utility and "went bush," returning with the necessary materials. The huts were quickly erected. They were about two metres in height; one roofed and clad with needles from the grass-tree,<sup>4</sup> and the other covered with paper bark. For several years to come, these huts were to provide the focus for our monthly campfire celebrations.

At first, not everyone in the Aboriginal community was happy with these public reminders of a past traditional style. One elderly woman told Mr. Mippy they were a "*shame*." She accused him of trying to take his people back to the old days ... "*I'd like to put a match to them*," she said. Such perceptions were not widely held however and within a short time the "*maya-maya*" structures had become an accepted feature of the town. Mr. Mippy was too single-minded to be daunted by the odd adverse opinion and persevered with his plan to set up an authentic looking venue. "*No one gives us an opportunity of telling about the bush*," he said. "*All these little things should be told to people*." (Mippy 1986)

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<sup>4</sup> Often called "blackboy."

The first “campfire Mass” took place on the evening of Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1984 and was attended by a dozen or so people. It was agreed by all present on that occasion that such gatherings should become a regular occurrence as they filled a spiritual need and would also provide a focus of popular communication. Furthermore, the church venue was seen to be neutral ground. It did not invade anyone’s social space and was free from any “political” or family associations. Campfire celebrations were held thereafter on each 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday during the summer months, and continued to be held until my departure from Moora four years later. They became hugely popular, sometimes attracting as many as seventy people, including children. Such numbers could never have been attracted to any overtly formal and structured gathering.

While Mr. Mippy was a baptised Christian and had been married in the Mogumber Settlement (Methodist) Church, he had never attended the Uniting Church in Moora and did not claim formal membership of that church. However he often stated his admiration for the Catholic Church which, at least in his estimation, had been pro-active in relieving the harsh lot of his people. *“I walk past my church to get to your church,”* he stated to me on more than one occasion.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of a wide cross section of local families augured well for the success of these celebrations, at all of which Mr. Mippy remained a central figure. On every second Sunday he would come to me for some petrol money and then set off into the bush in a utility loaded with youths, equipped with a couple of rifles. Over a four year period, he never once failed to return with a *yongka* (kangaroo) or *wetj* (emu), sometimes both, for the campfire after Mass. Returning from the hunt,

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<sup>5</sup> The town’s Uniting church lay on the route he took from his home to my church.

he and the boys would go to the home of one of the local women who would help by marinating the meat after cutting it into steaks. On other occasions he would cook the meat himself in the traditional way. He would singe the fur off the animal first before stuffing it with eucalyptus leaves and putting the whole carcass into a pre-heated hole in the ground lined with hot stones. Eaten with lashings of New Norcia bread, so well known to those who had spent their childhood days in the Mission, the bush tucker proved a great draw-card for these assemblies.

To anyone passing by the church grounds on those evenings, seeing the *maya-maya* huts and the smoke from the fire, hearing the happy laughter of the dozens of Nyoongar children chasing each other among the trees or painting their faces with ochre and putting on an impromptu corroboree, as they sometimes did, it might have seemed that the years had melted away and that there never had been an incursion of foreigners into this ancient land.

With the clarity of hindsight, one could say that, by the end of 1984, the Aboriginal people of Moora were on the brink of a significant cultural revival. This present chapter, as well as those following, serves to document the course of that revival and traces some of the effects of Mr. Mippy's influence. It is not argued that any Indigenous person ever expected a return to a pre-colonial model of society. That autochthonous world had gone forever – but I believe it was the Indigenous awareness and racial identity which emerged as a result of our work that ensured that things would never be quite the same again for the Yuat people of Moora

Mr. Mippy always welcomed the opportunity to “go bush” and take his *koorlangka* (young people) with him to learn the traditional skills of hunting and gathering. Besides the all-important kangaroo or emu, he and the kids would sometimes bring back to the campfire supplies of

yams such as the *kano* (underground tuber), *borna* (white bush onion) or *kwardany* (a red tuber) – bush tucker which even some of the older people found difficult to locate and identify. Behind the enjoyment and enthusiasm he showed in these outings, however, one could discern, as in the following quotation, a deeper motivation – his desire to pass on to the younger generation his legacy of traditional knowledge.

*I myself, I get out in the bush every chance I get. Every chance I get ... you'll find me chasin' 'roos or somethin' like that. I'm learning, learning as I go along about the bush, and these are the little things I'd like to tell the younger people, the people that don't know nothing about the bush. I'd like to go and walk in the bush, talk to them, tell them which is good to eat ... tell them what to look out for, how to walk, how to get through the bush, how to sneak on a 'roo without cracking a little stick ... (Mippy 1986).*

Apart from the socialising and the popular bush tucker, Mr. Mippy and the older Yuat people truly appreciated the spiritual nature of this monthly gathering and the eucharistic service celebrated in front of one of the *maya-maya* huts. Even the non-Catholics amongst them joined in the hymns, often accompanied by Mr. Mippy on his somewhat battered guitar. The hymns they enjoyed most were the ones some of them had sung as children at the old Moore River Settlement, such as “In the Sweet Bye and Bye,” or “Jesus is Calling.” Mr. Mippy’s favourite, “One Day at a Time,” was one which he sang in his unique Country and Western style, to the accompaniment of his own guitar. These hymns hardly ever failed to bring a tear to the eye of many present.

Besides establishing my credibility and “presence” as a committed pastoral facilitator, these popular gatherings provided a renewed sense of unity and common purpose which assisted in the emergence and formulation of agendas for community action. In relation to the various problems within the Moora context, a process of “looking and thinking” (Stringer 1996: 16) took place in this unstructured, informal setting over a



four-year period. I already knew what the problems were from the perspective of Mr. Mippy and a few other opinion leaders. In the longer term, what gradually emerged was the perception that discriminatory attitudes and practices on the part of the wider community lay at the heart of many of the problems faced by the people of Moora.

*"THE CORE OF IT IS THE COLOUR OF US!" DISCRIMINATORY  
ATTITUDES*

The Yuat people believed that they were often subject to discriminatory attitudes within the Moora community and that these could be a cause of inter-racial tension, division and inequality. *"The core of it,"* as Mr. Mippy once remarked during a television interview, *"is the colour of us!"* (Maher 1986). He himself deplored all forms of discrimination based on race or colour. He firmly believed in the fostering of inter-cultural relationships and the need to achieve reconciliation between the Aboriginal and wider communities. His life demonstrated a desire and a capacity to work effectively with non-Aboriginal people, while at the same time maintaining pride in his own Aboriginality. I have previously noted the pointed advice he gave to his own younger generation in this regard (*State Affair* 8 Nov. 1985).

Edward Mippy, though, had plenty of "axes to grind" in regard to the racial discrimination which occurred in the social and institutional life of the Moora community. His opinion of the education system in general and the local government schools in particular was far from favourable. Having experienced the educational problems of some of his own children and grandchildren, he had formed the view that

established school curricula had little place for Aboriginal perspectives. Neither school policies nor teachers' attitudes in general were, in his opinion, sufficiently oriented towards the needs and problems of Aboriginal students.

On the other hand, it was not only schools and their policies which came in for criticism. Mr. Mippy regarded parents as being ultimately responsible for the educational attitudes and behaviour of their children. When interviewed on ABC Regional Radio, he took the opportunity of directing the following severe criticism to those Aboriginal parents who were failing their children in the matter of discipline. He complained:

*Well ... my method is to leave the children alone for a while 'n 'ave a go at mum and dad. I've been to a lot of meetings, 'ere in Moora, 'n we're what we call 'bashin' our heads against a wall' - that's what I told 'em. While we're caring for those kids, mum and dad's not pullin' their weight. That's the truth. They're not pullin' their weight - they're just sitting 'ome (Green 1991).*

The Moora Shire came in for its share of criticism too. Elders accepted that the Shire had played a major part in 1974 in relocating people from the Town Reserve and that it had long been a major employer of Aboriginal people. The Shire, however, had never promoted Aboriginal participation in Council affairs and was even seen as an obstacle to Aboriginal interests in certain areas.

As Mr. Mippy saw it, the Shire had been guilty of discrimination in failing to recognise the work done by the old Aboriginal residents of Moora who had laboured so hard over the years in clearing land and doing other work for the local pastoralists. Some non-Aboriginal identities and pioneers amongst the local farmers had their names publicly inscribed on the Shire "honour roll," but, as Mr. Mippy complained, no Aboriginal name had ever been included amongst them. He expressed some wry amusement, however, at the Shire's action in

having the names of notable local pioneers inscribed in sections of the pavement outside the Shire office. *"See the way the 'Wadjalas' [white people] honour their pioneers?"* he would say to me. *"They put their names where everyone can walk on 'em!"* Up to the time of his death, he had made a number of representations to the Shire for a memorial to be erected in the town cemetery commemorating the deceased members of the local Aboriginal community. His efforts were unsuccessful. *"The only land-rights we'll ever get is that grave plot in the cemetery!"* was a humorous sally, more than once made in my hearing.

In regard to land rights, the Shire's opposition to the claims of the local Indigenous people was another cause of dissatisfaction. Land claims had been made in relation to the old Moora Aboriginal Reserve and to an Aboriginal town block, in Long Street, which had been reserved for pensioners' flats. As late as 1990, even after the Bourke Labor government had granted the Moora Aboriginal Progress Association a 99-year lease over the above reserves, opposition to land rights claims was still being expressed by the Shire Clerk.

An additional cause of discontent in the 1980's was the failure of the Council to provide sufficient recreational and sporting facilities (such as a youth club) and the increasingly high entrance fees to the town swimming pool, whereby the more disadvantaged children were often excluded. The ire of the people was often raised, too, through the activities of the Shire "dog-catcher" who was constantly impounding their dogs. This latter complaint was serious in view of the fact that, to supplement their larder when their pension cheques ran out, many of the people depended on their hunting dogs to maintain a supply of kangaroo and emu meat.

Many other institutions in the town, such as the churches, clubs and associations, were seen by the Aboriginal community as "white

preserves," exclusive to non-Aboriginal people. One of the younger people told me that in the sporting area, for instance, Aboriginal youths who were valued and accepted within their clubs for their sporting skills could still experience discrimination at the personal and social level. It was Mr. Mippy's view that local organisations had done little or nothing to address local Aboriginal needs and aspirations.

Antagonistic feeling between Mr. Mippy and the local police seemed to be mutual. In 1984, when I spoke favourably to the Sergeant in charge of the Moora Police about his role as a respected Elder and an influence for good in the town, the Sergeant demurred. He responded by alleging that, although Mr. Mippy, in his view, had the potential to be a peacemaker and a means of reconciliation within his community, he nevertheless preferred to encourage physical confrontation along the lines of the old traditional law as a means of resolving disputes. Mr. Mippy's view of the same police Sergeant was equally dismissive. He told me that, on one occasion, during an altercation with the Sergeant, he had told him to his face: "*You must have got your sergeant's stripes from a 'Weeties' packet !*" It was an observation that did little to improve their mutual relationship.

Mr. Mippy wanted the *manatj* (police) to be more pro-active in town, to walk around and relate to the community at a more personal level rather than, as he put it, just to cruise around in their police cars. He reflected the general view that the police failed to empathise with the problems, cultural views and practices of Aboriginal people. Police were often seen as "targeting" Aboriginal as opposed to non-Aboriginal people, especially juveniles, in relation to alleged criminal, traffic, or other petty offences. Nevertheless, Mr. Mippy saw the police as a sort of "necessary evil." He said as much during an interview for "National Nine News," in the aftermath of Aboriginal family riots in the town in

1986. *"If only we had stronger police,"* he complained ...*"when I say 'stronger' ... it's to get out and marshall. We look for the police, we look for them every time"* (Maher 1986).

The informal enquiries I made during this period had led me to the conclusion that, amongst the problems which had the effect of maintaining the divisions within the Moora community and which were recognised by Aboriginal people as being a cause of continuing discriminatory attitudes, none could be more urgent than that of Indigenous unemployment. From informal consultations with the stakeholders, I felt that the phenomenon of unemployment within the local Aboriginal community was one which could well be given priority. I therefore set about investigating the question of unemployment and its consequent problems. By gathering information from within the Aboriginal community I was able to identify some of the causes and to investigate possible solutions to the problem.

*"IF THEY WANT SOMETHING . . . THEY GOTTA WORK FOR IT:"*

*THE NEED FOR EMPLOYMENT*

Mr. Mippy often stated that the fact of being Aboriginal made it harder to obtain employment in Moora. He believed that if an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal person were to apply for the same job, all other things being equal, the non-Aboriginal person would nearly always be preferred. When interviewed by a Television News reporter (Maher 1986) about the difficulties faced by Aboriginal people in finding jobs, he stated that racial prejudice was often a major factor.

One instance of this was his reaction on hearing that two Indigenous girls, who had been employed in a Moora cafe, had been

retrenched by the proprietor. On enquiring at the shop in question as to the reason why the girls had been sacked, he said that the female proprietor appeared quite distressed by what had happened. She recounted how two adult females, members of her clientele, had approached her to inform her that if she continued to employ Aboriginal girls, they and many of their friends would cease to patronise her cafe.

Another episode, which may have been actionable at law as a breach of anti-discrimination legislation, occurred during the Christmas period, December 1986. One of the Aboriginal health workers came to my door to ask me if I would act as Father Christmas at the forthcoming Christmas Party to be held by the Aboriginal Progress Association. She said that she had already hired the Santa Claus outfit from a local businessman (a person well known to me as a fellow member of the Moora Rotary Club). When I told them it would be more appropriate for one of the Nyoongar men to act as Father Christmas, she advised me that the hirer of the outfit had stipulated, as a condition of the hiring agreement, that under no circumstances was an Aboriginal person to wear the outfit. In spite of my angry feelings, I did finish up being Father Christmas at the Progress Centre. Although I advised the Nyoongar organiser that she might contemplate taking legal action against the man in question, she thought it better, in the interests of racial harmony, to let the matter drop.

In regard to the matter of exploitation, there was one established businessman in town who was always ready to hire Aboriginal workers. However, no Yuat person remained long in his employ. Information supplied to me by a former Aboriginal employee was that he invariably underpaid them and exploited their time and labour. Mr. Mippy, though, did not always lay the blame for these complaints at the door of the employers. In his view, there were two sides to the question. Too

many of his people, he told me, were inconsistent and unreliable in the performance of their work. “*Reliability!*” he remarked on more than one occasion, “*that’s a word some of the Nyoongars don’t understand.*”

A little investigation on my part revealed a high rate of Aboriginal unemployment in the town of Moora. It was hardly a new problem. Laurie (1995: 259) reports that in 1979, “out of a total population of 260 Aborigines in Moora only thirty five were in employment and roughly 100 more needed jobs.” In 1985 my own assessment was that of an estimated average of 200 Indigenous persons, inclusive of men, women and children, only 15 people (9 males [m] and 6 females [f]) held permanent or semi-permanent employment. An informal list of employers and positions held by Nyoongar people in Moora at the time (1985) is set forth below (fig. 5). The remaining townspeople of employable age (about 50 m. + 75 f., including some considered old and/or infirm) seemed to survive on various security and welfare payments. On these figures, Aboriginal unemployment in the town of Moora stood at more than 80%, an unacceptably high figure by any standards. In the light of these findings, it is not surprising that the lack of employment opportunities was a major problem for the stakeholders, especially as it led to other negative social consequences.

**Fig. 5** List of employers and positions held by Nyoongar people in Moora (1985)

<i>Employer</i>	<i>Employed</i>
<i>Health Clinic</i>	<i>1 f.</i>
<i>Ab. Progress Association</i>	<i>1 f.</i>
<i>Agricultural Suppliers</i>	<i>2 m.</i>

<i>Parish Primary School</i>	<i>2 f.</i>
<i>Main Roads Dpt</i>	<i>2 m.</i>
<i>Shire</i>	<i>4 m.</i>
<i>Childcare Centre</i>	<i>2 f.</i>
<i>Self employed</i>	<i>1 m.</i>
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>15 m. &amp; f.</i>

Unemployment, which inevitably gave rise to an over-dependence on social benefits, was seen as a cause of aimlessness and boredom amongst the youth and a high level of juvenile and adult crime in the area. In the perception of Mr. Mippy and others, it also encouraged habits of drinking and gambling. It contributed to a lowering of self-esteem within the Aboriginal community and did nothing to assist the cause of racial reconciliation. Reference has been made to some of the factors considered by Mr. Mippy and other Elders to have contributed to unemployment in Moora. It was thought that prospective employers were often unduly influenced by negative Aboriginal stereotypes. Potential Aboriginal employees, therefore, were sometimes the object of discriminatory attitudes, particularly when they applied for work in industries related to retailing, clothing, catering and food services. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Aboriginal persons who did succeed in gaining employment were sometimes subjected to exploitation by employers in regard to their wages and conditions. There was also a perception on the part of some employers that Aboriginal employees were unreliable.



If discriminatory attitudes and negative stereotypes within the wider Moora community and amongst potential employers in particular were being generated, at least to some extent, by the negative social effects of unemployment, then the reverse was probably also true. If so, the Yuat community was being confronted by the proverbial “vicious circle.” Negative social attitudes, being a cause of unemployment, were in turn being exacerbated by the very unemployment which those negative attitudes were helping to promote. The twin social evils of unemployment and discrimination, therefore, might be seen as two sides to the one coin.

In regard to his people’s dependence on government financial support, Mr. Mippy showed himself to be in two minds. On the one hand he was opposed to “socials” (Social Security payments) which he saw as robbing people of their initiative and to some extent, their self-respect. On the other hand, he saw no alternative to financial support being provided by the State for as long as unemployment remained a major problem. During an ABC Regional Radio program, he posed the problem to his interviewer:

*The government or someone said, along the line that they were gonna cut it, cut all the ‘socials’ off. That’s in the Nyoongars’ mind, that things are gonna be cut off. Now where do they go from there? What’s the backing up; are they gettin’ some assistance - like rations? (Green 1991)*

He was not opposed to rations being provided for those living at subsistence level. However, he was of the opinion that, apart from the provision of basic necessities, even the needy should work for what they wanted. He continued:

*If they [the Nyoongars] want something else, they gotta work for it ... earn it. See what I mean? We ‘ad it down the Reserve when we were there. We got rations. If we wanted something else, we ‘ad to go and work for it. We had to go out. And we used to run out and argue over*

*it ... 'can I go with 'im?'... when the bosses came there. But there again, you white people made it too easy. They go to the post office now and ask for their money. (Green 1991).*

The expressed view of opinion-leaders among the Aboriginal stakeholders reflected my own perception that the situation in Moora called for the institution of an appropriate form of collaborative self-employment which would be within the ownership and control of the Yuat community. Such work would need to be more than simply “occupational therapy” or a project enjoying mere “hobby status” along the lines of an arts and crafts society. It would be one which would create for the Aboriginal participants an entry into the commercial labour market. A number of benefits, too, might be expected to flow from such employment. Besides helping to restore a sense of empowerment to Aboriginal participants, it would provide a source of self-generated income for otherwise unemployed people and reduce their dependence on Social Security. It would help to offset and disprove some of the stereotypical perceptions which fostered entrenched racial and discriminatory attitudes towards Aboriginal people and, if culturally based, would provide an opportunity for promoting and implementing the kind of cultural awareness and identity-renewal so dear to the heart of Edward Mippy.

#### *EMPLOYMENT: A PROJECT EMERGES*

In December 1985, Mr. Mippy and I had been invited to attend a Nyoongar language conference at Marribank, situated a few kilometres north of the Southwest town of Katanning.<sup>6</sup> Marribank, known in

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<sup>6</sup> See fig. 2.

earlier days as Carrolup, was well known to Edward Mippy as it had been, before being finally abandoned, a staging post for children destined for the Moore River Settlement. It was an emotional experience for my old *koorda*, as it was perhaps his first visit to Marribank since he had been sent there as a child in March, 1921. By 1985 it had been given a new identity and part of it was being run by the Baptist Church in conjunction with the Aboriginal Community as an Arts and Crafts Centre. Ceramics, pottery, painting and art works of quite a high standard were being produced at the workshop by the local community. After inspecting the art display Mr. Mippy was fired with enthusiasm for the possibilities it represented. Could a similar workshop, he wondered, be established for the people of Moora? On returning home we both spoke often of the Marribank project and resolved to propose such a scheme to the Moora community at the first opportunity.

Such an opportunity was not long in presenting itself. In August 1985 a suggestion was made to me by a local farmer's wife that the Yuat community might be interested in exploring the possibility of working with wool with a view to setting up an enterprise in woolcraft. The lady in question, herself of Yuat descent,<sup>7</sup> was experienced in spinning and weaving. She expressed her willingness to make herself available, if required, to conduct a course of tuition in Textile Production. When the idea was put to our stakeholders, a significant group, mainly women, showed enthusiasm for the idea. I therefore began to make enquiries regarding possible sources of funding and necessary equipment.

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<sup>7</sup> This particular lady, Mrs. Wendy Passamani, was to initiate the first self-employment scheme for the Yuat in Moora. Wendy was a descendent of a Yuat family by the name of Shaw. It is a point of interest that one of her forebears, George Shaw, had figured prominently in disturbances that took place in New Norcia in 1907, apparently caused by a lack of employment opportunities at the Mission (Haebich 1988: 17-19).

The Catholic Parish Hall in Moora, which a few years earlier had seen the birth of CMAPA, was for the Aboriginal stakeholders a familiar and convenient venue for the project. I therefore sought and obtained permission from my Parish Council to make the church hall permanently available for their use, free of charge. In November of that year the Aboriginal Access section of the Department of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) agreed to supply three spinning wheels and two weaving looms. These, together with two spinning wheels loaned by a local benefactor were soon in place in the hall. In January 1986, Mr. Mippy and I held discussions with the proposed tutor together with representatives of the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Training (DET) <sup>8</sup> and the Aboriginal Employment branch of the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES). As a result of these meetings it was agreed that funding would be provided to enable the commencement of a tuition course in spinning and weaving.

Classes would be conducted for two three-hour periods on Tuesdays and Fridays.

On Tuesday, 18 February, a large number of Yuat people, mostly female, arrived at the hall to begin the first day of tuition. Some problems came to the surface at the outset when a disagreement arose between two major family groups regarding organisation and membership. The result was that some of the intending participants returned home and took no further part in the project. <sup>9</sup> Shortly after this altercation, some of the women who had opted out of the Moora experiment sought and obtained funding from the Moora Community Welfare office (DCW) to finance a visit to the Art & Craft project at

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the names of some government departments and agencies mentioned in this thesis have since been changed.

<sup>9</sup> These problems may have arisen through inter-family conflicts.

Marribank. In Mr. Mippy's view, they were inspired by his own account of that project and were hoping to gain ideas for a possible alternative to spinning and weaving.

Meanwhile, in spite of these early differences amongst the participants, work in Moora quickly got under way. Using bags of raw wool donated by a local farmer, the remaining ten or so participants were introduced to the skills and techniques of the weaver's craft. Coping as well as possible with limitations in terms of space and available equipment, all members taking part in the workshop received practical instruction in the art of spinning wool and the use of the various weaving frames and looms for the production of textiles. Good progress was made and for the first few months attendance was regular at the twice-weekly classes. Mr. Mippy himself took part in the enterprise and became as adept as the ladies, using both the table loom and a large frame loom in the production of textile articles.

As time went by, however, enthusiasm waned and attendance became irregular. By the end of May the number of active participants, who were all female except for me and Mr. Mippy, was so reduced that the tutor thought it best to suspend classes indefinitely. From the following remarks made to Sarah Green during a Radio interview three years later, we learn from Mr. Mippy himself that the conclusion of the project had come as no real surprise. As he explained:

*Yeah!, it wasn't hard ... it's just that, you know, they start, 'n you'll get a roll-up. When you start something new, they're there. You can't fit 'em all in! Then they gradually fade out. It wears off. That's what I notice with Nyoongars ... that's us people! (Green 1991).*

Although these words of Edward Mippy identify a problem which he saw to be common within his own society, it could be argued that loss of enthusiasm for any popular project over a period of time is a common

phenomenon, not confined to any social group. I would add, however, there are cultural factors to be considered here in regard to work and in particular, to the division of labour. My experience in the field has taught me that many Aboriginal males avoid what might be regarded as "women's work." In some Indigenous communities (as indeed in the wider society) so-called "masculine" pursuits, such as farming, manual work, hunting, sporting and recreational activities etc., are readily engaged in by men, while domestic chores like setting up and keeping house, cooking and cleaning, are always, where possible, left to the women. Mr. Mippy, in my experience, conformed to this seemingly time-honoured division of duties (See Salvado 1977: 166). This may help to explain why, in the course of the woolcraft project, he never tried his hand at the art of spinning which was so popular with the women participants.

Working at the loom, it seems, was a different matter. During the course of the training program he applied himself zealously to learning the art of the weaver and produced a number of articles for his own personal use. *"They had me weaving wool there,"* he explained, *"making rugs and that. I've got proof of that, I've got the rug 'ome ... the one I made"* (Green 1991). He certainly made good use of his handiwork. On cold nights in his old weatherboard house in Moora, Mr. Mippy had been in the unusual habit of sleeping with his feet projecting from the end of his bed into his kitchen oven, still-warm after the day's use. The "rug" referred to, a warm woollen blanket, was the product of long hours spent by him at the weaver's frame loom. While as heavy as lead, the blanket at least enabled him to make less use of the oven as a foot-warmer.

As previously noted, tenacity and reliability were qualities which I had come to expect in my associate. His fidelity and commitment to the woolcraft experiment proved both an example and an incentive to the

other workers. Were it not for him, I feel sure that it would have wound up much earlier than it did. Though it ended prematurely, however, it proved to be a valuable experience for those who participated. Besides providing them with a practical introduction to some useful manual skills it gave them a greater insight into some of the problems to be faced in establishing any form of cooperative training and self-employment. As the stakeholders reflected on the experience, certain conditions were identified as relevant to the viability of any such project in the future. Experience had shown that there was a need for supporting income for students during any training phase. There was also need for a profit motive in respect of work done and goods produced. Any future enterprise, they thought, should also embrace a wider spectrum of participants and allow extended involvement in terms of age, sex and ability.

The conclusion of the textile enterprise was not the end; it marked only the first stage in the Yuat Community's search to find an answer to its problems. The possibility remained for the seeking of new directions and the making of further forays into the field of training and employment. As Stringer has pointed out in his handbook for practitioners, research should be seen "in terms of a spiral of activity: plan, act, observe, reflect." Further, he continues, this spiral or cycle of "looking, thinking and acting" should not be seen as a necessarily linear procedure in some uniform or irreversible direction but rather as a recycling set of activities. "As experience will show, action research is not a neat, orderly activity that allows participants to proceed step by step to the end of the process. People will find themselves working backward through the routines, repeating processes, revising procedures.. and sometimes making radical changes in direction" (Stringer 1996: 16, 17).

For the Moora community, just such a change in direction occurred soon after the abandonment of the textile training program. It resulted from a process of lateral thinking and directional change on the part of Edward Mippy and some of the stakeholders and provided the foundation for the successful enterprise that was eventually to follow.

*"I'D LIKE TO TEACH THE KIDDIES:" ARTEFACTS AS A FORM OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION*

As stated frequently enough in this thesis, nothing was more important to Mr. Mippy than his perceived duty of passing on to his own younger generation, as well as to the children of the wider community, the skills and values that were part of his Indigenous heritage. He expresses these views in an audiotape which he personally prepared for some close Moora friends, in the hope that, to use his own words, *"they'll play this back and listen to it in years to come:"*

*All these little things I'd like to teach the kiddies; and I'd like to go into the school and teach them, you know. They don't give us the opportunity to go in there ... makes me very, very cross, to know, to realise that the kiddies are forgetting the background of the Aboriginals. There's no talk like that. These are the things I'd like to get in there and teach them, and also teach the white kiddies ... so I'm passin' it on, hoping that the kiddies these days will listen to this (Mippy 1986).*

When, in 1985, Mr. Mippy formed a plan to educate the younger children of the Moora community in his Indigenous cultural understandings and traditions, he was fulfilling a long-standing ambition. Knowing of my interest and involvement in cultural education, he accepted my cooperation in developing a new educational program at St. Joseph's, Moora's Catholic Primary School. The new



subject was designed to introduce the language, stories and traditions of the regional Nyoongar society, targeting both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in grades five, six and seven. With the support of the Principal, Sister Denise Casey, tuition began in the first school term of 1985 and was delivered by Mr. Mippy and myself, acting as a team.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on his own extensive knowledge, Mr. Mippy proved to be an effective teacher, both in the classroom and in the field. Children were introduced to the basics of the Yuat language. They received instruction in bushcraft and in the use of the spear and boomerang. They heard stories of the Dreamtime, as recounted by Mr. Mippy. They learned to identify bush foods. Although not himself a dancer, Mr. Mippy engaged tutors to instruct the children in traditional styles of song and dance. Dressed in a *Djoolip* (loin-cloth) and with his body adorned with ochre, he would act as Master of Ceremonies during the children's dancing demonstrations. Aboriginal studies became a popular subject with the children and endured as a pilot project for a full two years.

As an added component to this Cultural Awareness Program Mr. Mippy soon began to consider setting up, for the senior children, a course in woodcraft which would concentrate on the production of cultural items. He saw the cultural and pedagogical value of such "hands on" activities as the production of facsimiles of traditional Yuat artefacts like the *kaali* (returning boomerang), *miro* (spear thrower), *kidji* (spear), *woonda* (fighting shield) and the "bull-roarer" (of desert origin), all of which could be crafted as working models, whether using bush timber or sheets of 9mm. Plywood.

In April, 1986, a meeting was held by Mr. Mippy and myself with the principal of St. Joseph's School. At this meeting it was decided

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<sup>10</sup> The cultural content of these classes will appear in more detail in the following

to seek the assistance of the Central Midlands Senior High School in organising a weekly class in woodwork for the St. Joseph's senior students. The High School Principal agreed to this proposal and arranged for the class to be held each Tuesday at the High School manual arts workshop for the benefit of the St. Joseph's students, with Mr. Mippy acting as cultural adviser. Classes were to be under the direction of the High School's manual arts teacher, assisted by myself and supervising teachers from St. Joseph's.

Woodwork classes for the year 6 & 7 students began in May 1986 and continued in the High School workshop until mid 1988. The classes soon became an important part of our Cultural Awareness program and the artefacts produced under Mr. Mippy's guidance were used for the instruction of the children in the field. A report in the local newspaper at the time, headed "Culture is an Art," was accompanied by photographs of the workshop in action and stated that many of the young participants "have been learning the art of making and throwing boomerangs." The article went on to explain that "each student had made at least one boomerang" and had learned "how to use the Aboriginal spear thrower" (*Midlands Telegraph* 11 June 1986: 4).

Inspired by the success of the school woodwork program and influenced too by suggestions offered by a few of the children, Mr. Mippy and I discussed the possibility of establishing a similar project for the adult community. Many of our Yuat stakeholders had already been hearing favourable reports about the school program from their children and saw therein an opportunity for re-establishing a new collective enterprise in the Church hall to take the place of the superseded woolcraft project. As the initial response of the stakeholders to this

proposal was favourable, a decision was made to take advantage of an offer made by a local benefactor to provide for the purchase of equipment. Required alterations to the hall were carried out by volunteer labour and, by the beginning of July, the newly acquired woodworking equipment had been installed and work was ready to begin.

On Wednesday, 13 July, the doors of the Church hall were officially re-opened and the new project was begun. Mr. Mippy, myself and two local Yuat Elders comprised the first working group, making maximum use of the limited facilities. In its issue of 3 August, 1988, the *“Central Districts Gazette”* ran an article on the new project, reporting that “the [Yuat] group began handcrafting artefacts over a month ago and a supply of boomerangs, spears, spearthrowers and shields is growing.” Interviewed by a Gazette reporter, Mr. Mippy stated that the workshop would henceforth bear the name *“Yuat Nyungara Kaat Maya,”* a Nyoongar title meaning *“Headquarters of the Yuat people”* (Gazette: 5).

The term *Yuat Nyungara (Nyoongara)*, as used in the name selected by Mr. Mippy for his workshop, refers to the Indigenous inhabitants of the Yuat region. It makes use of the now unused and almost forgotten plural form of the word *Nyoongar*. The other term in the title, *Kaat Maya*, is one of his coined expressions whose literal meaning is “head house” or “headquarters.” Such coined expressions were not uncommon in Mr. Mippy’s vocabulary.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Because the Yuat language lacked many of the social and technological concepts that were taken for granted in the wider society, Mr. Mippy did not hesitate to update his language by coining new words and phrases as the occasion demanded. A butcher shop, for instance, was for him *dadja maya* (literally, meat house); the hospital was *menditj maya* (sick house) and the police station was *manatj maya* (house of the cockatoos, i.e. police) - to give only a few examples. The people employed in the workshop have always respected the name conferred by its co-founder and patron. In 1998, six years after his death, a split log of *mangkatj* (banksia) wood, Mr. Mippy’s

Over the next few months the workshop opened its doors on the Wednesday and Friday of each week. It was left open to both male and female adults to participate on an informal basis, with the result that numbers varied from day to day. While the men took informal instruction in the crafting of implements under the watchful eye of Mr. Mippy, the women occupied themselves in self-taught skills such as painting, silk-screen printing and decorating artefacts with the paintbrush and the electric poker-work appliance.

It was a significant moment for Edward Mippy. Two years earlier, during an interview in Moora with a newspaper reporter from *The West Australian*, my friend had recalled how, from early childhood, his parents had enjoined him never to forget his culture and his identity. “*Unless the Nyoongars know their background,*” he had told the reporter, “*they will become drifters*” (Carbon 1986: 16). During the course of his long life, Mr. Mippy had forgotten neither his identity nor his background. For him and for many other Yuat Elders, these small beginnings in cultural education would surely have revived some of the hopes and aspirations of earlier times.

From my perspective too, the self-employment program which was getting under way constituted an important step forward for Moora’s Aboriginal Community and seemed a significant turning point in their post-contact history. When I had first made their acquaintance in 1958, they had still been “fringe dwellers,” poorly housed in the neatly-kept but ramshackle humpies of the Moora town reserve. It was 1974 before the first moves were made to abolish the Aboriginal Reserve and re-house the people within the wider town community. Now, a mere fourteen years later, Edward Mippy was able to watch the same former

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favourite bush timber, was installed over the entrance to the workshop, hand-carved by

fringe-dwellers, both young and old, working cooperatively in their own craft centre as they developed what Fred Mogridge later described (Bunbury 1996) as “*part of that lost culture*” – their unique, though long-neglected, traditional arts.

#### *THE QUEST FOR FUNDING*

Although an auspicious beginning for such hopes and aspirations had now been made, seven years were to pass before the dream could finally become reality. Over the next few months, good progress was made. Adult workers were joined by some of the students of St. Joseph’s who began attending after school hours. However, two major problems demanded resolution. As the old parish hall was falling into disrepair, an acute need was felt for more suitable premises. There was also a need for a source of ongoing funding for the project.

To address these problems, an application was made to the Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC) to advise on how assistance might be obtained. A positive response was forthcoming. On 18 October, 1988, a representative of the Commission arrived to inspect the Yuat workshop and to hold an informal meeting with a representative selection of the Aboriginal stakeholders. The impression made was sufficiently good to inspire the Commission to promise all possible support in the acquisition of new premises and the initiation of a funded training program. In December, a meeting was held in Moora which was attended by Mr. Mippy, myself, the Chairman of CMAPA together with representatives from State Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), from ADC and from the Department of

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the workers themselves with the legend *Yuat Nyungara* (sic) *Kaat Maya*.

Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). At that meeting it was decided to set plans in motion for the establishment of an Aboriginal Arts & Crafts Enterprise in Moora. Another year was to pass, however, before the details of the proposed plan could be ironed out.

For several months during 1989, contact was maintained between our small Yuat committee and representatives of the office of DEET. These meetings were not without their lighter side. Mr. Mippy would recall one particular DEET officer who would sometimes call at the hall and give advice on the way in which he thought our project should proceed. This Indigenous representative, a certain Mr. F, would express enthusiasm about our possibilities and was often carried away with flights of fancy. Bearing in mind the poverty of our resources at that time – the dilapidated hall, uncertainty in regard to membership, insufficient equipment, our complete lack of professional expertise and marketing experience – we at times found the scenarios painted by our advisor to be so unreal and premature that, during our meetings, Mr. Mippy and I could hardly refrain from exchanging bemused glances.

There were, according to Mr. F, big markets in Japan, the U.S, even China. Unlimited opportunities were there for the taking. Boomerangs and other authentic artefacts were, we were told, in great demand and Mr. F visualised an international export market being developed from our little run-down hall. Supply would have to rise to meet demand and there would need to be attractive packaging and stringent quality control over workshop products. Only the fine details, according to our adviser, remained to be worked out. It was all a little too much for beginners like us who had not yet thought beyond providing a few tentative artefacts for display at the local service station. Well meant and inspirational as it was, Mr. F's enthusiasm always left our small group feeling a little breathless.

During 1989 the workers continued with their informal training program and the production of artefacts. In the early stages of the project the question of marketing, which loomed so large in the mind of our DEET adviser, posed no great urgency for the group as it was understood that a high degree of expertise had first to be developed amongst the trainees to ensure the maintenance of product quality. It was obvious, too, that a large stockpile of high-quality artefacts would have to be developed in order to ensure a continuity of supply before any larger-scale marketing could begin. Again, it was highly unlikely that the group could, in the foreseeable future, expect to achieve financial independence solely through the sale of artefacts. Some sales were made, however, even in these early days, through local commercial outlets. Displays were set up at a Moora Service Station, at the Walebing Roadhouse and at various local Arts and Crafts exhibitions.

It was not till early December of that year that an agreement was formally drawn up by DEET and jointly signed by Jennifer Mogridge, then Chairperson of CMAPA, and Stacey Joyce, a local non-Aboriginal person who had accepted the role of Financial Administrator of the proposed training program. Under this Agreement the training course, to be supervised by Mr. Mippy and myself, was to cover a period of 26 weeks; each of the ten enrolled trainees would work a 20 hour week and receive a weekly allowance of \$150. The Yuat Artefacts Training Project, which had its official beginning on Monday, 5 February 1990, was given favourable treatment a few weeks later in an article published in *The West Australian*:

Aborigines in the Wheatbelt town of Moora ... are turning their hand to commerce and in the process discovering talents they did not realise they had. Four hours of classes a day teach them to make various artefacts from the area, including boomerangs, spear throwers, bullroarers, lizards, snakes, didgeridoos and

shields which they hope to sell at tourist outlets in and around Perth" (Callander 1990: 44).

It would be too much to claim that the Yuat Community suddenly saw itself as a leader in the field of Indigenous training and self-employment. Nevertheless excitement was generated by the new training opportunity which was providing gainful skills-training for a number of long-term unemployed. As pointed out in the same *West Australian* article, the project was not only occupying the people in work that they enjoyed but restoring to them a sense of ownership and pride in themselves and in their future. In an earlier newspaper item, Mr. Mippy had already expressed the view that knowledge of their cultural background would give to his people a more secure sense of their place within the wider society (Carbon 1986).

Fruitful as the training exercise proved to be, however, it was not a final solution to the problem of local unemployment. By the middle of July, 1990, the official training program had come to an end and the problem of continued financing had to be faced. Acting on behalf of Yuat, the Moora branch of the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) made a new approach to DEET which resulted in an assurance of ongoing funding in the short term. For almost two years, from September 1990 to August 1992, DEET was prevailed upon to extend its grant to continue covering the meagre \$150 weekly allowance paid to the workers.

From 1990 onwards, meetings were frequently held at the Yuat workshop between representatives from DEET and members of the Yuat committee, including myself and Mr. Mippy, for the purpose of finding ways to continue the existing funding arrangements. My old associate had little to say at these meetings in regard to matters of administration, preferring to leave such affairs to others. Occasionally, however, he



would give departmental representatives the benefit of his ever-present, often pungent wit. On one such occasion, he asked a lower-echelon DEET representative to give the committee an assurance of further financial support. The representative demurred, explaining that he didn't have the necessary authority to commit his department to further funding. *"Well cobber,"* Mr. Mippy remarked in his typical dry fashion, *"we asked for the butcher and they've sent us the block!"*

Officers from DEET were reluctant to continue seeking approval for these financial extensions and we were frequently warned that a permanent source of support would soon have to be found. Sales of artefacts through commercial outlets were a welcome bonus, but the group realised that commercial sales, being slow and irregular, could not provide permanent financial viability. Despite uncertainty about prospects in the longer term, work continued with the result that a considerable stockpile of traditional art and artefacts was accumulated. In February, 1991, Mr. Mippy and the Yuat group set up a stall as part of the first Aboriginal "Kyana Festival" held on the Perth Esplanade. In the space of two days, just on \$1000 was raised from the sale of artefacts. Further income was derived from sales through other commercial outlets in both regional and metropolitan areas.

Expertise which I had acquired in 1981 when involved in a training program at Ken Colbung's "Gnangara Cultural Centre"<sup>12</sup> had enabled me to fashion effective returning boomerangs, not from bush timber, but from 9mm. plywood.<sup>13</sup> During our early period at the Moora workshop, this knowledge was put to good use in instructing others in the art.

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<sup>12</sup> Then located at Sydney Rd., Wanneroo, W.A.

<sup>13</sup> Because of its uniform thickness and good weight/strength ratio, plywood is considered an excellent material for fashioning working replicas of the *kaali*, or returning boomerang, and is still employed for this purpose at the Moora workshop.

However, while I regarded plywood as a suitable transitional material for our training phase, Mr. Mippy held it in disdain and considered it quite unsuitable for the manufacture of traditional artefacts. Instead he insisted on going into the bush himself to cut his own timber. To do this he needed the permission of the local representative of the Department of Conservation & Land Management (CALM) in the case of Crown land, or that of the local pastoralist when the trees he wanted were on private land. Fortunately he had some admiring friends amongst the farmers.

Mr. Mippy used a variety of bush timbers and instructed the trainees in their various uses. He explained how the *Mangart* (jam) tree was traditionally used for the *kaali*, the *wana* (digging stick) and the *dowak* or *koondi* (club, or throwing stick). Ti-tree wood was sometimes used to make spears. The tree known as *kwel* (Casuarina or she-oak) was also used by him to make spears, the thicker sections being suitable for the *woonda* (fighting shield). Materials favoured by Mr. Mippy for figurative or decorative carving were seasoned *Mangkatj* (Banksia) wood which he obtained from the bush around the old Mogumber Mission and the wood of the "wild pear," of which there were some stands along the nearby Badgingarra road.

In July, 1991, my friend accompanied me with a group of local Nyoongar boys on an overland excursion to Kalumburu, the former Benedictine Mission in the Northwest Kimberleys. With the assistance of the Aborigines there he collected a supply of didgeridoo wood and local timbers used for spear-throwers, tapping sticks, etc. In Broome and on the road south a large supply of boab nuts was collected. All of these materials were brought back and used by him for the production of

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Its main drawback is that it may lack the authentic appearance and sales appeal of

artefacts at the Moora workshop. From the old Mogumber Mission Mr. Mippy had earlier procured a supply of the white *wilki* (clay) which he so well remembered from his boyhood days in the Settlement. He told how he had often seen it used in traditional ceremonies. It was therefore not surprising that he found the natural earth-coloured ochres of Kalumburu of particular interest during his visit there. These were gathered by him in substantial quantities and brought back to Moora where he spent many hours grinding the rocks into an easily soluble powder. Such an amount of this ochre was prepared by him that supplies were assured for several years to come.<sup>14</sup>

As already pointed out, the question of financial viability had been from the very beginning one of the imponderable factors facing the Yuat Artefacts enterprise. Experience had shown the stakeholders that various government funded training initiatives (such as “Skilshare,” in which some Moora youth had been involved) had failed in the main to provide any long-term solution to the problem of unemployment. They realised that skills-training, while providing individuals with expertise necessary for entry into the work force, does not of itself create employment, nor does it necessarily lead to the creation of commercially viable enterprises. It seemed to me and to the organisers that the Yuat project, like any other skills-training scheme, could not be expected to develop into an income-generating self-supporting enterprise until important questions as to administrative, commercial and financial viability had been satisfactorily addressed. If the project were to survive

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authentic bush timber.

<sup>14</sup> Besides being used in the Yuat Artefacts workshop, Mr. Mippy’s ochre has played an important role at the New Norcia Education Centre (est. 1996). Together with the *wilki* (clay) which he brought in from the old Mogumber Mission, it was still being used ten years later for instructing visiting school children. A few of the traditional implements made by Mr. Mippy were placed on permanent display at the Moora Progress Centre as prized items.

in the longer term, possible external sources of funding would have to be identified.

In March, prospects began to appear brighter. Dr. Judyth Watson, then State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, paid a visit to the hall to inspect the project. Having met Mr. Mippy and his workers, she pledged her full support in the search for ongoing funds. In February 1992 an application was lodged through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) for permanent funding under the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). Up to this time, rural centres had not been able to attract funding under CDEP for community projects as only the more remote missions and settlements were considered eligible. For this reason and also because CDEP envisaged a minimum of 100 participants in each of its regional programs, this first application proved unsuccessful. It seems that the WAC central committee, which had the prerogative of disbursing available funds, considered the Moora Aboriginal community too small to qualify under the government guidelines and gave preference to the Aboriginal settlement at Cosmo-Newberry, via Laverton.

In due course, a second application for CDEP funding was lodged by Wendy Carrick, then Regional Administrator for WAC in Moora. This application suggested that the Yuat Artefacts group should not be seen in isolation but should be considered within the context of the Aboriginal population of the whole Wheatbelt area. If the target area could be extended to include the entire region represented by WAC, the number of potential Aboriginal participants would be within the CDEP guidelines and all the Aboriginal people in the area would benefit. This suggestion was finally taken up but it was not until early 1993 that the Yuat group was declared eligible for CDEP funding, along with all Aboriginal communities in the wheatbelt area. Ms. Carrick advised me

that, up until this time, no rural or semi-urban community in W.A. had qualified for such unemployment assistance. The admission of the Moora project to the scheme therefore marked a milestone in the policy direction and extension of the State CDEP program.

*A NEW WORKSHOP*

By late 1992, not only had DEET finally been forced through lack of available funds to withdraw all recurrent financial support but an urgent need had arisen to find alternative premises for the project. The plaster ceiling in the old church hall had collapsed, rendering the building too dangerous for continued use. Owing to these problems, little formal work was undertaken by Yuat Artefacts for the next eight months. The project remained virtually in abeyance from September of 1992 until May 1993, when the CDEP funding arrangement finally came into operation. Earlier in that year, in March, 1992, a meeting had been held at the Yuat workshop attended by three State Parliamentarians including the then Leader of the State Opposition, Mr. Barry McKinnon, the Regional Manager for WAC and the Moora Shire Clerk. Aboriginal stakeholders were represented by Edward Mippy and members of CMAPA.

As a result of that meeting it was resolved to apply to ATSIC for funds to purchase or build an alternative workshop. In June, the Chairman of CMAPA, Mr. Ben Drayton, submitted a formal application for a capital grant to cover the cost of a new building. The application stated that DEET's financial arrangements over the previous eighteen months had been so limited that provision could only be made for the payment of 3 male and 3 female workers. He pointed out that, under a CDEP or an ATSIC funding scheme, *"this number will increase to 15 or 20*

or more workers, consisting of a mix of both male and female adults as well as unemployed youths.”<sup>15</sup> The application goes on to explain that “*The Yuat Artefacts project ... was set up as a result of a vision entertained by a Moora Aboriginal Elder, Ned Mippy ... in association with Fr. Bernard Rooney, at the time Parish Priest of Moora.*” Designed by Mr. Drayton to be fully in accord with Edward Mippy’s cherished vision, the goals of the project were set forth in the funding application, as follows:

- *to recreate and instil in the local community a knowledge and love of their Indigenous culture*
- *to preserve and encourage traditional skills and cultural identity;*
- *to create employment for local school-leavers and adults;*
- *to replace the dole and other social security payments with paid employment in a communal working environment;*
- *to decrease opportunities for drinking and other unprofitable activities;*
- *to combat the increased tide of juvenile delinquency by providing occupational and cultural interests for the youth of the town;*
- *to lay the foundations for an ongoing industry for the Aboriginal Community of Moora.*

With the submission of this application, the Yuat Artefacts Project entered what was to be its final phase. Unfortunately, the man whose vision and commitment had made the project possible and whose unfailing inspiration had carried it through its darkest periods, was not destined to see the result of his efforts.

#### *THE DEATH OF MR. MIPPY*

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<sup>15</sup> Moora Aboriginal Community funding application, 17 June 1992, c. NNA.

Edward Mippy died on 5 May 1992, less than two months after a massive heart attack had placed him in Moora hospital. Needless to say, his passing was a devastating blow, not only to his family and relations but to all those who had been associated with him in the execution of his projects. During life, Mr. Mippy had served his people well as their outstanding leader and spokesperson. In death, he left a void that would not easily be filled. There was disappointment too that the co-founder of Yuat had not lived to see the successful outcome of his enterprise.

On the day of Mr. Mippy's funeral, which I myself conducted at the request of the family, over a hundred children drawn from all the local schools lined the route of the motorcade from the Catholic Church to the Moora cemetery. That evening, during an ABC television coverage, Mr. Mippy was referred to as "a respected man, an Aboriginal Elder in the Northern Wheatbelt ... fiercely proud of his heritage ... who fought to bridge the gap between black and white" (*ABC News* 5 May 1992).

Asked to address the mourners, as nephew to the deceased (he was a son of Mr. Mippy's sister Bella), well known activist Mr. Robert Bropho mounted the pulpit of the church to describe his uncle as "*a man who gave a lot of his time to everybody, not just Aboriginal people.*" The ABC broadcaster, who covered the event for the evening news, perceived Mr. Mippy as a kind of anomaly: "a man," she said, "deprived of more than a third grade education" who yet became "an ardent supporter of education for young Aborigines." She went on to describe how the deceased had "helped establish the first Nyoongar language class in W.A." and had been "an enthusiastic supporter of local football." One of Moora's most respected senior citizens, Mr. Roger Tonkin, who had given much assistance to the Aboriginal youth over the years especially in the sporting arena, might have been reflecting a view held by many among the wider community when speaking to the Media on the day of

the funeral. "Mr. Mippy," he said, "acted as a mentor to all these ... not only these young fellows playing football, but to all young Aboriginals. He was a role model" (*ABC News* 5May 1992).

Though his passing was a tragic loss to his extended family and the Yuat Community in general, the huge concourse attending his funeral (estimated at more than 500) bore witness also to the many in the wider community, white as well as black, who respected and valued his aims and aspirations. To those committed to following in his footsteps, the communal goals as set forth in Mr. Drayton's funding application may be read as a fitting epitaph to Mr. Edward Mippy – a concrete expression of his personal legacy of vision and achievement.

#### *THE FINAL PHASE*

In spite of the loss of Edward Mippy, morale in the Yuat workshop remained high. There were, however, more problems to face. When the old church hall, because of its ruinous condition, could no longer be safely used as a venue, most of the Yuat workers took temporary refuge in the CMAPA building. Since Shire by-laws forbade the use of electric saws, sanding machines and other equipment in the Progress Centre building, temporary, makeshift repairs to the old hall were carried out so that it could remain in use for essential woodwork activities. Other crafts, such as painting, silk-screening and textile work were then carried on at the Progress Centre hall.

Although, as stated earlier, CDEP finance for the payment of allowances had been approved, it was not until May 1993 that the scheme became operative and enabled work to begin in earnest with 12 enrolled workers. In 1994 the application for building finance was also approved. ATSIC agreed to provide two grants, one of \$25,000 for the



extension of the existing CMAPA building and the other, a grant of \$75,000, for the purchase of a new building to house the Yuat enterprise. The Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (AAPA) had also provided a grant of \$15,000 for the extension of the existing building. By February approval for the accumulation of these funds had been given by AAPA and ATSIC and the total amount of \$115,000 was made available for the construction of a new building as an annex to the existing CMAPA premises (Rooney 1995).

Plans for the new construction, including provision for an up-to-date office, store room and lunch room, in addition to the workshop itself and the shopfront display area, were approved by the Shire early in 1995. The way was then open for work to begin. The new building was opened on 18 November, 1995. At the opening ceremony, a plaque<sup>16</sup> was unveiled at the entrance of the building, dedicating the Centre to its co-founder, Mr. Edward "Ned" Mippy, without whose vision, inspiration and unflagging energy, the project would never have come to fruition.

#### *SOME LATER PERSPECTIVES*

A cooperative community enterprise such as the Yuat Artefacts project is best perceived within the context of the hopes and goals set for it by its stakeholders. Several years having elapsed, at the time of writing, since the Yuat enterprise finally achieved its financial viability and operational independence, it is useful to present some later perspectives. To what extent, it may be asked, has the project realised the hopes and expectations, not only of Mr. Mippy but of the Moora

Elders whose commitment and enthusiasm made it possible? The goals which had been envisaged by the stakeholders for a self-employment project in the town of Moora, were set forth earlier in this chapter. They were to restore to the people a sense of empowerment, to provide employment, to reduce dependence on Social Security income and most importantly, to bring about a renewal of cultural awareness. Another less direct, but no less important aim, one dear to the heart of Edward Mippy, was to “*go with the white people,*” to assist the Reconciliation process through counteracting negative stereotypes of Aboriginality.

In relation to the Yuat Artefacts Project, a range of perceptions has been expressed within the Aboriginal and wider communities. The first of these, possibly the most important, revolves around the restoration of self-esteem through a renewed sense of independence and ownership.

(a) Restoration of a sense of empowerment

Local Yuat Elder and regional ATSIC representative, Mr. Fred Mogridge, who played an important role with Mr. Mippy throughout the developmental phase of the program and later became the inaugural CDEP Administrator for the group, spoke about the project to the local press. He suggested that there was a causal link between the achievement of a sense of ownership and a renewal of communal self-esteem. “*It will build up people’s self-esteem,*” he said, “*by giving them something they own and which they can share with the whole community*” (*Central Districts Gazette* 11 Jan. 1995: 3). When asked on a later occasion what he might have gained personally through his involvement in the project, the same speaker reflected: “*It gave me a lot of good feeling, a lot of*

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<sup>16</sup> For the text of this inscription, see this thesis, p. 225.

*determination to keep this program goin'. You get a lot of self esteem,"* he continued ... *"a lot of respect in town."* (Bunbury 1996).

Mr. Mogridge's remarks suggest that, like Edward Mippy, he valued the enterprise as an important step forward, at a regional level, in the process of restoring an Indigenous sense of independence and ownership. Mr. Mippy had always seen the project as a means of re-affirming the knowledge, skills and abilities founded in his Indigenous culture. Through the project, he hoped to instil in his community an awareness of the value and richness of their Indigenous heritage. But he also regarded it as means to an end. It would reverse the feeling of dependence and disempowerment which had become, for his people, a cause of personal and social marginalisation. It would also help restore amongst Aboriginal youth the personal and social discipline which had been part of his own early experience but which, he often lamented, was now in danger of being lost.

In the opinion of Stacey Joyce, Financial Administrator of the fledgling enterprise and a local non-Aboriginal person, the initial Yuat training program was already producing results in some of these areas by the end of its second year of operation. Practical experience in arts and crafts was seen by her to be bringing out some unexpected abilities amongst the participants as well as a renewed sense of pride in their own talents: "They didn't realise they could do these sorts of things," she said, "until they tried" (Callander 1990: 44). Like Mr. Mogridge, I could see amongst the trainees, in addition to a renewal of pride and self-confidence, a burgeoning sense of ownership. As Stringer has observed, a sense of ownership is one of the major beneficial outcomes of community developmental activity. "If stakeholders can agree on a course of action and become engaged in activities that they see as purposeful and productive, they are likely to invest considerable time

and energy in research activities, developing a sense of ownership that maximises the likelihood of success" (Stringer 1996: 98).

(b) Providing employment and reducing dependence on Social Security

We have already heard Mr. Mippy express a measure of approval for government financial support, such as the so-called "dole." However, he seemed to have regarded this as a kind of necessary evil. Such enforced inactivity on the part of Aboriginal people had always been anathema to him. While admitting the necessity of social security payments, he strongly believed that his people should work for their living. He remained opposed to what he sometimes described as "*sit - down money*," which, for him, was little better than a handout. As he put it to his radio interviewer, "*You white people made it too easy*" (Green 1991).

From this, one could only imagine what Mr. Mippy's reaction might have been to the following situation that arose some six years after his death, as a result of government policy. In 1998, any female Yuat worker on a single mother's pension was forced to restrict herself to two working days per week. Were she to work longer hours under the government-sponsored CDEP program, the income restrictions imposed by the government would have been exceeded and an amount equivalent to the additional CDEP income would have been subtracted from her pension entitlement. This anomalous situation caused the Yuat project considerable loss of production and resulted in several female Yuat workers remaining idle for at least two days per week.

I have seen, during my missionary experience, that the goal of reducing dependence on government handouts has often been thus hampered by government policy. For Aboriginal communities such as

the Yuat, which are endeavouring to regain control of their means of support by establishing self-generated income, true financial independence can be undermined by the existence of other government welfare programs which dissuade people from working. I believe that, until enterprises like Yuat become commercially and financially viable in their own right, they must indeed continue to depend on interim funding such as that obtained under CDEP. But as long as allowances paid under CDEP remain comparatively meagre and often less than those available through other forms of Social Security which are not work-related, there will be insufficient incentive for workers to participate in self-employment programs.

In offering release from the stigma of unemployment on the one hand and in fostering a sense of independence and work satisfaction on the other, the Yuat project has nevertheless proved attractive to a wide spectrum of Aboriginal people. This was pointed out by Supervisor Fred Mogridge during an interview with radio personality, Bill Bunbury:

*The idea that Father Bernard and the late Mr. Mippy put together, I thought was very good, because of the percentage of the Aboriginal people that were unemployed. [They] wanted to keep the culture goin', to drive it through the education system in Moora; and they decided to try and get some of us Elder people ... which helped a great deal because it got us off the unemployment queue (Mogridge in Bunbury 1996).*

With particular reference to the Aboriginal youth of the town, the Supervisor went on to emphasise the link between gainful employment, the benefits of skills training and the opportunities for cultural renewal:

*I think it's important because of the fact that the employment prospects in Moora are not very good, and I think some of the young blokes don't think they're suitable to some of the jobs around town, anyway. It gives them a sense of identity, I think, makin' Aboriginal artefacts, - yeah!*

(c) Removing Stereotypes and assisting Reconciliation

As one who had worked with Mr. Mippy and the Yuat group from its beginnings, Fred Mogridge was well placed to present an overall perspective of changing attitudes within the broader community. Speaking to the press one year after the formal opening of the Centre, he claimed that the new enterprise had already been effective in presenting a new image to the world at large through the involvement of its participants in broader community affairs:

*It [the Yuat Project] has been very successful because it has been accepted in the wider community. We do a lot of work for people in town like mowing lawns and gardening. The main benefits I see are in community recognition and in the self-esteem that comes with doing things that you didn't think you would be able to do ... CDEP has had several contracts with the Department of Conservation and Land Management. We've done work in the Cervantes National Park and we've built two walk paths. The last one at Mt. Lesueur was a great success" (Midlands Advocate 21 Aug. 1996: 7)*

The Supervisor is here reinforcing sentiments he expressed four months earlier during his interview with ABC Radio. *"This program,"* Mr. Mogridge had reflected, *"earned me a lot of respect in town. Not only myself ... I'm speaking for the Yuat group as a whole. I think we all gained a lot of respect from the wider community"* (Bunbury 1996).

The fledgeling Yuat Project was barely two years under way when its participants were the subject of interviews conducted by a reporter from the *West Australian*. The following article, which appeared in that newspaper, signalled the anticipated effect of an Aboriginal self-employment program on entrenched stereotypes of Aboriginality:

Aborigines in the Wheatbelt town of Moora are working to clean up their image. To shrug off the 'drunken trouble-maker' stereotype they are turning their hand to commerce and in the process discovering talents they did not realise they had (Callander 1990: 44).

Five years later, similar expectations were voiced by the Project Officer for ATSIC, Steve Chesson, in the course of a press-statement announcing the release of funds for the construction of the proposed Yuat Artefacts Centre. Chesson's words, as presented here, seem to imply a possible nexus between the removal of negative popular perceptions through cultural development and the advancement of the Reconciliation process within the wider society:

It [the Yuat project] will increase the opportunity for Moora to not only further develop economically, but culturally. The wider, non-Aboriginal community will be able to see Aborigines doing something positive. In the spirit of reconciliation ... that's what it's all about! (*Central Districts Gazette* 11 Jan. 1995: 3).

The range of opinion presented here, from observers outside as well as within the Moora community, places a positive interpretation on the role being played by the Yuat project in the dismantling of racial barriers.

#### (d) Promoting Cultural Awareness

This chapter has stressed that a major factor in the development of the Artefacts Centre was the goal, shared by Mr. Mippy and his associates, of achieving a renewal of cultural awareness through the fostering of Indigenous skills and talents. In the expressed opinion of Mr. Fred Mogridge, the Centre has indeed been effective in achieving this goal. Inspired by the role of the project in maintaining Indigenous tradition, as well as by its contribution to the renewal of self-esteem and

cultural identity within his community, he made the following observations to his ABC interviewer:

*When they do their art work, it's amazing what it brings out of 'em. Part of that lost culture, I suppose you can say. They put that on paper, on their drawing board, and you can see that artistic value that they got. And I think it comes natural to the Aboriginal people, no matter that you haven't touched a paintbrush in ten years, or whatever... I mean, the natural ability is there (Bunbury 1996).*

Warming to his subject, Mr. Mogridge projected these perceptions beyond the Yuat community and set the expected benefits of cultural revival within the broader context of the Southwest Nyoongar society. The cultural deprivation engendered through the past processes of cultural assimilation would only be reversed, in his view, through a corresponding rediscovery of traditional language, values and skills:

*... even as far down as the Southwest, I think the revival of our culture and the language, I might say as well, is gonna have a big impact on the generation to come. Because I've been around for a few years and there's not much that I know in the way of language, which I'd like to see revived so that I can grab hold of it as well. Because I feel that, you can go back as far as the assimilation process, go back to the thirties and forties - all that culture was taken away from the Nyoongar people. The Nyoongar people, they lost that through the assimilation process, and now all those years - we gotta bring all those years back and try and grab it. One way of doin' it is Aboriginal arts and crafts. It's bringin' our culture back! (Mogridge in Bunbury 1996)*

As far as the Moora community as a whole is concerned, the available evidence would indicate that the project has enjoyed its support. In placing particular emphasis on the promotion of cultural awareness, Ian Craven, then Assistant Clerk to the Moora Shire Council, had this to say in a press statement announcing Shire approval of the proposed plans for the Yuat Artefacts extensions:

Council was pleased to approve the extensions, which would benefit both the Aboriginal and wider community. It gives the Aboriginal people a better outlet for their artistic talents. It is



also good for Moora as it will attract more tourists to town. Tourists inevitably end up looking for Aboriginal artefacts, and they shouldn't be able to miss the new building (*Central Districts Gazette* 11 Jan. 1995: 3).

It has been the contention of this thesis that "*bringin' our culture back,*" as Fred Mogridge expressed it, was the primary motivation for Edward Mippy in the implementation of his vision for an Aboriginal cultural revival. If the Yuat Artefacts project which he co-founded has served no other purpose, it would seem from the evidence presented that even in the short term, it has justified its existence.

Commenting from an autoethnographic perspective, as both collaborator and observer, I perceive the Yuat Artefacts Project to be not only an important part of the legacy of Edward Mippy but an example of unstructured community-based development. During the later planning stages, formal meetings were held as required between community project leaders and representatives of the various government departments and agencies. Participation by the wider community of stakeholders, however, took place at a more informal level at the regular "campfire" meetings. I feel that this mode of proceeding enabled the community to avoid some of the interactional problems sometimes encountered in the course of more formal, structured procedures which often fail to take sufficient account of intra-communal tensions and rivalries. The very informality of proceedings may have also served to minimise the dominance of any one group within the Aboriginal community and especially to prevent some of the outside stakeholders, such as government agencies, from exercising undue influence and encroaching on Aboriginal terms of reference.

*EPILOGUE*

In pursuing his vision of re-establishing the control of Aboriginal people over their own destiny, Mr. Mippy was confronting and challenging an Australian mind-set that has its roots deeply embedded in colonial history. The paternalistic perception that Aboriginal people, left to themselves, are incapable of taking control of their own affairs is still widespread.

It was seemingly in the Christian missions that these old paternalistic attitudes first began to change. In 1974 the Methodist Church, in conjunction with the Aboriginal communities of Northern Australia, agreed jointly that Aboriginal people should be “free to decide the direction, rate and style of the changes that were to take place in the communities” (Brown 1996: 35 [11]). Harris also records what he sees as the leading role of the Christian churches in implementing this movement towards greater self-determination:

By the early 1980’s three things had come together: a growing consciousness among Aboriginal people that they could and should take responsibility for their own affairs, a revival movement in the Aboriginal churches and the opportunity for Christian leadership training” (Harris 1990: 860).

Thirty years of missionary experience in the Benedictine missions of New Norcia and Kalumburu had led me to similar perceptions. I had too often seen the failure of ideas, plans and programs which had not involved stakeholders in local decision-making processes but which had been produced in accordance with preconceived, generalised principles or superimposed from above in accordance with ecclesiastical or administrative imperatives. From the 1960’s onwards I had witnessed a number of well-intentioned initiatives in areas of departmental and mission policy such as the design of community housing and facilities,

community management and employment models, land-use proposals and medical and educational programs. In my view, the failure of some of these programs to achieve their goals was attributable in large measure to the lack of community participation in their conception and development. They were the product of an earlier ideology, espoused by the government instrumentalities of the time, which placed much emphasis on objective, scientific evaluation but took little account of human relationships and the need to engage people as active participants. Stringer (1996: 6) has observed that 'the application of scientific method to human events has failed to provide a means for predicting and controlling individual or social behaviour.' This may be over-stating the case. However, I believe that methods that prove effective in the tangible, quantitative sphere are not always as successful in addressing social problems.

In tracing the origin and development of the Yuat Artefacts project from a variety of perspectives, this chapter reveals a program of community-based action which has aimed at empowering a regional Aboriginal Community to attain a greater degree of cultural identity and self-determination by identifying and coming to grips with its own social problems. In hindsight, I believe that the informal process of enquiry and community action implemented jointly by Mr. Mippy and myself, as described in this chapter, has been in line with the sort of research methodology which today forms the basis of much community-based action research and development.

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By way of conclusion, it seems fitting to pay a final tribute to the vital contribution made to the Yuat enterprise by Edward Mippy, whose personal involvement in the project, from its inception in 1988 to his death in May 1992, proved to be a major factor in its ultimate success.

His commitment was loyal, unwavering and single-minded and he gave his time and energies solely for the satisfaction of knowing that he was advancing the cause of his people. Always a firm believer in what he termed "*voluntary service*," he made his contribution to the project without any expectation of personal reward or remuneration. In this regard, he was critical of some sections of his own community who were not so motivated.

Edward Mippy's honesty and directness were revealed in his dealings both with his own community and with the representatives of departments and agencies. He had a way of "getting to the point," often summing up a situation with a "dry" or "pithy" observation. He participated, too, in all stages of the developmental project. During the spinning and weaving program, for example, he was always first to arrive and last to leave each day. His tenacity and reliability were a model for the other workers and he was philosophical to the end when the program failed through lack of participants. Undaunted by the failure of the experimental spinning scheme, Mr. Mippy retained his optimism in seeking alternatives. When he saw the possibility of extending the craft training exercise, which he had introduced to the students of St. Joseph's school, he took it up with enthusiasm and once again led the way in helping to set up the old church hall as a workshop and instructing adult members of his community in the production of traditional artefacts.

As one of the most respected of Nyoongar Elders, he acted as spokesperson for the group when called upon to do so in negotiations with parliamentarians and government agencies. At the first Aboriginal "Kyana" Festival, held in Perth in February 1991, he took a leading role in setting up the displays and promoting sales. In the same year, when the condition of the old hall began to deteriorate, his voice was crucial in

lobbying parliamentarians, Aboriginal organisations and the local Shire for ongoing funds to meet recurrent expenditure and for the provision of alternative premises. At the time of his death, he was negotiating with the Ministry of Education for the preparation of a series of educational videos which were to encapsulate his vast knowledge of local Yuat culture. These were intended as an educational resource for the proposed school curriculum for Aboriginal Studies. Sadly, these plans were cut short by his untimely death in May, 1992. Although the vacuum left by his passing was felt, not only within the Aboriginal community but by many in the wider social context, the main lines of his visionary program were sufficiently well established by the time of his death to allow others to fill the breach and continue in his footsteps. As his former associate, I believe that his inspiration will continue to be a practical and enduring legacy to a rising generation.

The Yuat Artefacts Project is arguably Mr. Mippy's major material contribution to the cultural development of his people. The origin, growth and expansion of the project, as outlined in this chapter, should be seen as one of the vital elements of his life story, providing as it does a deeper understanding of the nature of the man and of the quality of his social legacy. His role in inspiring and guiding the project is overtly recognised in the title which he himself gave to the undertaking and in the photographic portrait which, for many years, presided over the workshop's activities. More importantly, however, his influence may be seen in the vitality of the enterprise and in its subsequent expansion. In 1998, with financial assistance from WAC, the Yuat Artefacts group acquired an additional building adjacent to the original workshop. The new premises, formerly a hardware store, have served for the development of an expanded business enterprise. Having established a freezing works, the group is now engaged in the commercial production

of ice for supply to regional businesses, while a sales outlet for second-hand furniture is also operating from the same premises.

On the occasion of the formal opening of the original workshop on Sunday, 18 November, 1995, a commemorative brass plate was unveiled by Mr. John Hayden, chair of ATSiC's "Kaata Wangkinyiny Regional Council" The plaque reads as follows:

*Yuat Nyungara Kaat-Maya*

*(Headquarters of the Yuat People)*

*This building is to commemorate the work of the late*

*Mr. Edward (Ned) Mippy, one of the co-founders of the Yuat Artefacts.*

Although recognised as being "one of the co-founders of the Yuat Artefacts" and indispensable to its early growth and development, Edward Mippy never attempted to control the project or dictate its direction. Rather, he was content to take his place as one of the workers, seeking always to promote and maintain a spirit of collective ownership – a spirit of unity and common endeavour in the cause of cultural awareness and education.

The events described in this chapter took place at the interface between the Aboriginal domain and the world of the wider community. It was the active presence of Mr. Mippy at that interface that gave both credibility and authority to the work of identifying needs and setting future directions for the Indigenous people of Moora. Without his presence, any attempt on my part as community facilitator to understand or operate with due regard to Indigenous sensibilities would not have been possible. What Mr. Mippy brought to our mutual association were those dimensions of cultural knowledge, experience and understanding of Aboriginal thought and behaviour which are indispensable for the construction of Indigenous representations of reality.

Through my participatory role in documenting this project I have highlighted the arts and crafts centre as one of Mr. Mippy's more important initiatives, demonstrating the practical dimension of his multi-faceted cultural vision. In doing so I have augmented the ethnobiographical focus of the thesis with an autoethnographic perspective, placing myself openly in the text as a participant who was able to see the larger context wherein self experiences occurred. The thesis now proceeds to examine the content of Mr. Mippy's cultural understandings, his educational methods and the Indigenous environment in which he worked.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MR. MIPPY'S CULTURAL WORLD: LANGUAGE, ORAL LITERATURE AND COSMOLOGY <sup>1</sup>

*"Without our identity, we're nothing. That's how I think about it."* (E. Mippy)

By providing an interpretation of the institutional and cultural milieu in which Edward Mippy lived his earlier years and then of the rural community which set the stage for his adult life, the second and third chapters of this thesis have identified some of the social, environmental and experiential factors which contributed to the shaping and developing of his cultural understandings and perspectives. The fourth chapter then described the development of his cultural arts and crafts enterprise as one of the major initiatives of his later years and as a material example of the way in which his vision of cultural awareness and renewal came to be implemented in the social arena.

The scope of this chapter is to present what Mr. Mippy revealed of his language, cultural knowledge and experience. In accord with the methodology chosen for this study and employing some of the terminology referred to by Tyler (1986: 122) as "the rhetoric of ethnography," the chapter aims at contributing a deeper understanding of the knowledge, experience and motivation which lay at the core of

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<sup>1</sup> "Language" here refers both to the Indigenous language spoken by Mr. Mippy and to his everyday speech. This latter speech was English, combined with Indigenous expressions. "Oral Literature" refers to his fund of stories or legends of a traditional



Edward Mippy's educational program and of his vision of cultural renewal. It also reveals something of his pedagogical methods and of the educational environment in which he chose to operate. More importantly, however, it provides a point of entry into his everyday Indigenous world. It offers an interpretive understanding of that world as he himself perceived and understood it, evoking, through the medium of that interpretive experience, what Tyler (1986: 125) calls an "emergent fantasy" of his contemporary Indigenous community as a social and cultural entity.

It was Mr. Mippy's view that the passing on of traditional knowledge was a task of vital importance to the future generation of Yuat people. As he expressed it, the continuity of cultural identity was an essential element for the youth of his community if they were to retain their sense of place and direction within the wider society. He saw that there would be continuing and far-reaching change in Aboriginal cultural life. Nevertheless, he emphasised that "*traditional ways*" must be treasured and retained. "*They must keep our identities and our traditional ways,*" he said. "*They must – it's a must for them. Otherwise they're lost*" (Bourke 1990).

In this present chapter, the recorded content of Edward Mippy's cultural heritage and understanding is examined under three major headings, viz., Language, Oral Literature and Cosmology. It must be understood, however, that these categories are by no means mutually exclusive. While they may be listed separately for practical reasons, they fuse and interpenetrate to such an extent that it may often be difficult to determine where one ends and another begins.

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nature, while "Cosmology" denotes his perception and interpretation of the physical environment.

Before proceeding, it is opportune to re-emphasise <sup>2</sup> that this study is not a formal contribution to linguistics, nor does it intend to model the language of the Southwest or its dialects. Unlike most other linguistic studies, the limited vocabulary employed here in the text and documented in Appendix 2 is the unique language of a single individual. It is presented as the fruit of my long association with Edward Mippy and the continual, verbal interaction which took place between us. By reason of its traditional content and its existential value as a medium of communication, the linguistic usage of Mr. Mippy constitutes an important subject in its own right. Its importance, however, has wider ramifications. Of the three categories mentioned, that of Indigenous language is the most pervasive as it enters into almost every expression of Mr. Mippy's cultural legacy. <sup>3</sup> Since, in almost any social context, language functions as a prime vehicle for the expression and communication of cultural concepts, it is hardly surprising that Edward Mippy's use of Indigenous language, as presented in this thesis, should be seen to operate as an interconnecting framework for almost all aspects of his cultural knowledge. It is a kind of common thread of Indigenous terminology and expression which lends a certain unity to otherwise diverse areas of cultural perception. In brief, the part played by Indigenous language may be seen across the whole spectrum of his cultural understanding and may be seen as having a major role, too, in his dynamic of cultural renewal.

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<sup>2</sup> See this thesis, Intro: 8.

<sup>3</sup> For the interest of those wishing to delve more deeply into the Nyoongar language, a large number of available sources and records are documented in Appendix 1.

*LANGUAGE IN THE LIFE OF EDWARD MIPPY*

Mr. Mippy considered his Indigenous language to be an important subject in its own right. He seemed to delight in conducting lessons in language in the classroom situation and in hearing the children learning and repeating his words and expressions. From 1984 to 1992, I had the privilege of assisting him in his formal and informal teaching program in the regional schools in and around Moora. During the course of my association with him over this period and with his encouragement, I was able to learn, absorb and record what I believe to have been the greater part of his linguistic knowledge. The record of this research appears in Appendix 1 of this study under the heading "The Vocabulary of the Late Edward Mippy." It may be necessary to have recourse to this wordlist from time to time during the presentation which follows.

*"THAT'S OUR SECRET WEAPON:" EDWARD MIPPY'S VOCABULARY*

The operative, recorded wordlist of Mr. Edward Mippy, as presented in the Appendix, consists of approximately 250 words and phrases. It has been divided for the reader's convenience into the various parts of speech and grammatical forms which would be familiar to anyone in the general community who has studied English or another language according to standard educational methods. It must be asserted immediately, however, that Mr. Mippy himself would have had little if any idea of his linguistic "thesaurus" as such, nor of the parts of speech into which his vocabulary could be divided. While the categorisation and ordering of words employed in the Appendix may

accord with the expectations and perceptions of non-Indigenous readers, it is not intended to be a reflection of Mr. Mippy's own perception of his language. As passed on to him by his forebears, language had been oral and unwritten. It was not something to be analysed but to be used. I believe that, besides acting as a vehicle for expression and communication, traditional language has been for the Yuat people in the post-contact era a feature of that cultural awareness and identity that continues to distinguish their community from the rest of the world. My contention, therefore, is that Edward Mippy did not see his language simply as a means of communication, but that it assumed both for him and for his community a symbolic significance as an important expression of Aboriginality, a significance which it continues to bear.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Mippy, I believe, would not have argued with the following comments of his close associate Mr. Fred Mogridge:

*... the revival of our culture and the language, I might say as well, is gonna have a big impact on the generation to come ... There's not much that I know in the way of language - which I'd like to see revived so I can grab hold of it, and my kids and their kids can grab hold of it as well ... it's bringin' our culture back (Mogridge in Bunbury 1996).*

In describing language as an important means of cultural reawakening, Mr. Mogridge was reflecting the view of many in his community. When answering questions during an ABC radio interview about our proposed Yuat dictionary, Edward Mippy described the cultural importance of the latter in quasi-military terms, referring to it as a "secret weapon." As he expressed it to his interviewer: "We've got the language there ... that's our secret weapon, you know!" (Green 1991). In the absence of any further explanation, his meaning here can only be

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<sup>4</sup> The importance of symbolism in culture has been forcefully emphasised by writers like Linnekin, who suggests that "the premise that culture is symbolically constructed

surmised. Perhaps he was saying that language was a potential weapon in the hands of his people; to be held in reserve and used as part of their arsenal of cultural renewal.

Having had minimal formal schooling, Edward Mippy expressed little interest in the intricacies of grammar and syntax. He was, however, willing and able to offer a few reflections, not only on the source of his linguistic knowledge but on some aspects of its style and composition. It will be of interest, therefore, to hear what he himself has to say on these issues.

*"WE PICKED IT UP AS WE WENT:" EARLY LESSONS IN LANGUAGE*

Mr. Mippy remembered that in his family environment traditional language had been little used as a means of communication. Asked whether his parents often spoke in Nyoongar, he replied;

*Oh not much, not mum and dad. Mum and dad you know, they had it in them ... but they never used it much when we [were] talking.*<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, he did pick up some language from his parents. He had the following memory, for instance, of the way they described non-Aboriginal as distinct from Aboriginal people. Besides using *Wadjala*, the word used today for a white person, they also had recourse to *djanak* or *djangka*, an old word for an evil spirit or a devil. He recalled:

*Mum and dad used to say that the white people were djanaks. Now 'djanak' is a devil, in English. They say 'djangkas coming' ... djangkas, that's white people. We all sit with our heads down!*<sup>6</sup>

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or 'invented' has become a hallmark of social-science scholarship ..." (Linnekin 1992: 249).

<sup>5</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 54).

<sup>6</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 6).

He went on to say that various expressions were used more often by his parents and elders in a natural setting, such as when they went out hunting together. It was *“just outside,”* as he put it, that the old expressions and exclamations came to the fore:

*‘Ni!’, ‘Ni!’... means you heard something at a long [emphasis] distance ... ‘Ni!’ The dog could have a kangaroo bailed up ... you’ll hear him barkin’. ‘Kaditj’ means it’s just here close. ‘Kaditj’ means something made a noise in the bush. ‘Baliwa!’ is something’s comin’ at you from the bush ... ‘baliwa!’ and ‘balayi!’<sup>7</sup>*

Speaking of the sources of his traditional language, however, Mr. Mippy went on to explain how he *“picked it up from the others, the old people”* in the Moore River Settlement. As he put it, *“we just picked it up as we went.”* Warming to his subject, Mr. Mippy gave the following examples of how Indigenous language provided a ready response to real-life situations:

*Yeah, at the Settlement, it was there. ‘Balayi!’ would come out, natural. ‘Balayi! ... you got to look around - something’s comin’. ‘Djinang!’ and all that. That’s been picked up around here with the sou’westers.*

Former associates of his have suggested that his language, like that of many of his peers, reflected the diverse origins of the Moore River Settlement’s Aboriginal population. This perception is borne out in the following recollection of Alice Nannup who, as a girl in Moore River, had shared a job with young Edward Mippy in the Settlement store:

*At the camps there were Nor’westers and Sou’westers all mixed in together like up at the compound. So people spoke in different languages, and if you were from the North, you’d pick up lingo from the South. See, us from the North, we’d call the bosses Nyambali, but the South had different words. Like we would say marndamara for policemen, and the South would call them menarch [manatj], that sort of thing. I picked up quite a bit of South language and I used to be able*

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<sup>7</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1900a: 54).

*to talk in my language with some of the Nor'westers* (Nannup 1992: 85).

It should be noted here, at least in passing, that if the integrity of regional dialects or languages was affected by the mixing of different “lingoes,” the very existence of Indigenous language at Moore River was threatened by official policy. As Nannup takes pains to add; “*in those days they didn't like us speaking in our language, we all had to keep to English, and that way they stamped a lot of it out.*” Apart from official policy, there was, in Maushart's view, a “compound culture” which was “resistant to traditional teaching.” The author quotes the following view of former inmate Doris Pilkington in regard to the general attitude manifested at the Settlement, even by the children, towards the use of Indigenous language:

*On arrival at the Settlement, the newcomers were told that speaking 'native language' was forbidden. Those who misunderstood or knowingly disobeyed the instruction (which had become an unwritten law) and continued to communicate in their traditional language were intimidated and victimised by others. Foreign and colonial words such as 'uncivilised,' 'primitive' and 'savages' were bandied about in the compound and the school playground* (Pilkington in Maushart 1993: 171).

In spite of this inhibiting atmosphere, language did survive at the Moore River Settlement, to be learned, adopted and carried into the wider world by people like Mr. Mippy. Whatever may be said about the mixing of languages or dialects, his grasp of traditional language, the legacy of “*the old people*” at the Moore River Settlement and elsewhere, remained one of his most treasured possessions. It was to prove to be, in its own right, an important part of his legacy to future generations. To be able to assess the vital role of traditional language in Edward Mippy's cultural understanding, some basic knowledge of its forms and usages is provided in the following section.

"SUBJECT COMES FIRST:" LANGUAGE USAGE IN THE WORLD OF  
MR. MIPPY

For the purposes of this study, some introduction to Edward Mippy's Indigenous language is indispensable. Through the record of his actual words and the way he used them, we are led to view his language as he did and to arrive at an understanding of the place of language in his cultural life. His voice, with its unique modes of expression, provides us with the means of proceeding further into his conceptual world of belief and understanding, conjuring up that "emergent fantasy" of Indigenous reality spoken of by Tyler (1986: 125) as a goal of ethnographic narrative.

As already stated, Mr. Mippy would have reflected little on the form and structure of his Indigenous language. Some of his observations, however, do indicate an awareness that his language possessed some unique characteristics that set it apart from the standard forms of English expression. Of primary importance to him (as it was to other speakers of the Nyoongar tongue) was the emphasis on the subject (i.e. noun) in any phrase or expression. He explained how the "subject" always "comes first."

*See! 'Wilara windji?'... when we goin' out huntin' we say 'wilara windji?', that means 'where's the moon?' Subject comes first. You'd say 'moon where?', or 'where is the moon?' We say 'wilara windji?'... 'moon where?'<sup>8</sup>*

In normal conversation, Mr. Mippy followed this principle. Like others in his community, he applied the rule "subject comes first" in the

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<sup>8</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1900a: 65).



conjunction of a noun with an adjective or adverb, reversing the English rule of placing the adjective before the noun in a noun phrase. The phrase “bad eyes,” for example, was rendered as “*miyal wara*” (eyes bad), while the word “clever” was expressed in the phrase “*kaat moorditj*” (head very good). Similarly, a man with a sick stomach was said to be “*ko’bool menditj*” (tummy sick), while a person walking slowly was “*yakany mookiny*” (turtle-like).

Another important element for him was the role of the verb in the typical Nyoongar sentence. Just as the “*subject*” came first, the verb was habitually placed last. Thus, in the word sequence employed by Mr. Mippy, the sentence: “*Baal bokadja bidjara nyininy*” (lit., he over there on the ground sitting) places the verb last. It was his way of rendering “he is sitting over there on the ground.” By the same token, “*Baal wot koorliny*” (lit., he away going) was used by him to express “he is going away.” These are typical examples of the traditional word order used in the Yuat and in other Southwest dialects in which the placement of the verb differs significantly from normal English usage.

It must be noted immediately, however, that Mr. Mippy felt in no way bound to adhere to these principles. In the example that follows, in which matter for classroom language lessons is recorded by him on audiotape, he will sometimes be heard to use Indigenous words in a normal English sequence. The classes in language were originally given by him to the year 6 and 7 pupils of St. Joseph’s, Moora, between 1985 and 1987. At that time, more than half the pupils of the school were Aboriginal. I helped him conduct similar classes in a number of other regional schools which had a majority of non-Indigenous students. In regard to language instruction, it was his expressed intention to include the wider community as well as his own. This was, as he put it, “*so the Wadjalas [white people] know what we’re talking about.*”

It would be useful at this point to indicate some examples of the kind of material presented by Mr. Mippy during his language classes. Always aware of the need to preserve and record his knowledge for the benefit of posterity, Mr. Mippy privately dictated the following linguistic information on his own tape recorder. It is reproduced here in its entirety, as follows:

*I'll tell you a few Aboriginal words ... of when we talk ... If we say 'balayi!', that means 'look out!', and if I say 'ni!, ni!', or 'kaditj!', that means 'listen!' If I say 'windji?', that means 'where?', 'where is it?', or 'who's goin' there?', or somethin' like that.*

*'Yongka'- you all know yongkas, that's the kangaroo. 'Wetj,' or 'yalerbidi,' that's the emu.*

*If I say 'nakamoo!', that means 'look!' 'Yaan baal coming?'- that means 'who's that coming?'- 'look over there, who's that coming?' If I say, 'balayi, Wadjala!' that means a white person's coming; 'look out! There's a white person.' If I say, 'balayi manatj!' that means, 'look out! There's a manatj coming,' that's a policeman. 'Yoka,' well, yoka is a woman. 'Kaat wara' means you got nothing in your head. 'Kaat' is your head.*

*If I say 'bokadja'... 'bokadja' means 'way over.' If I say 'djinang yongka bokadja,' that means 'I can see a kangaroo, way over.'*

*So ... 'kaal' – 'kaal' means fire. 'Kep' means water, what falls from the sky – rain water. 'Wilara' means moon; when the moon comes up. 'Djena bwoka,' that means boots. 'Where's my djena bwoka?' – that means 'get my boots' (Mippy 1986).*

In the above transcript of Edward Mippy's self-recorded instruction material, there emerge the following important characteristics which I have found to be generally typical of his language style. In the first place, it may be seen that Yuat expressions were rarely used in isolation, but were usually in a broader context of English, thus reflecting the normal usage within his community. "Yaan baal coming?" (who's that

coming?), for instance, is a typical example of the way in which Yuat words could be used in association with an English word or words in the same sentence.

Some expressions seem to have been derived from non-Yuat sources, probably picked up from companions in the Moore River Settlement. "*Wetj*" and "*yalerbidi*," for instance, are given as alternative renderings of the word for "emu," even though he himself conceded that the latter version, "*yalerbidi*," is peculiar to the Yamadji, a northern linguistic group. "*Nakamoo*,"<sup>9</sup> meaning "look," or "look at," and "*wilara*," his word for the moon, are examples of a unique repertoire of words which he seems to have borrowed from other sources (in this case, the Wangkayi or Western Desert languages).

On the other hand, some items of his vocabulary reflect the usage common to his own region. The word "*yoka*" (woman), for instance, is one of a family of words (nouns) which he himself recognised as belonging to a more distinctive local or Yuat style. Referring to Nyoongar language speakers from some regions further to the south, he once remarked that "*they seem to clip their words.*" This was a reference to the eclipse of the final vowel in some southern dialects. In the left-hand column of the comparative table on the following page (fig. 6) are listed some typical examples of words used by Mr. Mippy. In the centre column are the same words spelt according to a common Southwest, or "mainstream" pronunciation. Lacking a final vowel, these latter words are amongst those which would have seemed to him to be "*clipped*" or shortened.

This is not the place, I believe, for a detailed examination of the dialectal differences that once existed between the various regions that

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<sup>9</sup> Re "*Nakamoo*" or "*Nakamu*," see Douglas (1988: 53).

are embraced by the Southwest genus of language known as “Nyoongar.” Neither their geographical distribution nor their possible origins are within the scope of this study.<sup>10</sup> It is sufficient to note here that Mr. Mippy was aware of some enduring regional differences in pronunciation and seemed to have little difficulty in conversing with Nyoongar speakers from outside the Yuat area.

This chapter will later outline Mr. Mippy’s role in a movement which began in 1985, sponsored by linguists from the Institute of Aboriginal Studies,<sup>11</sup> to standardise the orthography of the language of the Southwest. The Aboriginal community, he believed, should be the final arbiter in all questions of spelling their language. “*We’ve got to go with them, Koorda [mate],*” he once remarked to me in reference to the need for researchers such as myself to heed the “Aboriginal voice” rather than the opinion of non-Indigenous linguists in the matter of spelling. Moreover, he believed strongly that within the Indigenous Southwest society, respect should be given to the preservation of

**Fig. 6:** Table comparing words used by Mr. Mippy with common Southwest variants:

<u>Mr. Mippy</u>	<u>Southwest</u>	<u>English</u>
<i>Boorna</i>	<i>Boorn</i>	tree, wood
<i>Bwoka</i>	<i>Bwok</i>	cloak
<i>Dadja</i>	<i>Daatj</i>	meat

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of this subject, see von Brandenstein (1986: Intro.).

<sup>11</sup> This Institute was attached to the Western Australian College of Advanced Education (WACAE), which is now Edith Cowan University.

<i>Djena</i>	<i>Djen</i>	foot
<i>Kano</i>	<i>Kaon</i>	tuber
<i>Kidji</i>	<i>Kitj</i>	spear
<i>Kwoba</i>	<i>Kwop</i>	good
<i>Moolya</i>	<i>Mooly</i>	nose
<i>Nyoongara</i>	<i>Nyoongar</i>	Aboriginal men
<i>Yoka</i>	<i>Yok</i>	woman
<i>Yorna</i>	<i>Yorn</i>	goanna

regional traditions in the matter of culture and language. This thesis does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of Edward Mippy's use of Indigenous language nor does it try to trace its origins by comparing it with earlier sources. Interesting comparisons could be made, however, with the broader family of Southwest dialects or with the careful record, made in 1851 by Salvado (1977: 255), of the "dialects which are spoken in the neighbourhood of New Norcia." Such would indeed be a worthy subject for further research.<sup>12</sup>

Mr. Mippy, however, gave little attention to such academic pursuits. What did concern him was the work of revitalising interest in his traditional tongue. His efforts in this regard comprised an important part of his vision of cultural renewal and will be examined here under two headings, viz., language education and language reconstruction.

#### *THE WORK OF LANGUAGE REVIVAL*

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<sup>12</sup> See von Brandenstein (1986: intro).

## (1) Language Education

Formal classes in Yuat Nyoongara language were initially begun in St. Joseph's School Moora in 1985 and were continued until 1987. These classes were designed for two primary streams (Years 4 & 5 and Years 6 & 7) and combined a mix of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the ratio of about 6:4. They were conducted by Mr. Mippy with my assistance and formed part of a broad spectrum of cultural instruction. In initiating this educational program, Mr. Mippy was beginning to realise his long-standing ambition of bringing the younger generation of his people back into contact with their ancestral traditions. *"All those little things I'd like to teach the kiddies,"* he declared. *"I'd like to go into the school and teach them"* (Mippy 1986).

His ambition to *"go into the school and teach"* was at last realised. The St. Joseph's language project was described by the media at the time as probably the first of its kind in Western Australia. (*State Affair* 8 Nov. 1985). Initially some parents, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were unable to comprehend the rationale behind such instruction and voiced opposition to the program. As a result, Mr. Mippy felt obliged to suspend classes at St. Joseph's in 1987. However, informal classes continued in other regional schools. In 1990 he and I became joint-tutors in Aboriginal Studies, having received accreditation through the Ministry of Education. Weekly classes, focusing on the Yuat language, were then begun at the Central Midlands Senior High School. In 1991 Mr. Mippy began additional classes, in association with me, at the Moora Campus of the C.Y. O'Connor College of TAFE. These classes, conducted as part of TAFE's Aboriginal Access program, were attended during the course of that year by an average of twelve Yuat adults who were resident in the town.

As Edward Mippy was the last of the Yuat speakers in Moora who possessed the linguistic knowledge necessary for teaching, his death in May 1992 inevitably proved a severe setback to the language programs which he had established. However the language instruction course under the Aboriginal Access program continued under my direction until my resignation from TAFE in 1995. At the end of the following year I also discontinued the language teaching program which Mr. Mippy and I had begun at the Central Midlands High School.<sup>13</sup>

Another major work of cultural renewal which benefited from Mr. Mippy's input and involvement was the program of language research undertaken by the Southwest Aboriginal Community. This research culminated in the formation of the Noongar Language and Cultural Centre which was initially located in the city of Bunbury, W.A. His share in the origin and development of this important Centre was significant and will be traced in the following section which deals with the question of language reconstruction and preservation.

## (2) Language Reconstruction

In 1985, under the initial sponsorship of the W.A. Institute of Aboriginal Studies, plans were developed by a group of concerned Aboriginal people for a series of conferences regarding ways and means of preserving the Nyoongar language. As a notable resident of the Moora area, Mr. Mippy accepted an invitation to join a body of Elders drawn from representative areas of the Southwest. The first of these conferences was held in September of that year at the Noalimba

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<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of this temporary setback, opportunities for Yuat-Nyoongara language teaching have since opened up elsewhere (e.g. at the Education Centre, New Norcia)..

Conference Centre, Perth. It was accepted at this meeting that the Nyoongar language was in a serious state of decline and urgent steps would have to be taken in order to preserve and record the knowledge of the Elders. It was therefore decided to organise a series of conferences devoted to this purpose. Over the course of the next six years, Nyoongar Language conventions were held at Marribank (Dec. 1985), Guildford (Oct. 1986), Wellington Mills (Feb. 1990), Katanning (Oct. 1991), Narrogin (Nov. 1991), Narrogin (Apr. 1992) and Dryandra (Oct.-Nov. 1992).

As the main representative of the northern language area (the Yuat Nyoongara), Mr. Mippy attended all of these meetings accompanied (with the exception of the Narrogin meetings) by myself and on three occasions by a small group of the Indigenous youth of Moora. The involvement of the younger people of his community in such events was of paramount importance to Mr. Mippy. Interviewed on television after the conclusion of the Katanning conference, he expressed the following view of the part to be played by cultural education in the task of rescuing "street kids."

*The kiddies I brought down to this conference at Katanning, they can't get over it ... so they'll take that back and they'll talk to the other ones we call 'street kids' and we hope that somewhere along the line they'll come up to me 'n front me and ask could they come ... so we'll bring them (Bourke 1991).*

The involvement of children and youth was indeed an important issue for all the Indigenous participants and the presence of young people was a feature of every meeting. Non-Aboriginal people took part also. Except for the two meetings held at Narrogin which were attended by Elders only, several non-Indigenous advisers and organisers, including linguists, were co-opted for the conferences. The aims of the conferences and the understandings on which they were based were



summarised in the following excerpt from a printed report issued by the organisers at the conclusion of the convention at Wellington Mills, W.A.

*There was official recognition of the fact that everyone speaks one Nyoongar language. There was also official recognition of the fact that there are at least three distinct dialects spoken. The elders advised that each dialect must be preserved, by preparing the courses in each dialect. The dialects must also be preserved in Nyoongar dictionaries, and in other cases where the language is written. They stated that children should learn their grandparents' way of speaking and understand and respect other Nyoongar dialects (Nyoongar Language Conference 1990).*

Mr. Mippy was greatly encouraged by the establishment of the Nyoongar Language Project. It would have affirmed his vision for the survival of the Indigenous language and encouraged him in continuing the work of teaching which he had first begun in Moora in 1985. He accepted nomination as a member of the Project panel and as representative of the northern (Yuat) language area. One of the senior Elders of the Southwest community, Mr. Cliff Humphries, was also chosen to represent the district of Kellerberrin. These meetings finally bore fruit. A course of Nyoongar language instruction was prepared and published (Wooltorton 1992), followed by the *Noongar Dictionary* (Whitehurst 1992) under the auspices of the Noongar Language and Culture Centre.<sup>14</sup> With Mr. Mippy as co-author, I also worked on the compilation of a Yuat dictionary (as yet unpublished) which, though oriented to the linguistic usage of the Yuat area, drew extensively on and was supplemented by other Southwest language sources.

What has been said so far regarding Edward Mippy's Indigenous language has served as an introduction to its vocabulary and given some idea of its nature and style. For Mr. Mippy, of course, the Yuat

Nyoongara language was clearly a subject of prime importance in its own right. It was, to use his terms, a "*secret weapon*" in his arsenal of cultural revitalisation. However, given the role of Indigenous language in the unique cosmology which underpinned his educational program, some knowledge of the language is also of vital importance for the comprehension of what follows.

Under the next heading, the thesis proceeds to an examination of Edward Mippy's cultural understandings, first as revealed through his oral literature and then in the body of belief, custom and environmental perspectives which he had inherited from his forebears and which he endeavoured to pass on as an important part of his cultural legacy.

#### *ORAL LITERATURE AND COSMOLOGY*

Through the following interpretive presentation of the record of stories, beliefs and environmental knowledge which formed and expressed Mr. Mippy's cultural heritage, it is possible to gain a glimpse of some of the cosmological understandings which were not simply his own, but which were part of a traditional inheritance shared by many of his contemporaries. Edward Mippy's cultural perspectives are offered here, however, through the prism of his personal recollection and experience. It must be borne in mind, too, that the three areas to be studied in this section, i.e., story, belief and environmental knowledge, should not be seen in isolation but, to some extent at least, as interpenetrating and interdependent.

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<sup>14</sup> The assistance of Mr. Edward Mippy in the preparation of these works was acknowledged by Woollorton in the dedication to her course book. Both publications have since been widely used and distributed.

In the following section the main focus of enquiry is the part played by story and legend in the didactic style of Mr. Mippy. As each story is presented, however, it will be necessary to introduce the reader to considerations of belief and environmental understanding which, being integral to the narrator's didactic purpose, may need to be dealt with in the context of the story.

*MR. MIPPY AS STORY-TELLER: A LEGACY OF LEGEND*

Edward Mippy's repertoire included five stories or legends which he never tired of repeating to the children and which formed an integral part of his teaching method. Four of the five stories were tape recorded and are presented here verbatim. The fifth and last story, a short one, was often told to the children in my presence. Although it was never recorded "live," it is well remembered by me and is recounted in my own words. I have composed my own title for each of the five stories. For the purpose of offering an overall perspective, however, each story is preceded by a brief resumé.<sup>15</sup>

*(1) THE STORY OF JOEY'S NOSE*

The first story, which I am calling "Joey's Nose," is set in the Southwest of the State, near the town of Capel. It tells of two disobedient boys who stole away from their parents' camp one night with their father's digging sticks in order to look for edible grubs. Having broken the sticks in the process of digging they were afraid to return home and

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<sup>15</sup> The first three were self-recorded, the fourth recorded by Roberts (1990a: 65).

fled further into the bush. Discovering their absence, the boys' father went in pursuit, accompanied by two of his dogs which he sent on ahead of him. The boys lay in wait for the dogs and speared them, cutting off their tails.

Arriving at the coast near Capel, the boys felled a tree and used it as a bridge to cross to a small island, known today as "Joey's Nose." The father continued to track the boys and discovered the bodies of his dogs without their tails. Filled with rage and vowing vengeance, he followed them to the tree bridge and began to cross over to the island. The boys, however, pushed their end of the log off into the water and the old man was swept away and drowned. The boys eventually perished on the island and to this day it is a forbidden place. Anyone who looks at the island now will see two dogs' tails waving and will consequently become ill. Here follows the story as told by Mr. Mippy:

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*This is another one about two boys who didn't do what they were told. Now, you find a lot of these kiddies around that won't do what they're told ... now, there was an ol' Noongar, real old Noongar, he was havin' a sleep 'n these two boys ... they waited till he went to sleep and they pinched his wana stick, they both took one each, 'n they took it, went out, 'n they were diggin' borns, kwardanys 'n that ... the thing like I told you when I went out for the bus ride for the school ... I took 'em out during school to teach them.*

*Now they went out and they found a lot of borns, they were diggin', diggin', diggin' and they had big heaps of borns 'n kwardanys ... they had 'em heaped up there, an' all of a sudden they didn't see, didn't watch what they were diggin'... hit a stump or a root un'erneath and the two wanas went 'b'rnt dily!'... <sup>16</sup> 'n the other feller's went 'b'rnt dily!' too and broke. Now they knew they were in for it ... a wana stick is like gold to an old Noongar. That's for him to dig for his, yer know, food 'n that. He digs his borns, and 'e digs rabbits out, 'n 'e digs bungarras <sup>17</sup> out . 'e always diggin'. That's the main thing, that wana stick.*

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<sup>16</sup>An Indigenous, onomatopoeic word, signifying "snap!," "crack!," or "splash!"

<sup>17</sup> *Bungarra*; a species of goanna.

Oh!, they knew they done wrong, 'n they took off, they took off ... the father, 'e woke up, he missed these two boys ... so he went lookin' for them. He found the bornas, two big heaps of em, 'n, ah, kwardanys was there. So 'e got wild, 'e got real wild ... 'e went back home 'n 'e, ... went back home 'n 'e let this dog or dingo [go] ... 'e had two dingoes there. He used to tie their, they tie their two front paws back..so they can't get away ... with kangaroo sinews.

Kangaroo sinews is what you get out of the kangaroo tail, the tip of the tail. You cut it 'n you pull, 'n you get sinews out, an' it's real strong, strong as you can get it. You can't get anything stronger ... strong as any rope you got. So this is what he tied his two dingoes back with, what he kep', for catching his kangaroo, emus..

So he got these two 'n he let 'em go 'n 'e went down an' he tracked these two boys, he tracked 'em, tracked 'em, tracked 'em, tracked 'em. The dingoes got on the scent ... 'is two dingoes went after 'em 'n 'e's follerin', the ol' feller's follerin' behind. 'Koolankas, koolankas, koolankas, ... windji, windji, windji?' he said. 'Koolankas' means 'kids' ... these two boys. 'Koolankas' means 'where's the kids?', 'Windji' means 'where are they?' So he's follerin' behind, 'n the boys are ... they heard these dogs coming ... dingoes ... 'n they had a spear, they also had a spear each too, what they took off their dad's ... so they couldn't run any faster, 'n the dingoes was catchin' them up. The one boy said to the other, 'we gotta kill these two, so you spear one 'n I'll spear one.'

So they waited for these dogs. They was comin' ... these dingoes they was comin'. One speared one; the other bloke speared the other. They had a knife with 'em, so they cut off the tail of each. One boy cut the tail off the other one ... the other boy cut the tail off the one 'e killed. And they took off.

Now the father's comin' behind: 'koolangka, koolangka, windji? ... baaminy, baaminy, baaminy,' that means 'where are these kids?' He's gonna baaminy them; that means he's gonna give 'em a hidin'; baaminy means 'hit.' So, he come to the two dingoes and he look. Spears still stickin' in 'em ... and the tails were

cut off. Well! That made him more wild. 'E started to go on these boys' track ... so round 'n round 'n round 'n round 'n round 'n round ... 'n they were heading towards Capel, place called 'Joey's Nose,' Yallingup.

And, er, they come to the coast ... come to the coast and er, they somehow or another there was a big tree. They chopped it down, that's how the story go ... and they and they chopped this big tree down, 'n they had a tommyhawk or an axe ... 'n they chopped it down, chop, chop, chop, chop ... 'n it fell right out to a little rock. A little rock ... 'n that rock's there today at 'Joey's Nose,' if you'd like to check on it. It went, the limbs went right out, the tree fell onto the rock and made a little plank-way where they could walk. They went out on it, 'n they got out on this little rock. Right to today, that's wirnatj ... it's bad to look at that when you come over the hill. The Noongars' ruling is, if you do it 'n you see like two little tails wavin', someone wavin' tails, you'll get crook.

So, I'll tell you the rest of the story now, how it goes. When th' old father got there he seen this tree an' he looked at it and he seen the boys, 'n he goin' out there to kill them. When 'e got half way they pushed, the two boys pushed the branches off ... limbs that was hangin' on to this rock ... pushed 'em off, 'n the old man went down with the log, with the tree, down to the bottom and got drowned. So those boys was caught out there.. 'n that's where they perished, 'n they died ... 'n as I said just a while ago, right up to today, if a Noongar goes down to that 'Joey's Nose,' fishing or anything like that, he's not allowed to look up. If he looks up and see a tail wavin', like someone wavin' a tail, that's bad, that's wirnatj. Kaanya, that is ... you mustn't look ... bad, very bad ... you're supposed to go home and get sick.

That's the story of the two boys that didn't do what they were told, or done the wrong thing by their father. So they perished out there, and their father got drowned. That's what I always say, to always do what you're told ... any kiddies, Noongars or Wadjalas, that means white or black.

## (2) THE STORY OF THE WOODADJI

"The Story of the Woodadji" also involves two boys who roamed off into the bush while their parents were sleeping. They discovered some grass-trees containing *bardi* (edible grubs) and became so engrossed in collecting and eating them that didn't notice some *woodadji* (evil little men of the bush) creeping up and surrounding them. The *woodadji* dragged the boys off to their underground lair and killed them.

The parents, who had been tracking the boys, came upon the hole in the ground and saw what had happened. Realising the boys had been killed, they heaped up some wood of the grass-tree around the cave entrance and set fire to it. The hot gum from the wood ran down into the hole. All the *woodadji* were burnt to death with the exception of one little creature who was caught trying to escape and thrown back into the fire. Immediately his stomach burst and a little black and white bird jumped out. This was the *djidi-djidi* (willy wagtail) or so-called "devil bird."

The father chased the bird but it escaped by jumping from place to place. This is why, to this day, parents tell their children never to go

near the “devil bird.” If children chase him, warns Mr. Mippy at the conclusion of this story, he will jump ahead of them and lead them astray.

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*There's another little story about woodadjis. Now these are the little people that live, they live up in the big caves.. known to us as the woodadjis ... 'n I've always warned 'n told the kiddies about these little men. Never roam around unless you got big people with you.*

*Now, once upon a time there was another ol' Noongar ... he's had these two boys out with 'im and er, they went off, they went off while he was 'sleep ... 'n when he ... their mother 'n dad was there, mum 'n dad. Now, the two oldies was sle-e-eping, 'n these two boys roamed off. They went down, oh, about a quarter of a mile in the bush, 'n they come to some ... come across some blackboys.<sup>18</sup> Blackboys ... they pushed one over 'n the bardis<sup>19</sup> were packed. Bardis was all in 'em. An' they started eatin' 'em, eatin' 'em there ... eatin' 'em 'n pickin' 'em, pickin' 'n savin' 'em ... puttin' 'em round.. and er, it was gettin' late, gettin' late in the evening ... 'n they didn't notice, didn't notice these little men coming in ... they were coming round 'em while they were busy gettin' these bardis, 'n they all closed in on 'em.*

*One of the boys heard, tha's too late ... they heard a little stick, 'b'rnt dily!<sup>20</sup> ... little feller trod on a stick by mistake. They looked round, 'n there's all these little men, closing in on 'em. So they grabbed 'em, took them ... they had a scuffle there, the boys put up a fight, but no ... there was too many of them. They took 'em right through the bush, right through the thick bush and into a bit of a clearing where there was a hole in the ground, big cave thing,<sup>21</sup> in the ground.*

*This is where these woodadjis lived, see. And they took 'em down there and they done away with 'em ... what we call 'noyitj.' 'Noyitj' means 'e killed 'em ... and they done away with them, 'n the old father come along with mum. They found where all these blackboys was knocked over, and seen where there was a scuffle there, they fought around ... an' 'e said to 'is mother, 'woodadjis barang koolangkas'; 'woodadjis barang koolangkas.' That means that the woodadjis grabbed them and took 'em bokadja, took 'em right away. 'Bokadja' means 'right away.'*

*So they track, track, track track, track, track, tracked 'em ... tracked 'em. They were worried, 'n they come there, they come to this hole ... an' they could hear the little woodadjis down the bottom havin' a good ol' time. The boys was*

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<sup>18</sup> Known as “Balka,” in Nyoongar language (author)

<sup>19</sup> Edible grubs.

<sup>20</sup> An expression meaning “snap!” or “crack!”

<sup>21</sup> Aboriginal people speak of such caves in the Yuat area and at Yanchep, W.A.

*already noyitj .. that means 'killed,' so the old father, 'e said, 'look mum, we gotta gather up a lot of these blackboys ... 'n pack it on top of that hole, that's the only way we're gonna get even with these woodadjis.'*

*Well they packed all these blackboys there ... and they set alight to 'em ... and as soon as it started burnin' all the gum outta the blackboys ran down the hole .. went down the hole 'n killed 'em ... all except one, one little feller ... 'e came out of the hole. When 'e come out, the old man grabbed 'im ... grabbed 'im an' threw 'im on the fire ... 'n just before he burst, when his stomach went 'b'rnt dily!'... that's sort of 'busted' ... out jumped this little djidi-djidi, little black and white bird ... 'e jumped out. An' the ol' feller said, 'oh, I'll have to try to kill 'im, 'cause that's the devil bird.' An' you think the old man could hit 'im? He couldn't hit 'im 'cause he's a smart little bird, he went 'djidi, djidi, djidi, djidi ... djidi, djidi, djidi,... 'n 'is little tail was waggin', jumpin' around 'n the ol' man give in ... 'e couldn't kill 'im.*

*So right up to today, that is known ... an' I've told my kiddies never to chase that bird, 'cause that is a djidi-djidi, an' it is a devil bird. It's wara, don't foller it. Wara means 'bad'... don't. He'll lead you away all the time: you'll foller 'im an' foller 'im. He pretend he can't fly ... 'e jumps around. You gotta throw something at 'im, you can't hit 'im. So, right up to today ... 'n I've always said that ... the djidi-djidi is a devil bird. Never go near 'im.*

### (3) THE STORY OF THREE SPRINGS

As its title indicates, "The Story of Three Springs" centres around the town of that name which is situated between Moora and Geraldton to the north of Yuat country. It tells how, in the beginning, there was only one fire stick in existence. Two old men of that place quarrelled over its use. One wanted to use the fire for cooking, while the other thought that all meat should be eaten raw. The latter determined to get rid of the fire so that it could never be used. He called a chicken hawk to take the fire stick and drop it in the ocean.

After the bird set off, the second man sent two bronze-wing pigeons with orders to bring the fire back. Three times the pigeons circled, looking for the hawk, one to left and one to the right. Three times they came together and at each meeting place a spring of water



arose. However, they had not as yet sighted their quarry, though they heard him crying out ahead of them. A fourth time they set out. This time they flew together and were more successful. Seeing the chicken hawk, they gave chase. Now over the ocean, the chicken hawk dropped the fire stick which splashed into the water. Just before it reached the water, however, the bronze-wings, diving down in unison, caught a tiny spark on the whiskers which grow on either side of their beaks. Nursing the spark, the birds landed on the coast and made a big fire by blowing on the little spark until it became a flame.

Meanwhile the two men arrived at the scene, having seen the smoke from the fire. They immediately began to fight. They threw spears at each other and the man who had wanted the fire extinguished was killed.

This story accounts for the origin of the "Three Springs" which have given their name to the town. It also explains the singed whiskers which can be seen on the cheeks of the bronze-winged pigeon. Above all, Mr. Mippy concludes, it explains why all the people today value fire and can use it for cooking their meat. Here follows the legend, as recounted by Edward Mippy.

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*Well, ladies and gentlemen, a little yarn 'ere about how we first become aware of eating the meat raw, or cooking it.*

*There was two Noongaras. One Noongar said, 'oh, let 'em, let 'em eat it raw' ... 'n the other feller said, 'no, we must cook it. We must eat our tucker properly.' So the one that said he wanted the meat ate raw, all our tucker raw ... 'e looked up on a tree, and there was a chicken 'awk. So the chicken 'awk ... 'e got the chicken 'awk to grab this one little fire stick they had, 'n he took off with it. So the other ol' feller was worried ... worried, thinkin' how he's gonna catch that chicken 'awk. He looked in the tree, and there was two pigeons, bronze wing pigeons. They're very fast birds, these. So he got both these, 'n 'e sent one out to the left, 'n one to the right. So they went out, 'n they come in, 'n they just missed this chicken 'awk, carryin' this fire stick. He's goin' to the sea, to throw it in. So 'n they came in together, they listened, they could hear 'im goin'*

along, over ... further over in the bush: 'kep, kep windji; b'rnt dily! b'rnt dily! ana?' That means 'where the water? I'm gonna throw this stick in, so nobody can cook their meat.'

So they went out again ... they went out again, these two birds, 'n they come in again. Now, where they came in - this is s'posed to happen somewhere around Three Springs - every place they came in an' met, there's a little spring. They came in again. They listen 'n they hear him goin': 'kep, kep windji; b'rnt dily! b'rnt dily! ana?' - 'kep, kep windji; b'rnt dily! b'rnt dily! ana?' So they went out again, 'n they came in again, so many miles down they came in again; 'n they missed 'im ... 'e just goin' again ... now tha's the third time they came in. So right up to today, if you go to where these two pigeons come in ... there's three springs there. But if you go up along the line, past Carnamah, you're goin' to school .. you'll always tell your teacher that.

So they went out again - this was their last chance. They come in again, 'n they was just on the sand hills, 'n 'e was just gonna throw it in, into the sea. 'E did throw it! ... 'n these two birds come, 'n they met, put their two 'eads together, 'n a little spark got on their whiskers. If you look at a bronze wing pigeon, you see a little whisker thing turned up. A little spark got on there.

They sat down 'n they blew, blew, blew, 'n it got bigger ... a pin's 'ead, 'n it got bigger, bigger, bigger ... 'n they made a fire. They made a big fire, 'n these two old fellers was sitting back there, waiting for the results. They seen the fire, and the bloke that said they wanted the tucker cooked ... they were gonna cook their tucker and eat it ... 'e got up and he was dancing with joy. The other old feller got wild ... they both grabbed a spear each an' they had a fight. An' the bloke that wanted the fire, 'e killed the other old bloke ... speared him and killed 'im.

That's why, right up to today, you're in your house, you're happy, you're lighting fires with matches 'n that ... 'n cooking. If it wasn't for that old Noongar you'd have been eating meat raw, 'n your tucker wouldn't be cooked ... right up till today. So I hope you kiddies listen to that, 'n pass this down, as you go along, get older, pass it down to the next little one ... so he'll realise what went on years ago. Thank you for listening.

#### (4) THE BIRTH OF THE MOON

This legend, "The Birth of the Moon," is set in the creation time and once again centres around a fierce argument between two old Nyoongars. One of the men said "when your parents die, let 'em go. Forget about 'em." The other strongly disagreed, saying, "no, they must come back and visit us." Unable to convince his partner, the latter fought with him

and killed him. Immediately, the moon appeared in the sky, coming up over the hill.

The full moon now comes back each month, visiting his people by night. In the following self-recording, Mr. Mippy explained that the moon is the spirit of the dead and his name is Wilara.

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*Two old Nyoongars had a row.. two of them had a row. One bloke said 'when your parents die, let 'em go. Forget about 'em.' Other bloke said, 'no, they must come back and visit us.' So they had a fight ... and the one that said 'they must come back and visit us,'... 'e killed the other feller. Just when he killed 'im, the moon come over the hill. From that day to now, that is our spirits comin' back to visit us ... and his name is the Wilara.*

*But he is the one - he's the spirits. I tell all my little kiddies, grannies, that's your grandfather comin' back to see you ... my father. And they'd sit, they'd cuddle up to me you know ... 'don't be frightened, he's only comin' back to see you.' All them little things come in and it's good for the kiddies ... good for the big people too ... grown ups..*

On another occasion, when speaking on camera during a television program, Mr. Mippy reinforced the concept of the moon as a spiritual entity. As he explained:

*The moon is the spirit ... the full moon, that is. He comes back to see all the dead. That's when we talk to our kiddies. He comes back, 'e comes over... creeps over 'n leaves shadows 'ere 'n shadows there.. (Mippy in Bourke 1990).*

##### (5) THE MAN IN THE MOON

The final story, which I have called "The Man in the Moon," also concerns Wilara. Although this story was often recounted by Mr. Mippy, it was never recorded "viva voce." It is reproduced as follows, from my own memory and in my own words.

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Before there was any moon, an old man called Wilara used to chop wood with his axe. Because it was too dark to see clearly, he kept hitting his leg. This made him curse and swear a lot.

In order to give light for the old man and to prevent him cursing and swearing, *Maman*<sup>22</sup> put the moon in the sky. But even though he could now see more clearly, the old man continued to curse and swear while he chopped wood. The old man was punished for this. He was taken up into the sky with his axe and placed on the moon. If you look closely, you can see Wilara there on the moon, still chopping wood with his axe.

*"ALWAYS DO WHAT YOU'RE TOLD:" MR. MIPPY'S PEDAGOGICAL PURPOSE*

In relating what might be called his "cautionary tales," Mr. Mippy's comments indicate a pedagogical purpose in expressing views regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and the need for children to listen to their parents. As he put it:

*That's the story of the two boys that didn't do what they were told, or done the wrong thing by their father. That's what I always say, to always do what you're told ... any kiddies, Noongars or Wadjalas, that means white or black.*<sup>23</sup>

When questioned, Mr. Mippy registered concern about what he regarded as a growing crisis within his society. Even adults who should know better, he maintained, were violating the duty of respect owed to parents, seniors and elders. He made this point when making the following remarks concerning one of his nephews, who had achieved a degree of public notoriety:

*He [Mr. Mippy's nephew] should be listening to me because I'm the eldest, but I just try him out, let him go. He's got to learn to fend for*

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<sup>22</sup> Nyoongar word for "God" or "Creator."

<sup>23</sup> Quotation from "The Story of Joey's Nose."

*himself, which he can. His mother's always told him 'you must listen to Uncle Ned, 'cause he's the eldest.'*<sup>24</sup>

Children in particular were ignoring the directions and warnings that had once formed part of the fabric of Indigenous life. This, he explained, was why he felt the need to tell them stories about “*where they should go and where they shouldn't.*” As he said, with some feeling:

*I don't beat around the bush. I say this is what happen to kiddies what don't do what they're told, or don't listen to their mum and dad, so they sit up and take notice then. Now, we [emphasis] got to sit up and listen to them [emphasis] ... Teenagers [have] got it over us!*<sup>25</sup>

Mr. Mippy felt equally strongly in regard to another vital function of his story telling – the transmission of cultural knowledge and identity. His perception of the need to pass on a legacy of culture to the next generation is revealed in his conclusion to “The Story of Three Springs.”

*So I hope you kiddies listen to that, 'n pass this down, as you go along, get older, pass it down to the next little one ... so he'll realise what went on years ago.*

The knowledge of “*what went on years ago*” was knowledge that he had himself received as a legacy from his parents and Elders. It was knowledge that he treasured and which he, as a senior Elder within his community, felt obliged to “*pass down*” to the rising generation.

While all of Edward Mippy's stories are distinctive and varied in terms of their geography and subject matter, they have a number of common features which were sometimes noted by his audience. On one occasion, for example, I heard a pupil ask him why his stories so often centred around “two boys.” I don't remember his answer. But as his

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<sup>24</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 7).

<sup>25</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 51). Mr. Mippy's emphasis on “we” and “them.”

desire to “*teach the kiddies,*” as he put it, was of such importance to him, we can understand why children featured prominently in his stories.

It is worth noting too that each of his stories begins with some kind of confrontation, violence or offence and ends with the offender or offenders receiving their just deserts in the form of death or exile. In the case of the two boys in Story One (“*Joey’s Nose*”), the offence is a breach of parental discipline. Mr. Mippy presents the boys as habitually “*disobedient*” to their parents. They are seen as doubly guilty since, besides having left camp at night without their parents’ permission, they have stolen their father’s digging sticks, which are described by Mr. Mippy as “*like gold to an old Nyoongar.*” For these offences the boys pay the ultimate price. Their life ends in exile and death, and even their father dies in his effort to punish them.

Story Two, which centres around the evil *woodadji*, also involves two boys. As a consequence of roaming off while their parents are asleep, without permission and ignoring warnings, they are captured and killed by the evil denizens of the bush. However it is ignorance rather than malice that leads these two boys to a tragic end.

Both Story Three (“*Three Springs*”) and Story Four (“*The Birth of the Moon*”) begin with a dispute between two old men, one depicted as good, the other as evil. Each story is resolved with the death of the evil one.

Story Five (“*Wilara*”) features an old man who persisted in swearing and cursing. His bad behaviour is punished by permanent exile in the sky, where he remains to this day as a warning to all children who swear.

Set as they are in a traditional cultural context, all the stories commemorate aspects of life familiar to the children and appear well adapted for the purpose of informing and instructing them. It is their

common theme, however, that underlines Mr. Mippy's expressed pedagogical purpose. They are in the nature of "cautionary tales," designed to impress on their hearers the lesson that wrongdoing or ignorance will have its inevitable consequences. Three of the stories in particular, the first, second and fifth, were designed to have a particular emphasis in the area of morality and behaviour. These three stories emphasise and inculcate the moral virtues of obedience, good behaviour and the proper observance of law and tradition. In the first, "The Story of Joey's Nose," Mr. Mippy makes the virtue of obedience a central issue. "*You find a lot of kiddies around,*" he says, "*that won't do what they're told.*" If children remain disobedient, he continues, or "*do the wrong thing by their father,*" as these two boys have done, they must expect the consequences. "*That's what I always say,*" Mr. Mippy concludes, "*always do what you're told ... any kiddies, Nyoongars or Wadjalas, that means white or black.*"

In "The Story of the Woodadji," a further behavioural instruction is given. "*I've always warned 'n told the kiddies about these little men,*" says Mr. Mippy. "*Never roam around unless you got big people with you.*" He has further advice regarding the willy-wagtail: "*I've told my kiddies never to chase that bird, 'cause that is a djidi-djidi, an' it is a devil bird. It's wara - don't foller it!*"

The moral lesson contained in the fifth story about old *Wilara* seems directed against the use of bad language. Mr. Mippy himself always strongly disapproved of bad language or swearing, which he called "*wara wangkiny*" (literally "saying bad things") and the children in his community never swore in his presence without risking his displeasure. There may well be, in Edward Mippy's view, a parallel in this tale between old *Wilara's* exile to the moon and the ostracism which he felt should be imposed on people who swear.

The wider pedagogical dimension of all five stories is seen in the Indigenous cosmology which provides their contextual background. Like many traditional Aboriginal legends which are said to relate to “the mythological era” or “sacred past” (Berndt 1964: 228 - 230), all of Mr. Mippy’s stories, particularly his second, third and fourth, bear a relation to ancestral beliefs about the origins of life forms, spirits and world-features. “Joey’s Nose,” for instance, relates the improper behaviour described in the story to the evil influence that is permanently associated with a small island. The sight of the island and its ghostly dogs’ tails can still make children sick. The story of the *woodadji* is another example of traditional belief. Here, Mr. Mippy speaks of his belief (and that of his community) in the evil little men who are generally considered to inhabit certain areas of the bush, especially caves. “*These are the little people,*” he says in the story, “*that live up in the big caves, known to us as the woodadjis.*” More will be said later about these creatures, which he considered to be of particular danger to children. “*Woodadjis barang koolankas*” (literally, “*Woodadjis steal children*”) are the words Mr. Mippy puts into the mouth of the father of the two boys who are abducted and killed.

The birth of the *djidi-djidi* from the belly of the dying *woodadji*, besides accounting for the willy wagtail’s origins, gives added credence to his instruction that the willy wagtail is the “devil bird” and must be avoided. “*He’ll lead you away all the time,*” he warns as he concludes the tale. “*The djidi-djidi is a devil bird. Never go near ‘im.*”

“The Story of Three Springs” also provides instruction in local Indigenous cosmology. First and foremost, it tells of the origin of fire and of the custom of cooking. “*If it wasn’t for that old Noongar,*” Mr. Mippy explains, “*you’d have been eating meat raw, ‘n your tucker wouldn’t be cooked.*” It also explains the origin of the three springs which have given their name to a nearby town. “*So right up to today,*” says the narrator, “*if*



*you go to where these two pigeons come in ... there's three springs there."* Finally, it gives an explanation for the "singed" whiskers which are to be seen to this day on the head of the bronze-winged pigeon. *"If you look at a bronze winged pigeon,"* observes Mr. Mippy, *"you see a little whisker thing turned up. A little spark got on there."*

The fourth legend tells of the birth of the moon and its intrinsic relationship with the souls of the dead. Because of his disrespectful and dismissive attitude towards the spirits of his dead ancestors, the first old man in the story is himself killed. His death ushers in *Wilara*, the New Moon, who comes in a monthly cycle, bringing the departed spirits to visit their living progeny. *"He [emphasis] is the one - he's the spirits. That is our spirits comin' back to visit us,"* Mr. Mippy continues *"... and his name is the Wilara."* In speaking of the Moon, he seemed to be evoking an age-old belief of his people. *"The moon is the spirit,"* he once explained, *"... the full moon, that is ... he comes back to see all the dead"* (Bourke 1990).

The nature and style of the final short story, "The Man in the Moon," suggests a legend which, though perhaps basically traditional, may have since been endowed with some non-Aboriginal, Anglo-Celtic elements. Unlike the previous tale, *Wilara* does not here personify "Moon" but is rather named as the "Man on the Moon" whose still discernible figure serves to explain the physical patterns on its surface. The idea of *Wilara* being punished by *Maman* (lit. "Father" or "God") would suggest a Christian perspective. Similarly, his "cursing and swearing" and the concept of "chopping wood with his axe" may seem to us to be more in keeping with a non-Aboriginal rather than an Aboriginal environment.

To summarise, it may be said that Edward Mippy, in the course of telling the stories, disclosed his rationale or purpose for doing so. In the first place, he wished to inculcate in the children of his time, both

Aboriginal and otherwise, the social virtues and graces expected by society, in particular that of obedience. Moreover, he sought to reinforce this lesson by dramatising the possible consequences of unacceptable behaviour. Finally, he saw story-telling as an opportunity to transmit some of the cultural and cosmological understandings which he himself had received from his forebears.

I believe that, in the cultural world of Edward Mippy, stories and legends served the same pedagogical function that traditional narratives have served in other societies. "Legends," argues Dixon (1996: 127), "have a social function, helping to justify the received ordering of daily life." Traditional stories serve a further social purpose, the author suggests, in forming ideas and regulating behaviour. My perception is that, in repeating his repertoire of stories, Mr. Mippy's aim was to combine social and behavioural instruction with traditional teaching in relation to his natural environment. The following section takes a closer look at the available record of his cultural understandings in this area and to open up the broader horizons of his conceptual world.

#### *TRADITIONAL BELIEF, CUSTOM AND THE ENVIRONMENT*

The stories or legends of Edward Mippy have been presented in the foregoing section in the form of his own recorded words and memories. My account of the verbal record, thus presented, aims at offering a meaningful insight into the personal principles and convictions which he held so strongly and which formed an important element in his pedagogical style. It should also help to evoke a perception of his cosmological world and of the traditional beliefs and understandings which he had inherited from his parents and elders. What follows is a

more extensive account of Mr. Mippy's recorded memories, undertaken for the purpose of achieving an understanding, not only of those particular and personal beliefs which he was willing to make public, but of the wider community perspectives which those beliefs reflected.

*"I SOUNDLY BELIEVED THIS:" A WORLD OF SPIRITS*

The Indigenous world of Edward Mippy was populated by a number of spirit beings. The existence of these beings, benign or otherwise, was never questioned by Mr. Mippy and his contemporaries and they still loom large in the lives of young and old. Some of these spirit entities were freely and openly spoken about by him during the course of his cultural instruction and some have already been encountered within the context of his stories and memories.<sup>26</sup>

The survival of the human soul or spirit, for example, was something taken for granted by him and never questioned. In the following words, he expressed the hope that the spirits of former companions might still be contacted at the Moore River Settlement.

*If we could camp there you know, somehow or other the kaanya might come back to us – kaanya is the spirits – and talk to us while we [are] in our sleep ... something like that.*<sup>27</sup>

In remembering his deceased family and friends he sometimes spoke of those who had made their presence felt in various ways. As he explained to me, the presence of the departed spirit – the *kaanya* – was sometimes seen in the form of a bird (e.g. during the burial service of the deceased) or heard as a low whistle outside his window during the

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<sup>26</sup> Re Aboriginal belief, see Salvado (1977: 125-9). Re "spiritism" see Elkin (1946: 221).

<sup>27</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 58).

night.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes a pebble might be thrown, as in the following reflection:

*If we got back to Mogumber that'd be a real relief. We could sit down there and have our little cry-up... Then when it comes at night and we're sittin' around the fire we'd get a little warning – p'raps a pebble thrown over – we won't panic ... they're glad to see us ... slowly comin' round to see us ...*<sup>29</sup>

Some spirits, it seems, were rather less benign. Still speaking of his Moore River memories, Mr. Mippy recalled to his interviewer the following case of a man at the Settlement who was “pretty cruel” to his former spouse “who died having a baby:”<sup>30</sup>

*She died through that and that spirit haunted him. Every other night you'd hear it comin' from the cemetery, a woman crying, makin' straight to his little humpy where he stays. So they had to get rid of that. So they had what you call the Mabarn people ... Mabarn... They had to catch that spirit to give him peace, and I can swear, swear on it that they caught something down on the footy oval, straight down from the compound. They were there running around in the moonlight with a rug and they had to burn that rug 'cause that rug will stink. There was four Mabarn blokes. Well they caught whatever they caught. I was at me sister's standing outside and she was sayin' 'come inside, don't go over there!' I said, 'no, I just want to watch.' You could see them runnin' and they grabbed the thing, whatever it was. It was the spirit of that woman ... in the rug ... and they tied it up, held on to it and they burnt that rug. From then on he didn't have any more worries, he didn't hear that cryin' comin' over...*<sup>31</sup>

The foregoing examples reflect a belief in the survival of the human spirit and suggest the possibility of the continued interaction between spirits and living persons. Apart from departed souls, however, there were other metaphysical entities in this Indigenous cosmology. An evil

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<sup>28</sup> Salvado records that the (New Norcia) people lament the death of a relative or friend “if they hear the sound of a bird, which they imagine to be the dead man's soul.” (Salvado 1977: 175) .

<sup>29</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 65).

<sup>30</sup> Personal names in this story are withheld.

<sup>31</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 60).

spirit or “devil” was referred to by Mr. Mippy as the *djanak* (or alternatively, *djangka*). In his stories and anecdotes, this “devil spirit” was sometimes equated with the traditional Christian concept, denoting the personification of evil. It was an image which he would sometimes use for the purpose of moral instruction. Speaking to a child, Mr. Mippy would sometimes describe the presence of a good spirit or angel. Stationed at the child’s right side, he would explain, this angel was there to give sound moral guidance. The *djanak*, on the other hand, would be pictured by him as sitting on the child’s left shoulder, making evil suggestions. “Don’t listen to him,” he would advise.

The *djanak* or *djangka* <sup>32</sup> has an important place in the Nyoongar belief system. In its present day connotations, the concept may appear to the non-Indigenous observer to be somewhat multivocal. In the story of the *woodadji*, for instance, the reader was introduced to an evil spirit or *djanak* in the form of a specific bird (viz. the willy wagtail) known by Mr. Mippy as “*the devil bird*.” On the other hand, in the Mippy tradition, the word *djangka* (or *djanak*) had come to be applied to the “white man.”

*Mum and dad used to say that the white people were djanaks. Now ‘djanak’ is a devil, in English. They say ‘djangkas coming,’ that’s white people. We all sit with our heads down! Well, the parents put that into our mind, the djanak business. ‘Djangka comin’... Dabakan,’ that means ‘stop what you’re doing’... That goes right back, right back in history, right back. You’ll find that same word in other tribes.* <sup>33</sup>

This explanation by Mr. Mippy of what he refers to as the “*djanak business*” would seem to reinforce traditional belief. It was recorded in the early days of the colony that the early white settlers were considered

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<sup>32</sup> See Salvado (1977: 126).

<sup>33</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 6-7).

by many Nyoongar people to be the ghosts of their own Indigenous ancestors.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the ghosts or spirits which interact with the existential world, there were other entities to be reckoned with in the Mippy cosmology. Situated in a kind of “demi-monde” bridging the spirit world and the world of nature were beings which, though rarely or never seen, had and continue to have a considerable impact in the Aboriginal psyche. Amongst these were the *woodadji*, the little, hairy men who inhabit the hills and dark caves. Mr. Mippy’s stories have already introduced us to these denizens of the bush<sup>35</sup> who are capable of abducting any children who misbehave or disobey their parents and are unwise enough to wander off by themselves. He often warned the children against these little creatures. “Up there they live in the hills ... they’re woodadjis,” he explained. “They’ll take you away as kiddies, take you right home ... if you don’t watch yourself!” The kids, as I also know from personal experience, didn’t need a great deal of warning. “Woodadjis!” Mr. Mippy said ... “you say that to one of our kids and they go like hell.”<sup>36</sup>

As a child, young Edward had his own brush with a *woodadji*. The following episode, he maintained, took place at the Moore River Settlement where as a young boy he used to sleep in the girls’ dormitory. He gave the following account of how he was in bed, suffering toothache, when he saw something emerge from the manhole in the ceiling:

*I was cryin’, cryin’, cryin’, and I heard him. There was a bang on the floor like someone lobbed on the floor. I stopped ... I could hear him walkin’, come down the rows – there was a row of girls in the middle – and this thing’s comin’ to my bed walkin’, stopped at the foot*

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<sup>34</sup> See Green (1984: 33), citing Armstrong (1844).

<sup>35</sup> Known also as *Balyit* to some of the Southwest people (Bennell 1991: 30).

<sup>36</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 49).

*end of me bed, shuffled along. I waited, had the rug over me head ... put his hand on here ... I gave one big shout. Mum come in and Superintendent come in. 'What's goin' on?' She said, 'it's just one of the kiddies got a fright here seein' something.' That was me, so everything went back to normal. The next bed's right alongside of me, see ... tooth started achin' again and I pulled me head out of the rug and there was this thing ... little thing there with eyes like that [gesturing] ... it come straight at me. I gave another big shout and mum took me out.<sup>37</sup>*

As he reflected on this event in his later years, Mr. Mippy had no doubt about why his unwelcome visitor had put in an appearance. *"I was makin' too much noise,"* he said. He was also certain about the nature of his unwelcome visitor on that night in the girls' dormitory. *"That's what we call a woodadji,"* he explained. *"I soundly believed this ... even the Nyoongars here, they know what a woodadji is."* Southwest Cultural Educator, Mr. Joe Northover (videocassette: *Language Lessons* 1992), advises that no Nyoongar should remain fishing at the bank of any river after about five o'clock in the evening as, at that hour, the *woodadji* (he called them *balyit*) come down to the water. In the following terms,

using appropriate sound effects, Mr. Mippy recounted a similar prohibition:

*You get that when you go fishing. You don't make a noise when you're fishing, there's something there too. Mum'd hit you with a stick if you laugh ... you start laughin' and talkin'... s.s.s.s. [a hissing noise] ... 'Plop!' ... [the woodadji would throw] a stone in the water!*

Observing the splash, the narrator continued, his mother would issue an admonition. *"Keep playin', you kids ... they'll be here directly!"*

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<sup>37</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 49).

Severe consequences awaited those who failed to obey. “*You just get the runs and double up,*” Mr. Mippy warned. “*I’ve seen that happen, otherwise I wouldn’t say it.*”<sup>38</sup>

Associated with the mysterious *woodadji*, though assuming an even greater significance at the interface between the natural and the supernatural, was the serpent-being which Edward Mippy referred to as the *Wakal*.<sup>39</sup> As he explained it to me, there was a widely-held belief within his community that this entity inhabited the rivers in areas where the water was deep and permanent. Although *Wakal* usually remained invisible (emerging occasionally in the form of the rainbow) he was responsible for the presence of water in the river pools. On his departure from any given area of the river, the water in that area would vanish and the river would become dry or stagnant.

The deep river pools<sup>40</sup> in the vicinity of the Moore River Settlement were of particular importance to Mr. Mippy as being places of permanent residence for the *Wakal*. He had the following memory of these pools, well remembered by him from his days in the Settlement:

*Shanaway, Kaali Pool, Round Pool, Rocky Courson, Elbow, Chalk Cliff, Diamond Pool, Kite Pool ... we call them as we see them ... as the shape.*

It would seem that some of these pools were so deep that no one had ever reached the bottom. There were those who had dived in, he said, and had never been seen again. It was foolish, in his view, for anyone to swim there as it was the dwelling place of the *Wakal*. He spoke of these convictions in the following terms:

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<sup>38</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 50).

<sup>39</sup> The following observations are the result of my association with Edward Mippy over a long period. For earlier perspectives re the *Wakal*, see Salvado (1977: 128-9).

<sup>40</sup> These river pools have probably given “Mogumber” its name, viz. *Moor koombar* (lit. “Big part of the river”).



*There's some places we don't swim ... you go down towards Shanaway, Shanaway's part of Mogumber. There's pools along there where you don't ... you don't go in there at all. You're comin' back to the kaalip [i.e. habitat] for the Wakal.*<sup>41</sup>

Remembering her Mogumber experiences, young Edward's former close companion Alice Nannup (1992: 85-6) reinforces Mr. Mippy's belief in the presence of the *Wakal* in the pools of the Moore River. Though the children used to swim in "lots of different places," she remembered, there was "one pool where no one was allowed to swim." This unnamed pool was forbidden by the Superintendent, not because of the presence of *Wakal* but "because it was the water for the whole settlement." The pumping station was located there and was under the charge of two men from the camp. It seems that one night the engine started making a strange noise and finally stopped altogether. One of the men, known as "Old Moses" had no doubt as to the reason. "You know what stopped that engine," he said. "That big feller down there!" According to the following memory, recorded by Nannup, he was referring to the "Water Snake:"

*The Sou'westers call them Waugals [sic] but we call them Warlu. He reckoned the snake had coiled itself around the pumps to stop them from running and was making that noise because he was getting sucked up.*

Superintendent Neal, no doubt giving little credence to such traditional beliefs, ordered the men to "get down there and have a look." Nannup continues:

*But I tell you what, none of them would get down there. So they had to undo all the pipes and bring them up and set it all up again. But that snake was still down there. You see, they reckoned that at a certain time you've got to give in, because you're draining all the water out for the Waugal, and he gets cross and stops you. I suppose it's feasible too, when you think about it.*

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<sup>41</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 57).

In speaking of the *Wakal*, Edward Mippy was reflecting a widespread belief within the Nyoongar society. Any West Australian familiar with the press reports of the time would be aware of the representations made during the 1980's by Mr. Mippy's nephew, Mr. Robert Bropho, to prevent the desecration of sites around Perth which are sacred to the ancient Water Serpent.

In the view of Mr. Mippy, the *Wakal* would cause no harm to any person who showed him respect. He himself, when coming to the bank of the river would throw a handful of sand into the water from the river bank to identify himself<sup>42</sup> and to indicate his respect. The action would also acknowledge the presence of the Serpent. People who didn't do this, he used to warn children, might share the fate of some who went down into the water and were never seen again.

It is important to emphasise that, in Mr. Mippy's view, the *Wakal* did not seek or follow the water, it was rather the water which followed the track of the *Wakal*. Once, when travelling with me along the road leading southwest out of the town of Dandaragan, he pointed out the track of the Water Serpent. When travelling underground, the Serpent, it seems, left a wake which could be followed in the line of green grass and vegetation. The marshy spots and the pools marked the places where *Wakal* came near to the surface. As we drove together on one occasion through the Avon Valley, my friend explained that the road which wound its way through the hills from Toodyay to Northam and onwards to the town of York, was following the ancient Dreamtime track of the *Wakal*.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Mr. Mippy never explained to me the reason for this action. However, the key may be found in some perspectives offered by Salvado (1977:136), to the effect that a person's birthright was established, at the time of birth, through contact with water.

<sup>43</sup> This area is included in the territory of the Balardong. See Winmar (1996: iii-iv).

It is relevant to observe here that, according to Balardong Elder, the late Mr. Ralph Winmar, the Water Serpent did not proceed southward beyond the present suburb of Guildford. "*He came down the Avon River to the neck of the river at Guildford, where there is a bend.*" The Serpent did not go further, he maintained, "*because the water further on was salty*" (Winmar 1996: 21). During the summer months, the drying of the river bed to the northward signalled the *Wakal's* retreat to the southern areas where the water pools were more permanent.

This section has introduced some of the available evidence regarding the role of the *kaanya*, the *djanak*, the *woodadji* and finally the *Wakal*, in the recorded memories of Edward Mippy. The list does not claim to be exhaustive. However, it does represent what seem to have been important entities in his metaphysical or spiritual universe. From what has been said, it would appear that the lines of division between the spiritual realm and the world of nature were, for Mr. Mippy, often blurred or even non-existent. In the following section, which is devoted to a consideration of his expressed views in the area of sickness, its causes and its remedies, the reader will be offered further accounts of the fusion and interpenetration existing in the perceived relationship between the physical and metaphysical.

#### "*THE WAY WE CURE:*" *HEALING PRACTICES*

During his latter years, Edward Mippy underwent regular medical treatment under the direction of doctors and specialists and regularly took prescribed medicine. However, he also placed considerable faith in traditional healing. Where a physical condition or illness failed to respond to local treatments, people in the Moora community sometimes

had recourse to a traditional healer known as a *Mabarn* man. This was especially the case where the illness was considered to be the result of some evil influence or malice. Instances of illness being caused by some evil influence have already been encountered in the course of the memories and stories already quoted. In the story of "Joey's Nose," for example, the narrator warns that the apparition of a pair of dogs' tails waving above the rocks would be enough to make children sick. In one of the childhood experiences quoted by Mr. Mippy, the presence of the *woodadji* was associated with toothache. In other situations involving these evil little men of the bush, he warned, a child might "*get the runs and double up.*"

During my own experience in Moora, illness amongst the Indigenous people was at times imputed to the introduction of foreign bodies <sup>44</sup> into the human organism by some outside agent, or by the placing of some fetish object <sup>45</sup> in the vicinity of a person who was the target of someone's displeasure. Mr. Mippy referred to such unpleasant experiences as being "*caught.*" In his opinion, the only option for a person thus "*caught*" or afflicted was to have recourse to a "*Mabarn,*" a tribal man whose curative powers, as he explained, were held in the highest regard:

*The Mabarn bloke, he's the most important bloke in a tribe. He's called upon, you know ... 'I don't know what's wrong with this girl ... she's vomiting or seems to be miserable.' And there's such things as being caught, you can be caught by the other tribe.* <sup>46</sup>

In Mr. Mippy's view, not only do Indigenous people have faith in the *Mabarn's* intervention but, where his treatment is required, the

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<sup>44</sup> e.g. little stones, grass-seeds, etc.

<sup>45</sup> Usually in the form of a stone. Re earlier perspectives in this regard, see Salvado (1977: 128).

Mabarn himself is under a cultural obligation to intervene. A better understanding of these things is needed within the wider community, as he went on to explain:

*He's got to fix you, he's got [emphasis] to fix you. Well, he might have to travel miles and get it fixed. They're the things ... if the white people don't sit down with you and talk, they never learn, never [emphasis].*

Apart from illness caused by malign influence, there were other conditions which were amenable to treatment by an Indigenous healer. In the course of the same interview, further methods of healing were revealed by Mr. Mippy. One such was the traditional method for dealing with a headache. He prescribed the following remedy:

*When you've got a headache, or your back's crook or pains you, wherever there's pains, this Mabarn man can get that out. The method is, if you got a headache and it's very bad you got to let him stand on your head with his feet. He won't break nothing but that removes all the pains. He stands, just wherever you can stand it ... press his weight as much as he can ... that'll drive the pain away.*

Standing on the patient's head was not the only method of getting rid of a migraine. Sucking out the "bad blood" was another procedure that was effective even though, as he went on to explain to his interviewer, it went against the "white doctors'" methods:

*Let him suck the side of your neck so he can get the bad blood. It's only the bad blood in your head what's making it ache ... he doesn't cut it, he just sucks. It's surprising to see how much he spits out ... That's goin' against your white doctors but that's the way we cure.*

A bad back could be relieved in the same way as a headache. According to Edward Mippy, the application of pressure to the affected area was "the Nyoongar way of curing patients who want to be cured:"

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<sup>46</sup> These and the following quotes in regard to healing practices are taken from records of Edward Mippy's interview with Annette Roberts (1990a: 64).

*Yeah, he stands ... just stand[s] wherever you can stand it ... press his weight as much as he can. That'll drive that pain away ... it'll go. The same with your back ... let him tread on it, that'll drive it away.* <sup>47</sup>

These methods and practices were “passed down” within the family of the *Mabarn*, and Mr. Mippy himself was a witness to their effectiveness. By way of conclusion, he expressed the feeling that more should be said about these things:

*I won't say anything what I didn't see happen ... there's them things, see ... traditional ways of going. It's nearly the same as your white doctor. Doesn't cost you much, doesn't cost you like him ... Just imagine him standin' on your head [laughter], you'd have to pay him some dough for that! That eases your mind, too, by talkin'... yes, talking is good.*

The “*traditional ways of going*,” referred to only briefly in the above interview by Mr. Mippy in connection with traditional healing methods, has a much broader connotation. The same expression can be referred to other widely observed traditional customs which serve to distinguish and identify Mr. Mippy's society within the social matrix of the wider community. There were, of course, certain areas of custom and belief which he, as an Aboriginal Elder, could not fittingly discuss with “outsiders” and there was need for me as researcher to observe confidentiality and sensitivity when exploring such areas.

The circumstances, rituals and understandings which surrounded death and marriage <sup>48</sup> were spoken of by him as being of special importance and significance within the social life of his Indigenous society. As well as touching the individuals immediately concerned, customs and beliefs surrounding these important events have special relevance for the community as a whole. Like other aspects of Mr.

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<sup>47</sup> Such healing methods are described in earlier accounts. See Salvado (1977: 170-171).

<sup>48</sup> The term “marriage” is used here in the broad sense, including what the wider community might see as “de facto” unions.

Mippy's cultural heritage, therefore, the following account of his personal perspectives on death and marriage must be understood within the Aboriginal social context.

*"THAT'S TRADITION: " PERSPECTIVES ON DEATH AND MARRIAGE*

The death of a mother is a crucial turning point in the life of any person, especially under such circumstances as those experienced by the young Edward Mippy. The account of his life has already treated of the way in which he was given the news of his mother's passing. The first he knew of the death of his mother was when he was asked to *"go up there and measure Clara Leyland."* Understandably, he was stunned by the sudden news. *"I can't,"* he replied, *"that's me mother!"*<sup>49</sup>

As an adult, Mr. Mippy reflected on the lack of understanding of Indigenous sensibilities which at that time existed within the Settlement administration – indeed within the white community generally. For him, it was of the utmost importance that the news of someone's death should be relayed promptly. He gave the following account of how, within the Aboriginal community, it was *"soundly believed"* that the bereaved, especially the *"next of kin,"* be informed as soon as possible:

*As soon as anyone in our family or family tree dies, somebody's got to go to wherever that next of kin is and tell them, if they have to walk all night or get in a car and go.*<sup>50</sup>

Having declined the request to measure his mother's body, he asked his friend Reynold to go up in his place. But, as he said, Reynold was frightened. Mr. Mippy went on to observe that being in the

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<sup>49</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 27).

<sup>50</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 28)

presence of the dead was considered by an Aboriginal person to be very bad luck:

*See, it's taboo. We don't go near anybody that's dead. That's wara, we call that wara ... that's bad, superstitious.*

When anyone died at the Moore River Settlement, the body was sewn up inside a bag, *"like a sheath."* It was then taken to the cemetery on a flat top trailer. Some of the kids *"had to sit and make sure it didn't roll off!"* This too was considered culturally inappropriate. *"We were frightened, don't you worry,"* remembered Mr. Mippy.<sup>51</sup> The body was *"just wrapped up in blankets,"* he recalled during one of his later visits to the Settlement cemetery, *"and lowered into the hole, carefully as you could."* In the aftermath of the funeral there would be a prescribed period of mourning which, from the following description of it, seems to owe a good deal to age-old tradition.<sup>52</sup>

*The ceremony was ... you had to keep quiet for a week. There was no laughing, no music, no nothing ... no gramophone, no whistling. It was checked by the older people ... for a week. That's tradition, yeah!* (Mippy in Bourke 1990).

Mr. Mippy considered that respect for such traditions was not being maintained by the younger generation. *"But now,"* he continued, veiling a note of sadness and disappointment with his ever-present dry humour, *"I reckon they come 'n dance on your grave!"*

On the other hand, when speaking of his experience of nuptial customs within his community, he adopted a lighter note. Marriage in the Aboriginal way, he explained, was *"what we call 'jump the fire-stick.'"* He further clarified his use of this expression as follows:

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<sup>51</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 63).

<sup>52</sup> For a description of traditional Yuat funeral practice, see Salvado (1977: 175).



*There's a stick ... they hold a stick out and if you both jump over that stick that means you're legally married. There's none of this fussing around and going to church and have bells 'n that ringing.*<sup>53</sup>

It seems that the “jumping of the fire-stick” was not simply a metaphorical expression, but was a recognised ceremony. The stick was actually “burning at one end.” Getting a divorce entailed reversing the process. The divorcing couple, he continued, “just step back over the stick.”

*Yeah, there's no ways of going to church to get a divorce, you jump back over the fire-stick [laughter], and you're divorced.*

He went on to explain that there was no hard and fast rule about it. You could “jump the fire-stick” or alternatively “you can walk off and leave the woman.” His description of a “tribal” or what he called a “traditional marriage” indicated the existence of a more serious union, one which the parties were not free to break.

*When you get really [emphasis] traditionally married ... you got to be careful there. When you get a woman given to you ... that's the higher one. You got to do what you're told there.*

As previously stated, there were certain things which could not be made public and this was one of those areas in which the narrator did not feel free to provide any further information. “That’s about how much I can talk on behalf of that,” he interposed, bringing the discussion on marriage to a close.

In imparting his traditional knowledge, Mr. Mippy always adapted his instruction to the nature of his audience. He did not often mention Indigenous healing practices nor social customs such as those pertaining to death and marriage in speaking to children. As already

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<sup>53</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 3).

indicated, it was language instruction and story telling that occupied a central place in his classroom technique. Perhaps his greatest joy, however, was “going bush” with the children and talking to them about the natural environment. The bush was his favoured classroom and it was in the bush that he felt that full scope could be given to his cultural expertise. The following section introduces Mr. Mippy’s understanding of the bush and of its important role in his vision of cultural awareness.

*“THESE LITTLE THINGS SHOULD BE TOLD:” MR. MIPPY AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT*

Although his cultural awareness program was intended primarily to promote the educational interests of his own Indigenous community, Edward Mippy was of the opinion that every child, Aboriginal or otherwise, should learn to appreciate the bush and what it had to offer. Likewise, each child should know how to survive in the natural environment. Grateful for the legacy of knowledge he himself had received, he wanted to pass on to the younger generation the same love of the bush, the same understanding of nature and the expertise of survival that his father had passed on to him. For his father, he reserved the following tribute:

*I was lucky to have dad with me. He’s a man that wouldn’t lay at home, he’d get up and say ‘come on you kids, we’re going, we’re going to do something .. we’re going up here.’ He was on the move all [emphasis] the time. He wasn’t happy unless he was amongst a mob of kiddies, teaching them something. And if they’d listen to him, he’d teach them all right. That’s why I get it up there [in Moora]. I follow in his footsteps.*

The lessons handed down from father to son were not simply verbal instruction. During their life together in the Moore River

Settlement, Mr. Mippy senior was determined that his son would learn in the traditional way, through practical experience. Mr. Mippy continued, recalling his father's concern for his son's education:

*He asked [the Superintendent] to live out in the bush. I was the only one allowed out. Dad'd go down and say 'I want to take my son out.' 'All right,' Mr. Neal would say. I learnt [gesturing] since I was that high.*<sup>54</sup>

These recollections of Mr. Mippy's should provide a clue as to the source of his cultural legacy and his enthusiasm for passing it onto others. He admired his father and was determined, as he said, to "follow in his footsteps." What concerned him most, he went on to say, was that so many of the young people were not listening:

*They just don't listen! They want to be ... they want things put into their mouth. The thing I'm not putting over is 'listen, keep these ears open' ... Kaditj means 'listen.'*

As a regular associate and assistant to Mr. Mippy during his latter years, I formed the impression, however, that many children did indeed listen. Whether in the classroom or out on a field trip examining animal tracks or searching for bush tucker, he had a way of compelling the attention of adults as well as of children. A typical lesson in bushcraft might begin with an instruction like the following, which he self-recorded on audiotape. For those in danger of losing their way in the bush, he had the following advice:

*Now the first thing I'd advise for when you think you're becoming lost is ... don't go left, don't go right, but turn back the way you came. When you're going in it is wise to break bushes, or break the tops of the blackboys, the thorny part ... just drop 'em along behind you as you're goin' along, with the pointy ends pointing back the way you went in (Mippy 1986).*

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<sup>54</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 15-16).

Ideally, the bushwalker should avoid getting lost in the first place. It was important, he continued, for the person to exercise a keen sense of observation:

*When you go into the thicket, always look at trees as you go past them. A lot of them got different shapes. That's a good thing you can go by, if you're comin' back, you can say, 'oh, well, I came past this' ... 'n the people that's comin' in can always trace the little blackboys as you drop it along, or break a little limb ... break it pointing back the way you came from.*

Mr. Mippy was all too conscious of the ongoing destruction of his beloved bush through the clearing being carried out by farmers and pastoralists. Continuing the instruction, he permitted himself a little dry humour at the expense of the latter:

*Sometimes you hear of older people gettin' lost in the scrub 'n thickets like that. But now, the Wadjalas, that's the white people ... the farmers ... are makin' it more easy for us, that they don't get lost. They've taken all the scrub they could find - they've cleared it 'n chopped it all down. Seems ridiculous now if you hear of someone gettin' lost in the scrub!*

On another occasion, the subject of hunting in the bush at the Moore River was introduced.<sup>55</sup> Referring to the wholesale clearing in the vicinity of "Round Pool," he revealed to his interviewer the depth of his feeling:

*That was all thicket. Now it makes me, you know ... you feel like you want to stand there howling. They plowed it all up!*

In spite of Mr. Mippy's feelings about the devastation of his beloved country through excessive land clearing, the basic elements of bushcraft remained an important element in his educational program. Much of his experience in this regard was gained during his early years, when there was still plenty of bush around. In his boyhood, he recalled,

he spent many nights camping on Perth's northern outskirts, around Arthur St., in the Caversham area, where he and other family members used to take casual employment in the vineyards. Some of his recorded memories may well refer to such experiences. He made the following reference to damper-making, which was one of the first priorities when setting up camp:

*Damper is bread ... damper is the thing made in th' ashes. When we used to go out, we'd always carry a camp oven with us ... camp oven... couldn't wish for a better thing. It's like an oven what you got right up t' today. This is a camp oven. It will cook things in th' ashes. Our first duty was to make a fairly big fire, when we get to where we wanna go ... selected place ... make a big fire. Put logs, fairly big logs on, 'n let that die down, 'n you have a certain amount of ashes 'n coals there to cook on. That's the first duty in making a camp (Mippy 1985).*

Building a wind-break (sometimes called a "breakwind" by Nyoongar people) was the next duty for anyone camping overnight in the open. As Mr. Mippy continues his description, we can hear the voice of long experience in this regard:

*If the wind changes, you can move it around. But just make it easy, you don't get smoked out. You can move the breakwind around - around the fire what you got burning. Move it right around, tha's the bushes. Don't break any more, just keep that one lot going around ... so that's simple for when you're going out camping ... it's warm, the wind's blowin' straight over the top of yer ... very warm.*

The problem of ants is one often encountered by campers in Western Australia's Southwest. Amongst the various species, the "sergeant ant" is one that is capable of providing a nasty sting. When interviewed on camera for a State-wide TV program, Mr. Mippy called attention to these unwelcome camp-site guests, not without a touch of humour:

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<sup>55</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a:15).

*Now [pointing] this is what we call up in Moora 'Kaalil.' You people call it 'sergeant ant.' He acts as a sergeant too ... he makes you understand when he bites you. See [indicating a stick he had been holding], they know that human hands touched it. They're lookin' for it. See [indicating an ant], he's still comin' up ... I dragged me feet along there [indicating the ground] ... he'll foller that trail. There they come! They must have said, 'there's a Nyoongar over there, we'll sting him up!' (Bourke 1991).*

On the subject of food preparation and cooking, whether under camp conditions or otherwise, our narrator had much advice to offer. For him, as for many in his own community, two of the essential staples of bush diet were damper (with honey or treacle, if there were any available) and kangaroo meat. Having already explained the art of damper making, he now turned his attention to the subject of meat – how to catch the kangaroo and prepare it for cooking:

*Duties of the young people 's to get up early, go out and get a kangaroo, that's a yongka ... go out 'n get a yongka for daadja. Yongka daadja means 'kangaroo meat' (Mippy 1985).*

In instructing the older youths of the town in the art of hunting the *yongka* (with the help of a rifle and a *dwoort*, or kangaroo dog) Mr. Mippy used to insist on the observance of three rules. The first was to proceed *Dabakan* (in silence), the second was to remain motionless when the animal raised its head and the third was to keep the quarry to the windward. "You don't want him to smell you!" he used to say. Once caught, the animal had to be prepared by placing it briefly on a fire lit for the purpose. This had the effect of singeing off all the fur. After being cleaned, the stomach was stuffed with eucalyptus leaves and sewn up with sinews taken from the animal's tail. Mr. Mippy would then demonstrate how to place the animal in a shallow hole lined with pre-heated stones. The ground-oven was completed with hot ashes shovelled over the top, then sealed with a thin layer of earth. Four or

five hours later, the *yongka* was ready for consumption. In his recorded account, Mr. Mippy gave the following explanation of the Yuat names for some of the choice parts of this favoured animal:

*The legs of a kangaroo, tha's the maat bone, that's comin' up from his, what 'e hops on, up to his knee. That's the maat bone; 'n the other bone coming up towards his body ... this's a little round ... they call that the yaatj bone. And the square flat one, tha's the kwilk bone. All those bones is all booked by ... you've got a lot of Noongars there that [say] ... 'I'll have the yaatj bone'; 'I'll have the kwilk'; 'I'll have the maat bone.' Someone might say 'I want 'is mara,' well tha's 'is arms, to eat (Mippy 1985).*

This lesson in the physiology of the *yongka* was rounded off with some remarks about the internal organs. It seems, from what follows, that every part of the kangaroo was used:<sup>56</sup>

*With the kobool<sup>57</sup> [stomach] you make blood pudding. Clean the kobool out with the kotj [axe], the big part. Clean 'im out, wash 'im, then you put all his liver, kidney 'n everything, pin it up at the end, and stick it in th' ashes... couldn't wish for a better feed!*

While the *yongka* was the preferred animal, there were other meats considered desirable. Most delectable in Mr. Mippy's eyes were *karda*, the racehorse goanna, *nyingarn*, the echidna and *yakany*, the long necked tortoise. Many birds were considered suitable for eating, though *wetj*, the emu, was the most sought after. As this largest of birds was generally considered a pest, a few farmers with large areas of scrub in the Moora area were willing to grant access to Aboriginal people for the purpose of hunting them.

One delicacy prized by him and often spoken of in the course of his stories and lessons, was the humble *bardi*, sometimes referred to as the

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<sup>56</sup> See Salvado (1977: 154-5). It is interesting to compare what Salvado described with Mr. Mippy's account. It would seem that little has changed in regard to Yuat cooking methods.

<sup>57</sup> Pronounced to rhyme with "warble."

“witchetty grub.” The reader will recall Mr. Mippy’s tragic story of the *woodadji*, related earlier in this chapter, in which the two ill-fated boys came to grief in their search for these grubs. Roaming off by themselves, he related, they “*come across some blackboys:*”

*They pushed one over, ‘n the bardis were packed ... Bardis was all in ‘em! ... an’ they started eatin’ ‘em there ... eatin’ ‘em ‘n pickin’ ‘em.*

On one occasion, during the filming of a television documentary, Mr. Mippy demonstrated on camera the method of locating the *bardi* and preparing it for consumption. “*You can cook it,*” he said, “*they taste better when they’re cooked.*” For the benefit of his audience, however, he proceeded to eat one raw. Before swallowing the grub, he nipped off its head and tail, accompanying his “on camera” demonstration with the following step-by-step explanation:

*Off with his kaat [head] ... little bit off his nirnt [tail] ... ‘n down ‘e goes! [swallowing the grub] ... Well, that’s the bardis! Nyoongar tucker, you see it there? If you starve in the bush, you’ve got yourself to blame (Mippy in Bourke 1992).*

With access to “*nyoongar tucker*” you might not “*starve in the bush,*” but without water, he advised, you could still die of thirst. Expertise in locating water was therefore of prime importance for Edward Mippy in the art of survival, especially as during the summer months the rivers were mostly dry. On a field trip, on one occasion, he was able to give me a practical demonstraton of how, in the absence of surface water, potable water could be found inside a paper-bark (*Melaleuca*) tree.

On another occasion, he used a drawing to explain the procedure in detail. He indicated with a pencil how a bulge in the tree-trunk could signify the presence of a reservoir of water. Using his sketch, he then



gave the following explanation <sup>58</sup> of the technique of making an incision in the bark in order to release the water contained within the reservoir:

*You could be standing under a tree looking for water. It [the bark] comes out like ... shaped like a damper ... and goes back in again. You cut him down here [indicating his drawing] and the water just hoses out of it. Might be a little bit salty ... you're a fool if you don't drink it! And the dogs, we'd give them a wash all around.*

Mr. Mippy impressed on his hearers that an intimate knowledge of the natural environment and the cycle of seasons was important for survival. Food and drink were available for anyone knowing the bush and its secrets. *"If you starve in the bush,"* we have heard him say, *"you've got yourself to blame."*

*"YOU GOTTA DIG:" IDENTIFYING AND COLLECTING BUSH  
TUCKER :*

Besides the varieties of animals mentioned above, there was always an abundance of vegetable species to be gathered in Yuat country. Mr. Mippy remembered the various types of berries, for instance, that had been collected in former years by the inmates of the Moore River Settlement. Amongst the many types then available he mentioned *"butter berry, emu berry, ball berry, scenty berry and swan berries."* <sup>59</sup> Around Moora and the surrounding area, however, most of these species of berries are now rarely seen, and Mr. Mippy believed that some species had disappeared altogether. He attributed this sad state of affairs to excessive land clearing and the use of pesticides. One type still in good supply, to which he introduced the children, was one he called the *yorna*

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<sup>58</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 55).

<sup>59</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 55).

*berry*,<sup>60</sup> so named because it was much sought after by *yorna*, the bob-tail goanna. This is a small green berry that ripens in the months of September and October. Its taste compares with that of passion fruit. Besides berries, he remembered various types of yams and tubers. The “queen” amongst these, in Mr. Mippy’s view, was a round, brown tuber with juicy white flesh which he called *kano*.<sup>61</sup> This species is still quite abundant in uncleared land. To obtain this variety during a field excursion, he would arm each of the children with a *wana*, or digging stick, and set off with them into the bush. On one such occasion, he was accompanied by a reporter from the *West Australian* who was preparing an article about bush tucker. He told her of the old traditional belief that digging for this particular tuber would bring rain. She reported his words as follows:

*When we were kids we’d fight over it. But our parents always told us we’d be sorry because it brought the rain and we’d have to stay inside. It was the same on the railways. If I brought kano into the camp the foreman would tell me to get rid of it because he wanted to finish the job in dry weather. (Mippy in Carbon 1986: 16)*

Another favourite yam was one known to him as the “*kwardany*.” Still plentiful in the area, it was one known to the locals as the “Blood-root”<sup>62</sup> by reason of its bright red flesh. This was usually baked in the ashes as, when eaten raw, it had a hot, chilli-like taste and left the consumer with a blueish tongue. Mr. Mippy directed the digging of this item for the benefit of the television camera, using the occasion to administer the following admonition to the “*younger people*” for their perceived lack of industry:

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<sup>60</sup> Botanical name: “*Astrolama Xerophyllum*.” Unless stated otherwise, botanical information given here was provided orally by Dr. N. Marchant (W.A. Herbarium).

<sup>61</sup> Botanical name: “*Platysace Maxwellii (cirrosa)* .”

<sup>62</sup> One of a species of the botanical genus “*Haemodorum*.”

*That's the stuff you gotta eat ... this 'ere [indicating the bulb]. This is a kwardany ... used to be our feed, the only feed we could get outside of the Moore River Native Settlement. The thing is now, with the younger people, you've gotta dig to earn your food ... Nyoongar tucker! This is take-away, but you've gotta dig it to take away. That's where the 'ard part seems to come in with the Noongar (Mippy in Bourke 1992).*

As he displayed the hard-won item for the camera, Mr. Mippy continued to make the most of what he saw as a pedagogical opportunity:

*I hope that when this film is showing a lot of younger people take notice of this ... if you're a bit of a ngabart [greedy person] and you eat a lot, that means you gotta dig a lot. The less you dig, the less you eat. So that's all it amounts to!*

A similar plant to the *kwardany* was what he called *born* or *borna*, an onion-like species that seems to grow in more restricted areas, preferring soft and sandy soil. Mr. Mippy directed the children of St. Joseph's School on more than one excursion, in the company of a Conservation and Land Management (CALM) Ranger, to the Badgingarra National Park where he would find *Borna* growing in profusion in recently-burned country. Another sought-after tuber, the kidney-shaped *djoobak*,<sup>63</sup> was a plant also like a small domestic onion in appearance. Although rather rare, specimens were identified by him in areas around Moora and New Norcia. Like the *Born*, this could be eaten raw or cooked.

In the beds of creeks or rivers, he would often find a reed or bulrush which he called *yandjet* or *yandjep*, a species<sup>64</sup> which according to him had given its name to the coastal centre of Yanchep. This too was edible, as he demonstrated for the benefit of the television camera. While pulling out selected stems, he offered the following description:

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<sup>63</sup> Species of orchid, "Tribonanthes longipetala."

<sup>64</sup> Genus "Typhaceae." (Daw, Walley & Keighery 1997: 54).

[That's] *what they call a yandjep. And it's edible ... it's good marany [food] for you. What you do is, you eat the whitest part of it, the tenderest. So any time when you're in the bush, 'n you're feelin' a bit peckish, go along ... you can't pull 'em all up remember. There's only certain ones that you can eat. That's the little tender one. It's generally in the middle of the three pronged stem that you see comin' up. He's one of those that give away to you ... otherwise, you can pull all day. That's one sort of marany you can get in the bush with your bush tucker* (Mippy in Bourke 1992).

The gum, known by the Nyoongar people as *mena*, was exuded by two kinds of wattle trees and was much sought after by Mr. Mippy and the children. The first was that of the black-barked wattle or "Mena-gum."<sup>65</sup> The other, much tastier though less in quantity, was a gum of slightly darker hue which came from the branches of the "jam tree,"<sup>66</sup> known as *mangart* in Mr. Mippy's vocabulary. There was also a kind of bush chewing gum derived by him from the very young buds of various species of *Banksia*. He would show children how to select the youngest buds which, when chewed, assumed the consistency of a kind of pliable gum.

"GETTING WHAT YOU NEED:" SELECTING WOOD FOR ARTEFACTS

Brief mention should be made here of certain trees which supplied Mr. Mippy with suitable wood for the making of bush artefacts. The most important of these were various varieties of wattle, in particular the "jam tree" or *mangart*, already mentioned as sought after for its tasty gum. After splitting a selected branch of this hard, dense wood he would fashion the *kaali* or boomerang, first softening and bending the

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<sup>65</sup> Botanical species, "Acacia Microbotrya:" Nyoongar name, "*Badjang*."

wood in hot ashes. It was also used by him for making the *wana*, or digging stick, which in the past had been used mainly by women for the digging of yams. Before embarking on a “bush tucker” expedition with a group of local children, he would make sure each was equipped with a miniature *wana* stick for the purpose of digging.

Another artefact he would fashion from *mangart* wood was the Aboriginal club which he referred to as *koondi*.<sup>67</sup> According to him, it was the only traditional implement made and used by the children at the Moore River Settlement. As he described it to Roberts:

*A koondi is a stick, a long stick. You stop a kangaroo when he's coming to pass ... hit him in the legs ... or rabbits. We carried that with us. We'd make it out of jam. See, jam's solid as ... it's solid. Highly respected by the myalls, a jam koondi. We've got them up here [in Moora].*<sup>68</sup>

He also related how it had been traditional for boys, before their initiation, to practice the art of spear throwing by using miniature *kidji* (spears) and improvised *miro* (spear-throwers). He remembered how, as boys in the Moore River Settlement, he and his peer group used to play and have mock battles using such implements. Small spears were used, somewhat less than a metre in length. These were fashioned from the dry, straight branches of a bush that grew in the Mogumber area. As an improvised spear-thrower they had used a section of the dry flower stem of the grass-tree,<sup>69</sup> burning a hole near one end to insert the spear for launching. He used to demonstrate for the Moora children the technique

<sup>66</sup> Botanical species, “*Acacia Acuminata*.”

<sup>67</sup> This word for “club” or “fighting stick” may derive from an outside language source (see Ryan n.d.: 66). The normal Nyoongar name (which Mr. Mippy rarely used), is *dowak*.

<sup>68</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 56).

<sup>69</sup> Botanical name, “*Xanthorrhoea acanthostachya*,” also known as “blackboy.”

of making these artefacts and showed himself quite adept in their use. By the time Edward Mippy reached adulthood, the art of spear throwing had been virtually lost to the people of the Southwest and for the purpose of hunting, had given way to the superior efficiency of the white man's rifle. However, he was still able to give instruction in the manufacture and use of a spear.

The television documentary, already referred to, incorporates a segment which shows him selecting a tree which would be suitable for making a full-size spear. This tree was the *kwela*, or *kwel*, otherwise known as the casuarina or she-oak. The wood of this tree, referred to by him as *kidji boorna* (spear wood) was also used by him in making the framework for a traditional hut, or *maya-maya*. As he indicated, on camera:

*Kidji is the name of the thing what you throw, that's the spear. The one I've got my hand on is for the children [Mr. Mippy indicates a nearby bush]. When they coming up, they learn. As you grow 'n get into manhood, you're using these sort [indicating long, thin branches of the casuarina]... 'n when you're going out to get turtles and things like that ... [pointing to larger branches] you come to these (Mippy in Bourke 1992).*

These words reflect Mr. Mippy's view of the land as being a sure provider for its Indigenous inhabitants. What he was indicating here was the way in which different types of flora were appropriated for use by people of different ages and for different purposes. Just as a "white person's shop," he continued, had to be stocked with sufficient goods to satisfy its customers, "the bush" was likewise stocked with such a variety of materials as would enable it to satisfy all the needs of his people.

*It's like going into a white person's shop 'n getting what you need ... 'n the same things 'appen in the bush. That [referring to the tree] was put there for the Noongars, years ago (Mippy in Bourke 1992).*

*SUMMARY*

This chapter has provided an interpretive presentation of what Mr. Mippy had to say about his language, his cultural knowledge and his experience, thus providing direct insights into his understandings and cultural world-view. The recorded memories and reflections have presented a biographical window of interpretation through which, in the rhetoric of Tyler (1986: 125), an entry is gained into the “possible world” of Mr. Mippy’s Indigenous reality, conjuring up a “commonsense” perspective of the cultural environment of his contemporary community. The chapter has also helped make sense of Edward Mippy’s educational program and contributed an understanding of its background and the inspiration that lay behind his vision of cultural renewal.

Although he saw the process of cultural renewal as something involving the whole community, Mr. Mippy nevertheless directed his educational program primarily to the younger generation. The pedagogical nature and purpose of his work may be perceived in the way he presented his oral literature. As related by him, the stories take the form of “cautionary tales,” each reflecting in its own way his convictions about the need for strengthening respect for authority and tradition and a sense of social responsibility amongst the young. As a gifted Aboriginal educator, he was able to play on the sensibilities of his youthful audience, maximising the impact and effectiveness of his lessons by situating them within a traditional cultural context.

Beyond the oral literature, the recorded memories and original forms of expression have furnished the reader with a lens through which to interpret the beliefs and customs of Mr. Mippy and his community at

the cross-cultural interface. They have evoked, through the imaginative eye, an interpretive concept of his spirit-world and its integration within the traditional Yuat cosmology. They should help in comprehending his aspirations and in sharing, to some extent, his vision of a younger generation of Yuat descendants who would benefit from the cultural legacy which he himself had received from his parents and elders.

In Mr. Mippy's cosmological perception, the land was both mother and teacher. What he believed he was passing on to the rising generation was more than simply a bundle of stories, beliefs and traditions which might amount to little more than a static perspective of a regional Indigenous heritage. He was inculcating the ability, the willingness and the curiosity to learn from the storehouse of information provided for them by the natural environment. For Edward Mippy, the whole of Nature served to reinforce the cultural endowment which he had received from his forebears. Indigenous tradition was in many ways a reflection of the cosmological order and sequence to be learned in the classroom of nature. As he explained it, there was always more to learn:

*I myself ... I'm not boasting, but I myself ... I get out in the bush every chance I get. Every chance I get you'll find me ... I'm out in the bush, chasing 'roos or something like that. But I'm learning, learning as I go along about the bush. And these are the little things I'd like to tell to the younger people, the people that don't know nothing about the bush. I'd even like to go and walk in the bush, talk to them, tell them what is good to eat ... tell them what to look out for, how to walk, how to get through the bush, how to sneak on a 'roo without cracking a little stick ... all these little things should be told to people (Mippy 1986).*

These words surely reflect an attitude of mind which Edward Mippy had received from his parents and elders and which he wanted to pass on to others. Like his father before him, he was motivated by a genuine desire to strengthen the cultural identity of his people. He did appreciate personal recognition and was really at his best in the presence



of television cameras or newspaper reporters. However, as I can attest from my own experience, it was not the need for financial support that inspired his work in cultural education and he never sought payment, except to cover necessary expenses. He was a man with a mission. He wanted his community to learn from the bush – to retain and develop that receptive ear and discerning eye which had been for countless generations of Aboriginal people the very means of survival.

At every stage in the process of presenting Mr. Mippy's cosmology, this chapter has given a high priority to the subject of Indigenous language. This is due, in the first place, to the importance attributed to it by Mr. Mippy. In his perspective it was to be valued as a subject in its own right, an essential component of his tradition which was to be maintained, renewed and passed down to posterity. As a researcher, I have also emphasised the role of his language in providing, for the reader as well as for myself, the conceptual basis and interconnecting framework for the diverse areas of his cultural understandings.

The ideological and conceptual world of Mr. Edward Mippy has been interpreted in this thesis, as far as possible, through the verbal record of his memories, experiences and perceptions. It has been my task, as his long-time associate, coadjutor and biographical researcher, to gain a knowledge of his spoken language with a view to uncovering the "special meanings," the codes and the non-verbal structures that were the medium of communication within his socio-cultural context. For the purpose of this chapter and indeed for the thesis as a whole, my role as mediator and biographical ethnographer will have been successful if I have been able to evoke, through this presentation of Mr. Mippy's cultural legacy, a better understanding of the richness and complexity of his cultural world and to illustrate the way in which he used his

linguistic and traditional knowledge to further his vision of contemporary cultural renewal.

The thesis now continues with an overview of the cultural understandings underpinning Mr. Mippy's material and moral legacy to his community. It considers the nature of that legacy and examines its significance, both in the perception of his peers and against the wider background of academic discourse.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE LEGACY AND THE VISION: AN OVERVIEW

This chapter presents an account of the life-experience and insights which led Mr. Edward Mippy to identify and understand the problems confronting his community and to recognise the role of cultural education in the task of restoring Indigenous identity. It provides the setting for his future strategies and gives an account of the way in which he “negotiated the engagement of his cultural background” with the encompassing demands of his contemporary world (Herzfeld 1997: 6). The chapter provides a fuller account of the material and moral legacy he bequeathed to his community and offers an overview of the practical ways in which he sought to achieve his objectives. From a more emic position, the significance of his legacy is complemented by the perspectives of some of his contemporaries and former associates.

The life and inspiration of Edward Mippy may be perceived, not simply as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a general resurgence of Australian Indigenous identity within a wider, global vision of Indigenous self-determination. In the context of a world-wide reappraisal by contemporary Indigenous peoples of their rights and values, the chapter therefore relates Mr. Mippy’s vision to the historical emergence of the concept of Australian Aboriginality at a national as well as local level. At the same time it gives an account of the way in which the concept of Indigenous identity is being explicated, re-interpreted and challenged at the present time within the controversial currents of Indigenous and academic discourse.

*RESTRUCTURING IDENTITY*

Mr. Mippy often spoke of the consequences of colonial settlement. He was well aware that, under the impact of Anglo-European culture, his people had not only lost their land but had suffered the continuing erosion of what he referred to as "*our traditional ways.*" Even within his own lifetime he had experienced the decline of many aspects of Aboriginal knowledge and tradition and had witnessed the enormous cultural change endured by his community as it endeavoured to conform and adapt itself to the mores of the wider society.

Looking to the future, he foresaw the indigenous heritage which he valued so highly becoming increasingly diminished and impoverished. He regarded his own family of nine children as part of a generation which had assimilated little traditional knowledge. Many of the stories and legends, with the ancestral law and customs which had provided the fabric of his traditional society, had already passed from living memory. In my hearing, he often lamented this decline in cultural understanding. He deplored the way in which knowledge of the bush and empathy for the natural environment, hallmarks of his personal construction of Aboriginality, had faded under the pressure and influence of urbanisation.

While he saw the inevitability of continued adaptation to social change, he was also aware of the cultural cul-de-sac into which his younger generation was being led. Relegated to the social fringe, they were being alienated from their own Indigenous values and understandings while simultaneously being denied access to the world of the white society. He sometimes reflected on those of his peers who had sought to achieve a new identity through attitudes of either cultural

denial on the one hand, or racial exclusiveness on the other. Like many of his contemporaries, Mr. Mippy saw both these extremes as equally futile. He sometimes referred to those who attempted to achieve acceptability within the wider society by breaking connections with their Indigenous community, even denying their own racial origins. He believed that, ultimately, such people were on the road to a metaphorical "no man's land." Isolated in a kind of cultural "demi-monde" between two societies, they often ended up being accepted by neither.

Opposition to the involvement of non-Aboriginal people in Aboriginal affairs was another Indigenous attitude encountered by Mr. Mippy. On two occasions, during language research conferences which we were attending together, my presence as a non-Indigenous person was called into question by one of the participants. Mr. Mippy seemed embarrassed by such incidents. He always took the view that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people should work together and that participation by "outsiders" in Indigenous affairs was part and parcel of the process of reconciliation.

On the other hand, he felt that the attitude of those who believed that integration with the wider community could be purchased at the expense of their own Indigenous identity was equally misguided. Energies should be channelled, he considered, in directions which assisted reconciliation between the Indigenous and wider society and which positively advanced the causes of cultural education and renewal. He saw no inherent contradiction in an Aboriginal person fulfilling a role in both societies. His own life, in fact, showed the possibility and the acceptability of being proudly Aboriginal while at the same time being regarded as an accepted member of the general community. For twenty-eight years, Mr. Mippy was a respected employee of Westrail. With the

status of "Trackmaster," he exercised authority over a variety of fellow workers, Aboriginal and otherwise. Being reliable and industrious himself, he understood the need for such qualities in the workplace. Proud of his own roots and origins, proud of his cultural knowledge and aspirations, he was none the less respected by society at large precisely as Aboriginal and was considered by many in the Moora town community as a role model for his younger generation.

In his view, the way forward for Aboriginal people lay in their ability to live comfortably in two worlds. While remaining true to their origins as Indigenous people they had also to accommodate their lifestyle to that of the wider community. It was a cultural dualism which was reflected, not only in his life, but in his educational philosophy. While advising the local Yuat children to "*go with the [white] people,*" he was also heard counselling them not to deny their Indigenous identity (*State Affair* 8 Nov. 1985).

Mr. Mippy saw cultural education as a way out of the otherwise trackless social wilderness which confronted his peers and which, he believed, threatened to engulf the younger Indigenous generation. Apart from the vitally important goal of learning and adapting to the legitimate requirements of the wider society, their principal task, as he saw it, was to restore and maintain their traditional and personal identity. Not only was this the moral ideal which lay at the core of his own philosophy. It constituted a vision for the future which he hoped to share with his community through his social programs.

Of particular importance was the message which was expressed to his community in different words and on many occasions during our time together. It was that the "*traditional ways,*" as he put it, must be treasured and retained:

*They must keep our identities and our traditional ways ... they must – it's a must for them. Otherwise they're lost* (Mippy in Bourke 1991).

This message has been emphasised in this thesis because it represents an essential ideal in the perspective of Edward Mippy. His was a vision for a renewal of Aboriginal identity based on the traditional style of education which he had received from his forebears. He envisaged a program of cultural education, directed particularly to the young, that would reverse the loss of direction and self-esteem that was threatening to turn his Nyoongar people into a society consisting of what he often called “*drifters.*”

The pursuit of a renewed indigenous identity was, I believe, the inspiration or driving force behind the activities which have been described during the course of this study. While he did, on occasions, accept financial benefits or offers of money to cover expenses, he always considered his work to be “*voluntary,*” as he himself described it. Although he greatly appreciated publicity for himself and his projects, it was not a desire for recognition nor a need for financial support that provided the mainspring for his activities. As his researcher and associate, I perceived Mr. Mippy as a man with a mission, bent on achieving his vision of strengthening and renewing Aboriginal identity by means of cultural education. As revealed through this study, some of the means through which that vision was implemented, notably at the level of self-employment and education, have become a practical and enduring legacy to a rising generation. The following section presents various perspectives of these and other facets of his personal contribution to the welfare of the Yuat community.

*THE LEGACY: OTHER PERSPECTIVES*

The following account of the material and social institutions which bear Edward Mippy's name and which constitute a significant and practical part of his legacy, together with some popular perceptions thereof, will help provide an understanding of the benefits enjoyed by his community as a result of his life and work.

What Edward Mippy would have seen as one of his most notable material contributions to his community is the "*Yuat Nyoongara Kaat Maya*," the arts and crafts workshop whose origin, growth and development has been described in chapter four of this thesis. Established by him to operate in conjunction with the Moora Aboriginal Progress Association, the workshop continued, in the years following its inception, to provide opportunities for employment and to encourage and promote the growth of cultural awareness within Moora's Indigenous community. Participants in the project now conduct their activities in a large iron shed, built for the purpose behind their original premises. As explained earlier, they have also expanded these activities to include a mainstream business enterprise under the title "*Yuat-Ice and Second Hand Furniture*."

In addition to the arts and crafts workshop and its ancillary enterprises, Mr. Mippy's legacy may be represented in other less tangible ways which may be equally significant in the perception of his present day society and its younger generation. A personal influence was exercised, for example, through his strict standards of sobriety, social responsibility and behaviour. Not only amongst Aboriginal people, but even amongst the wider community, he was regarded as a "role model." As an employee, he set an example for the young to follow, always



placing an emphasis on what he called “*reliability*,” a virtue which, as already noted, he himself cultivated and which he spoke of as one which the young should strive to emulate. Yuat author June Headland notes the role of Mr. Mippy as one of five Aboriginal men “*who were employed by the Midland Railway Company in 1951:*”

*Ned Mippy continued working for the railways even though the other men sought other jobs around the district ... He was made a ganger after many years of working as a labourer. Ned worked for twenty eight years laying tracks for the railways and he was awarded a certificate for his services from Westrail when he retired (Headland 1995: 44-46).*

The commitment and sense of responsibility displayed in the workplace was likewise reflected by Mr. Mippy in many other areas of social life. Prominent amongst the achievements and activities which have been described in chapter two of this thesis was his involvement in sporting activities. Headland (1995: 31) reflects the view of the indigenous community in referring to him as “*like a father figure*” for the young players engaged in the district football competitions. Similar views were shared by many in the wider community. Prominent Moora identity and former Shire Councillor Roger Tonkin has already been heard paying him tribute on the day of his funeral, describing him as a “*mentor*” and a “*role model*” to all young Aboriginals (ABC News 5 May 1992).

His moral and personal legacy is reflected in the expressions of appreciation for his cultural and educational initiatives. Amongst the tributes is one offered by his daughter Daphne, who writes as follows of her late father’s devotion to his culture:

*I always understood how important it was for Dad to give to his own culture and how much he wished, in his later years, to pass on his knowledge to the younger generation of Aboriginal people. During the last years of his life, Dad worked very hard ... to teach the children in*

*the schools about their culture, especially their language* (McBrearty 1998).

Headland (1995: 26) too, speaks of his work of restoring the “*almost extinct Nyoongar language*” and of the dictionary which he co-authored for the purpose of re-introducing Indigenous language to the Moora Aboriginal Community. “*In their Mission days at school,*” she explains, “*Aboriginal students were taught to despise their own language and consequently they have lost all identity. By developing the language,*” Headland concludes, “*we lose discrimination .*”

Having suggested that language is only part of Aboriginal culture, the author goes on to recognise, on behalf of the Moora Aboriginal community, Mr. Mippy’s contribution in the field of cultural revitalisation at the primary educational level. “*A culture awareness program,*” she points out, “*incorporating the teaching of the Nyoongar language, had also been introduced at St. Joseph’s School*” (Headland 1995: 27).

As mentioned earlier, Mr. Mippy’s services to his community were given official State recognition in 1991. Headland’s words represent an Indigenous view of the honour paid to him:

*Ned was holidaying in Broome when he received a gold embossed letter inviting him to Government House. The seventy two year old (at the time), father of seven [sic] was delighted to receive the Award. He had a celebration with family members who gathered at the Lockridge camp to toast his achievement. Mr. Mippy has lived in the Moora region about half his life. Twenty seven years he laid tracks for the railways. He has travelled Western Australia showing interested groups or schools tribal dances. He also taught Aboriginal and White children about culture and heritage of Australian Indigenous people. He worked hard in this field with his friend Father Bernard Rooney* (Headland 1995: 53).

In the following excerpt from her recorded memoirs, Headland insists that these educational initiatives marked the beginning of a new

era of cultural learning in which the Aboriginal people themselves are becoming involved in their own history. Aboriginal children are furthering their educational knowledge in *"the history and culture of their heritage"* by learning from their Elders, *"who pass on their knowledge from generation to generation."* Through researching and recording, she continues, *"Aboriginal people themselves are coming forward to tell their own stories about their heritage"* (Headland 1995: 28). Further reference is made to the measures which have been put in train since his death to ensure the continuation of his work and to perpetuate his memory. In order to recognise and commemorate the Mippy program in secondary education, the Moora High School established an Annual Scholarship together with a yearly celebration in his name to mark Aboriginal week. Headland (1995: 27) records that *"on the 27th February 1995, the first meeting was set up to form the 'Ned Mippy Scholarship Aboriginal Corporation'."* The purpose of this, she explains, was to assist Aboriginal students *"with furthering their education in high school:"*

*Mr. Mippy did Aboriginal studies teaching of culture in the Central Midlands Senior High School and at St. Joseph's School. He was a very important Aboriginal person, well thought of by the High School and now he has a Scholarship named 'The Ned Mippy Memorial ScholarshipFund' after him. The high school celebrates Aboriginal Week (1st. week in September) every year with a huge Cook-Up day after the man who first instigated this event (Headland 1995: 53).*

Paying tribute to him for his initiatives in bringing a renewed cultural awareness to the people, Headland (1995: 55) speaks of the regard in which his memory is held within the Aboriginal community. *"He always taught us our language and culture,"* she remembers, *"so that the tradition of Aboriginal people would not be lost. He was our true 'Koorda' [friend]."*

Having thus pursued other perspectives of the more important elements of Edward Mippy's legacy, it will be opportune, in the concluding chapter of this thesis, to return briefly to his own personal view of the sources of his cultural understandings. Attention is first directed, however, to the way in which his view of cultural identity sits within the broader concept of Aboriginality as developed by other writers and the way that concept has been constructed within the Australian social and cultural environment.

#### *ABORIGINAL IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE*

Emphasis has been placed, during the course of this thesis, on Mr. Mippy's concept of identity and on his conviction of the need for its renewal within the Indigenous community. His understanding of the concept and its importance was not based in philosophical speculation; for him, identity was an essential element in the practical reality of Indigenous self-awareness. He expressed the message in various ways. If his people were to avoid being "lost" within the wider society, he would say, they should keep their "identities" and their "traditional ways." Without a sense of identity, he maintained, they were "nothing." His own awareness of identity and the knowledge of "what went on years ago," as he put it, had been gained from his parents and was a legacy to be "passed on" to the younger generation. Mr. Mippy's personal vision, however, should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a national resurgence of Indigenous identity. To be more clearly understood, it should be located within this wider historical and social

context. His cultural understanding, therefore, must be related to the way in which the concept of Australian Aboriginality has been and is being defined and valued in contemporary discourse.

Over the years since Anglo-European settlement, worsening relationships between Australia's first inhabitants and the wider community coupled with the rapidly changing nature of Aboriginal social organisation gave rise to questions of government policy regarding the future place of Aboriginal people within Australian society. One of the early solutions proposed to address this problem was the policy of assimilation, first mooted by anthropologist A. P. Elkin, who described it as a policy by which Aborigines, although "still Aboriginal in many social and spiritual aspects of life ... may become as other Australians in all things except physical features." (Elkin 1938: 381) In dividing Aborigines into four categories, ranging from "full bloods" to "light-caste folk," he anticipated an assimilationist process by which Aborigines could blend unobtrusively into the wider Australian society. Although this concept of Indigenous assimilation was taken up and implemented by state governments throughout Australia, Elkin himself came to recognise that assimilation was "not a simple linear process." He argued that, as Australia would continue to have the Aborigines "as a distinct element in its total population," the trend to integration should be seen as "an inevitable part of the process." During the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of assimilation was modified and proposed as a new policy, favouring integration.

Elkin did not see in these policies a denial of Aboriginality as such. Nevertheless, they continued to involve definitions of Aboriginality in terms which are largely unacceptable today. Dodson, speaking of the need for new definitions of Aboriginality, claims that any goal of

preserving Aboriginality is virtually unattainable as long as the broader community retains its preoccupation with classifications based on what he calls '*blood percentages*.'" (Dodson 1994: 3). He goes on to quote the Victorian State President of the Returned Services League, Mr. Bruce Ruxton, whose words are seen as reflecting this essentialist paradigm. In 1988, Ruxton called on the federal government to "'amend the definition of Aborigine to eliminate the part-whites who are making a racket out of being so-called Aborigines at enormous cost to taxpayers', and for some kind of genealogical examination to determine whether the applicant for benefits was a 'full blood or a half-caste or a quarter-caste or whatever'." These quoted views of Ruxton reflect a view which, Dodson (1994: 3) continues, portrays the Aboriginal man (ignoring women and children) as "*the noble, well-built native, heroic, bearded, loin-clothed, one foot up, vigilant, with boomerang at the ready.*" Such paradigms of Aboriginality have long been accepted within the wider Australian society. They have resulted in the denial of cultural and racial legitimacy to so-called "fringe-dwellers" and to the Indigenous residents of country towns who, in the perception of their fellow residents, are often relegated to a kind of "demi-monde" of social nonentity and inequality.

Mr. Mippy never accepted such paradigms of Aboriginality. "*Never be ashamed of your colour*" was advice he would give to the children of Moora, as he raised his hand to indicate the colour of his own skin. By "*colour*," however, he referred not so much to skin pigmentation as to Aboriginal identity. Regardless of colour, an authentic Aboriginal was, for him, a person of Aboriginal descent who proudly regarded himself as Aboriginal and was so regarded by others in his community. Colour of skin was not the criterion. He often told me he could immediately identify an Aboriginal person, whatever his or her

appearance. On the other hand, he would use the word “*coconut*” to describe persons who, though Aboriginal in appearance, had turned their backs on family and friends in order to associate with the wider community.

According to Dodson (1994: 3), characterisations based on “*distinctions between the offensively named ‘full bloods’ and ‘hybrids,’ or ‘real’ and ‘inauthentic’ Aborigines,*” have been challenged in recent years by a number of Aboriginal voices. As these include Indigenous authors from the Southwest of Western Australia, it would be relevant to mention some of the latter in this connection. In his article “On being an Aboriginal: a personal statement,” Southwest activist Ken Colbung (1979: 100), for example, reaffirms the intrinsic nature of cultural identity, rejecting such imposed definitions of Aboriginality as “*the special Aboriginal legislation that defined us as Aborigines, more than our cultural background..*” In his well-known plays, e.g. “*Kullark*” (1982) and “*No Sugar*” (1986), the late Jack Davis, also of the Southwest and a contemporary of Edward Mippy during his time in the Moore River Settlement, has been another important contributor to understanding Indigenous culture in the modern context. Eminent amongst other Southwest authors are two men whose work was published to record the culture and language of the Ballardong, a territory adjacent to the Yuat. The first of these is “*Kura,*” a word list with several “*Dreaming*” stories and cultural, linguistic and historical notes by the late Tom Bennell, recorded by Collard. This book was written with the avowed purpose of allowing “*some of our people, young and old, to recognise that what we have belongs to us and is a valuable part of our culture and heritage*” (Bennell & Collard 1991: vii). The other work, “*Walwaliny: the Hill that Cries,*” is an extensive word list with many personal memories by a friend of Mr.

Mippy, Mr. Ralph Winmar, published only a few months before the latter author's death. His intention is recorded in his preface: *"to preserve this ancient and beautiful language of my people ... that some day we may hear the old words in the mouths and hearts of our children"* (Winmar 1996: iii).

These last two books were compiled by two Elders of the Ballardong, a Nyoongar regional area ranging from Northam and Merredin in the north to Pingelly in the south. Sharing its western border with the Yuat, the Ballardong is the name of one of the territorial clans written off as virtually extinct by earlier non-indigenous writers.<sup>1</sup> The very existence of these two indigenous works and the testimony of their authors contradicts such negative assertions, indicating the strength and continuity of Ballardong culture. In the words of Winmar (1996: 55): *"we have been through bad times, but we are still here. And we will always be here."*

Another book, *"When the Pelican Laughed"* (Nannup 1992), has been reviewed on its cover by Sally Morgan as *"a spirited and deeply moving story full of humour and insight."* It is the life-story of Alice Nannup, one of the "stolen generation" originally from Roebourne, who alludes to her association with the young Edward Mippy and his family while recounting the life-experiences and deprivations she endured at the old Moore River Settlement. Alice emerges from this assisted autobiography as a strong personality who, to the end of her days, asserted and preserved her Aboriginality in the face of a life-long experience of exploitation and of discrimination at the hands of the white society.

Perhaps one of the best known modern authors to assert her Aboriginality is Sally Morgan. Her internationally recognised autobiography, *"My Place"* (Morgan 1987), is a powerful account of an

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<sup>1</sup> Such as Berndt (1977) and Bates (1944): see this thesis (Intro: 1-2).



emotional and spiritual voyage to personal identity. In this work she reveals the cultural ambivalence which pervaded her earlier years. Unlike Alice Nannup, who remained only too conscious of her origins, Morgan tells of growing up in an atmosphere of cultural denial and low self-esteem. In the book she documents the search for her personal and family identity. Refusing to accept a "white" identity and rejecting other "false" labels which she and her siblings were expected to adopt, she tells of how she relentlessly pursued the true story of her Aboriginal origins in order to discover her true "*place*" in the wider world.

Another work of particular interest in this connection is one which is considered in some detail in this chapter. Headland's "*Aborigines of Moora*" (1995) is a historical chronicle of the author's own (Yuat) community, largely seen through the eyes of her father, Mr. Ted Headland. It is the first (though hopefully not the last) work, from the pen of a local Yuat author, to present a picture of Aboriginality which is both authentic and contemporary.

What these above-mentioned authors are recording, one way or another, is the role of Indigenous identity in the process of discovering or affirming one's place within the wider society. As already indicated in chapter three, non-Indigenous authors have also been active in challenging popular misconceptions of Aboriginality. In confronting the denial of cultural legitimacy to indigenous residents of country towns, Cowlshaw (1988: 88) presents a view which I believe to be capable of general application. She quotes Wolf, as follows, in proposing a "dynamic account of culture" which is different from previously accepted models:

In the rough and tumble of social interaction, groups are known to exploit the ambiguities of inherited forms, to impart new evaluations or valences to them, to borrow forms more

expressive of their interests, or to create wholly new forms to answer to changed circumstances... 'A culture' is thus better seen as a series of processes that construct, reconstruct and dismantle cultural determinants.<sup>2</sup>

Defined in this wider sense,<sup>3</sup> culture is seen by Cowlshaw (1988: 89) as "a creative response to the conditions of existence experienced by a group." As a result of personal experience in western New South Wales, she warns that we must not be misled by "metaphors of lost culture and destroyed society" in forming a concept of culture that is relevant to an Aboriginal rural community. In this view, as indicated in chapter three, she has the unequivocal support of Macdonald (2001: 182) who argues that cultures are constantly in the process of changing and adapting. "Traditions," says the latter, "are not the vestiges, the conscious or unconscious leftovers from another world of practice. Rather, they refer to meanings and practices moving through time, dynamic."

This chapter has argued that Edward Mippy's pursuit of his goal of cultural renewal is not to be seen in isolation from the wider context of Aboriginal academic and popular discourse but should be seen as part of a nation-wide resurgence of Australian Aboriginality. From a global perspective, that resurgence, in its turn, is part of a re-assertion of Indigenous life and values in other areas of the international community, particularly those "*non-dominant sectors of society*" which are demanding recognition of their collective identity (Dodson 1994: 5).

I believe that the theories of cultural transformation and the continuity of tradition are borne out in the affirmations of identity reviewed in this chapter and in the understanding of Mr. Mippy and his

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<sup>2</sup> Quotation taken from Wolf (1982: 387).

<sup>3</sup> See this thesis (1: 34).for similar opinions expressed by Linnekin (1992: 249-250).

community. Mr. Mippy himself remained wedded to a traditional ideal of identity which had its roots in the autochthonous past. In his perspective, the re-structuring of cultural determinants said to occur in a rural community as an inevitable result of “oppressive social conditions” (Cowlshaw 1988: 92), could never negate the style of education, the traditions and the knowledge which, as he insistently maintained, he had received from his forebears.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

In approaching the genre of biography from an ethnographic perspective, this study has afforded an interpretive glimpse of Yuat society through the life experience of a notable Elder, Mr. Edward (Ned) Mippy, who is taken as a representative of his contemporary world and its recent history.

The thesis introduced Mr. Mippy as its biographical focus and proceeded to document the formulation of its methodology. After giving an account of recent developments in ethnographic research, it supplied a summary of the new narrative forms employed in ethnobiographical writing and set out the terms of reference considered appropriate to the sphere of Indigenous enquiry. The life of Mr. Mippy was then traced largely through his own memories while some of the social and environmental factors which were of significance to his later life and work were identified. In thus offering an insight into Mr. Mippy's personal world, the thesis is intended to act as a kind of biographical lens into the wider world of his community and into the cultural "utopia" towards which his later activities were directed.

After documenting Mr. Mippy's move to Moora, the rural town where he spent the rest of his life, the thesis went on to provide a contextual overview of the post-contact history of the Yuat as a people, from their lengthy sojourn at New Norcia to the various centres of the Victoria Plains. This was followed by some consideration of the concept of Aboriginality as constructed within the Moora community and of the

understanding and application of that concept in the life of Mr. Mippy and his associates. Emphasis was placed on the way in which Mr. Mippy negotiated life at the cultural interface without seeming to lose his personal awareness of Indigenous and regional identity.

An examination was then made of the practical ways in which Mr. Mippy's initiatives in cultural education were implemented. Besides presenting his own as well as other perspectives of his projects and activities, I was able to add, through having personally shared in these initiatives as a participant observer and collaborator, a perspective which is largely autoethnographic. In the first place, the thesis set about tracing the course of the Yuat Artefacts Project. This enterprise, undertaken under his sponsorship, was perhaps his most important initiative in the area of community cultural development and renewal. I also sought to make sense of Mr. Mippy's cultural understandings and experience in areas of language, oral literature and cosmology, offering an interpretive account of how he used and imparted that knowledge and how he directed his activities and projects towards implementing his vision for a renewal of cultural identity within his community.

In accordance with my stated terms of reference and in view of the priority given by this thesis to the Indigenous voice, I then offered an interpretation of the development of Mr. Mippy's view of identity and his understanding of its important role in the social dynamics of his community. A narration of his activities, based on what Marcus & Fischer (1986: 26) might call the "inside accounts" of some of his contemporaries and associates, then provided the thesis with other perspectives of his social and cultural legacy. This was followed by a brief exposé contrasting Mr. Mippy's perspectives of cultural identity with some of the meanings given to Indigenous identity in academic and popular discourse and with the evolution of the concept of Indigenous

identity in the more recent works of contemporary Indigenous authors. This conceptual background serves to situate the life and work of Mr. Mippy, placing in a broader context his personal views and convictions regarding Aboriginality and the practical means he chose to renew and maintain it within his regional community. Far from being represented as an isolated phenomenon, therefore, Mr. Mippy's vision is to be seen as part of a general resurgence of Australian Indigenous identity.

Before proceeding to take the final steps in our literary journey, it is useful to pause briefly in order to take what might be called "a view from the ridge;"<sup>1</sup> to look back to the aims and methodology of the thesis, to gain an overall perspective of its genesis and development and to discern its effectiveness in fulfilling its function and purpose as a work of ethnographic biography.

#### *A VIEW FROM THE RIDGE*

In the Introduction, I described how this study began as "a personal journey across a cultural divide ... a journey undertaken by me in the company of Mr. Edward Mippy, an Aboriginal Elder whose destiny had placed him at the interface of two worlds divided by race and culture." While its primary function is biographical, the thesis, as I explained, is designed to bridge the distance between social analysis and lived experience. In allowing a certain interpenetration of the genres of ethnography and biography, its narrative style affords a glimpse, not only of Mr. Mippy as its biographical focus, but of his contemporary regional community, thus enabling the reader to evoke or conjure up that world of everyday reality spoken of by Tyler (1986: 125).

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<sup>1</sup> A phrase taken from the title of a recent autobiography by Morris West (1996).

In accord with its stated aims, the study presents Mr. Mippy as a significant figure within his Indigenous society – a medium through whom the intersecting universes of the singular and the social may be revealed and rendered palpable. In pursuing its biographical trajectory, the thesis has allowed Mr. Mippy, through an interpretation of his life and work, to emerge as both a metaphorical “lens” and a “voice,” enabling the Indigenous community which he signifies to be both seen and heard. In the first chapter of this thesis, he has already been portrayed as an instance of Sartre’s “universal singular,” to be conceived as one who both “sums up” and is “summed up and universalised by” the broad social context in which he lived (Sartre 1981: ix-x).

That this thesis has based much of its methodology on the philosophical and social concepts of Sartre, Denzin and Tyler is a reflection of my belief that the essential traits of human nature transcend social boundaries and differences and that the dynamics of human societies vary little across the cultural spectrum. Sartre’s concept of the “universal singular,” for example, is as applicable to the Indigenous as to the non-Indigenous context. Likewise, “narrative forms of representation,” such as recommended by Denzin (1997: 207-08) and pursued in the course of this thesis, can serve in any cultural or cross-cultural setting to extend the traditional, ethnographic model of textuality, and go some way towards establishing a postmodern ethnography.

The inspiration behind my decision to undertake this study was spelled out in chapter one of the thesis. My original aim, as I indicated, was to establish the cultural credentials of the contemporary Yuat community by presenting a new perspective which would differ significantly from commonly held views and from the current academic discourse. I believed, then, that I could establish the credentials of Mr.

Mippy's community by measuring the latter against the relevant ethnographic and historical records, thereby affirming the integrity and continuity of the Yuat as a social entity. I soon perceived, however, that this plan, based on the paradigm of descriptive realism which had often underpinned the ethnography of earlier writers, could well be a self-defeating exercise. A fundamentally essentialist, style of research, focusing on historical, genealogical and collective phenomena, would be intent on measuring the presence or absence of variables rather than understanding social and cultural worlds. Was it not that kind of methodology, based on phenomenological criteria, which had led Berndt and Bates <sup>2</sup> in a direction which caused them not only to question the viability of such indigenous social entities as the Yuat, but even to deny their existence?

In order to avoid what might be considered a realist or objectivist mode of enquiry, I was led to adopt a more qualitative approach. As already pointed out in the first chapter, I was drawn to the newer styles of social narrative which have adapted the traditional, informational models of communication employed in many earlier studies to emphasize "conversation, hearing and listening as the chief participatory modes of knowing and learning about the world" (Denzin 1997: 157). By following a methodology of participant observation and relying heavily on the extensive, available record of memories, experiences and perceptions, the study has focused on the life, works and ideas of Mr. Mippy as a single individual. In applying an ethnographic perspective to the genre of literary biography, it represents him not only as a significant Indigenous person in his own right but also as a lens or window through which the cultural world in which he lived may be better seen and understood. In short, it reveals his unique personality

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<sup>2</sup> See this thesis (1: 10, 11).



and at the same time represents him as a single instance of wider social experience – revealing the Yuat people as a specific part of that cultural world which created him and which he himself helped to create.

Underlying the ethno-biographical scope of the thesis lies a motive which is largely polemical. As pointed out in the first chapter, the study has taken issue with the widespread popular assumption, backed by academic opinion, that the Yuat society, like other Indigenous communities, did not survive Anglo-European settlement and that it therefore no longer exists as an identifiable social entity. I believe that what has emerged through this thesis is a very different picture. Not only is Mr. Mippy's community revealed as an integral and recognised part of contemporary Nyoongar society. It is one that is vitally aware of its historical, social and cultural identity – a community that extends today beyond its traditional area but has nonetheless retained a continuing awareness of its continuity with the past and its unique relationship with its ancestral country.

The effectiveness of the thesis in its ethnographic dimension rests on its biographical focus. Largely through Mr. Mippy's own recorded reflections, it has plotted and studied the life experiences which formed his character and shaped his understandings. From his birth in Mandurah, through the traumatic conditions of life in the Moore River Native Settlement and the harsh realities of the post-Depression years, the thesis has followed Mr. Mippy to his chosen home amongst the Yuat community of Moora. It has sketched the history of the Yuat people with special reference to the antecedents of the Narrier family, an important aspect in considering the regional lineage of Mr. Mippy's wife and children as well as his claim to acceptance within Yuat society. It has examined the growth of his awareness of the need for a renewal of indigenous identity, documenting his efforts, extending over many years

and at various social levels, to achieve his objective of cultural renewal through education. It has probed his store of cultural understandings – his language, his stories and the richness of his cosmology – and reviewed the projects and activities which he directed to the fulfilment of his vision of cultural renewal.

Through its interpretive presentation of the recorded memories and perceptions of Mr. Mippy, its biographical focus, this thesis has endeavoured to evoke an understanding of his cultural world and of the way in which he, like the subject of Herzfeld's work, "has negotiated the engagement of his cultural background, his sense of tradition and value, with the encompassing enormities of his times" (Herzfeld 1997: 6).

#### *THE TRAIL OF THE SWAMP HEN*

Mr. Mippy acknowledged that it was to his forebears, especially to his father, that he owed his vision of cultural identity. His father, Arthur Mippy, was undoubtedly a major source of his inspiration and enthusiasm as well as the model for his methods of teaching. While reflecting on his early years at the Moore River Native Settlement, he gave special importance to the influence of his father and spoke of him as a man who valued his cultural knowledge and made use of every opportunity to pass it on, not only to his son Edward, but to the other children at the Settlement. He was never happier, as his son remembered, than when he was "*amongst a mob of kiddies, teaching them something.*" He explained that his father was the proximate source of his inspiration and that, in transmitting his knowledge and traditions, he was simply following his father's example. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> E. Mippy; interview (Roberts 1990a: 16).

Having himself been taught, from an early age, to follow in the paternal footsteps, Mr. Mippy believed that all Aboriginal children should be *"brought up"* according to their ancestral traditions. Such knowledge, he believed, was essential for survival. Children who forgot their background were like driftwood, lost and without direction in the random currents of society. As this study has shown, Mr. Mippy never considered himself a *"drifter."* Ever mindful of his Aboriginality and conscious of his own identity, he would in turn encourage the children of Moora to be proud of their origins.

Mr. Mippy remembered the lessons handed on to him by his father and treasured them beyond his childhood years. Moreover, he spoke of the duty incumbent on all the adults of his generation to help preserve the knowledge that had been received from parents and elders, whether in the home or in places like the Moore River Settlement. More than a duty, it was for him a sacred trust. By passing on the knowledge and respect for Nyoongar tradition, that sacred trust would be fulfilled. It was for the younger generation to follow in the steps of their forebears by receiving and passing on their cultural inheritance. As he said in later life:

*"We've carried that burden ... us old people. Now we're looking back towards the young people to come forwards and follow in our footsteps"* (Bourke 1991).

Mr. Mippy often spoke to the children about their responsibilities, preparing them for the time when they too would have to bear the responsibility of passing on their culture. In the conclusion to his *"Story of Three Springs"* this advice, to *"pass down"* the knowledge of *"what went on years ago,"* was directed to his young audience, in the following words:

*So I hope you kiddies listen to that, 'n pass this down, as you go along, get older, pass it down to the next little one ... so he'll realise what went on years ago.*

In his world-view, the whole of Nature spoke of the importance of tradition. The concept was embedded in the very fabric of his cosmology and he considered that the reality of it should be visible to anyone with the eyes to see it. He considered that his cultural endowment – the understanding and the body of tradition which he had received from his forebears – was in itself a reflection of the order and sequence to be seen in the natural world. In describing the behaviour of the bird he knew as the “swamp hen,”<sup>4</sup> whose educative instincts he revealed on camera during a televised field excursion (Bourke 1992), he seemed to be drawing an analogy with the educational methods of Aboriginal society.

In accord with the spirit of this thesis, I believe it to be fitting for Mr. Mippy to have this televised address as his last, parting word. As he directed the television crew to focus its camera on the track which the swamp hen and its offspring had made through the grass, he took the opportunity to reflect on its wider symbolism. The trail of the swamp hen, as he interpreted it, was a metaphor of Aboriginal cultural transmission. His was an invisible audience, but I like to believe he was addressing his words to future generations of Aboriginal people as well as for the benefit of anyone in the wider community who would seek to understand the value of his legacy.

Looking directly into the eye of the television camera and using his hand to point out the narrow trail made by the swamp hen, he offered the following interpretation of its significance:

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<sup>4</sup> A species of black coot that inhabits wetland areas of the Southwest of W.A.

*...Yeah, well that's the trail of a swamp hen, ... that's the, like the traditional stuff of the Aboriginals. It's handed down, to each bird ... but they both start, they gotta go along and nip all the grass ... nip it, nip it, to leave the trail, so they know ... and this, as you see the bird we just took a photo of, he's carrying out that traditional style. Once he get on that road, he knows where he's heading to. How many birds came along there? Handing it down ... handing it down. They bring their little ones along there too, and let them know.*

**Finis**

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## APPENDIX 1

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. Evolving Conceptions of Aboriginality

Framed as an ethno-biography, this study has its roots in a long association between myself and the late Mr. Edward (Ned) Mippy, a notable Elder of the Yuat people of Western Australia. As a project, the thesis has unique features. It was not born simply of a desire to engage in biographical research. Rather, it arose as a consequence of my participation in Mr. Mippy's life and my sense of the importance of what he was able to accomplish. While most ethno-biographical accounts depend entirely on fieldwork, reports of interviews and life stories based on the biographee's personal memories, this thesis, although it certainly makes extensive use of such material, is above all a record of shared vision and personal collaboration between myself and the one whose life it represents. It was my close association with Mr. Mippy and his community during the last eight years of his life (1984-92) that both inspired and enabled me to make use of my carefully recorded experience as a means of re-affirming the cultural identity of his people. In the wake of this long relationship, I became convinced that there could be no understanding of Aboriginality within the wider Australian community that was not grounded in social interaction and interpretations of human experience. I came to see that, from the time of colonial intrusion, discourses of Indigenous cultural demise have arisen through academic and popular misconceptions about the nature and meaning of cultural identity. In opposition to such misconceptions, this thesis projects, through the lens of Mr. Mippy's life, a new image of the Yuat people as a continuing social entity.

Nineteenth century conceptions of Aboriginality can be found in the works of many colonial authors. Queensland explorer Carl Lumholtz (1889) is cited as one example of widespread beliefs about the imminent social and cultural disappearance of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Such perceptions, based on objectivist criteria, flowed through into the twentieth century. Some authors, like anthropologists R.M. & C.H. Berndt (1977), produced definitions of Aboriginality that were directly related to their own outsiders' notions of authentic traditional life and knowledge. Others wrote of the decline or disappearance of Aboriginal societies, either as a result of what they saw as cultural and racial degeneration (Bates 1907, 1913, 1914, 1944) or through miscegenation and loss of country and language (Berndt 1977). It was the widespread acceptance of such views that led writers like Elkin (1938), Hasluck (1942) and Rowley (1972) to see the future of Aboriginal people solely in terms of assimilation, integration or institutional organisation.

The cited works of Berndt and Bates are singled out by this thesis, not only for their narrow and objectivist concept of Aboriginality in general but for their denial of the continuing existence of the Yuat, one of a number of regional social entities included by Bates (1985), Tindale (1940), Douglas (1976) and others as part of the Nyoongar society of the Southwest of Western Australia.

Two enlightened studies indicated a way forward. These were the perspectives of Baines (1987), who argues for the survival of a distinct and vital culture in present-day Nyoongar communities and the study of Birdsall (1990), which seeks to show that relationships in an individual's childhood are a means of systematically generating and maintaining individual identity. Grounded in oral histories and through fieldwork which was conducted at close quarters and over several years, my chosen research path would pursue similar interpretations of human experience. Most importantly, it would question the assertions of those academics and popular authors who denied the existence of the Yuat people as a contemporary society .

Setting aside theoretical and objectivist preconceptions was a first step in understanding an existential Yuat identity. It allowed the thesis to articulate with recent authors who represent culture as a dynamic and creative reality. The discourse of continuing Indigenous identities has grown considerably over the last 20 years. Writing in vol 25 of the journal *Aboriginal History* (2002), Keen refers to papers by Grey, Egloff, Foster and Weiner, reproduced in volume 24 (2001) of the same journal, which point to the collaboration among archaeologists, anthropologists and historians in relation to Aboriginality in southeastern Australia. Three further papers, by Macdonald, Wood and Hagan, appear in volume 25 (*Aboriginal History* 2002). The first of these latter authors, Gaynor Macdonald, questions earlier views such as those of Cowlshaw (1988) and Morris (1989) who represent contemporary Aboriginal cultural domains as little more than a product of racism and colonial resistance. Although Cowlshaw (1988: 92) does define such culture somewhat negatively she also admits to the role in cultural construction of “subtle and pervasive understandings” that derive from past tradition. Macdonald, however, rejects inferences of “cultural loss” and “deprivation” in relation to these contemporary communities. She appeals to the theories of Linnekin (1992) and others in support of the view that culture is not static but dynamic, manifesting creative capacities for change and adaptation. From this perspective, the present is no different from the past – only the context (and so the content) has changed.

#### B. Some Indigenous Studies on Cultural Identity

A discourse of Aboriginality would lack credibility without the considerable Indigenous contribution that has been made to the debate over the last twenty years, both at an academic and popular level. Nyoongar Elder, Ken Colbung (1979), in affirming his own Aboriginal identity, is an early proponent of the concept of continuing cultural awareness. Important contributions in this field

are also seen in the various plays written by Davis, such as *Kullark* (1982) and *No Sugar* (1986). A personal quest for identity and her “place” in society as an Aboriginal person is documented by Sally Morgan in her autobiography (1987), while another of her books, *Wanamurraganya* (1989), tells the story of Jack McPhee, a man from the Pilbara “fighting with being black and white.” In his “Wentworth Lecture” (1994), Mick Dodson makes an impassioned plea for a new appraisal of Aboriginality. Making a case for the rejection of essentialist definitions of Aboriginality, he appeals to the Cobo report which was submitted in 1983 to the United Nations Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

Bennell and Collard (1991) contribute an affirmation of Nyoongar culture and heritage with their word lists and several “Dreaming” stories. The life history of Alice Nannup (1992), an associate of young Edward Mippy at the Moore River Settlement, also makes a significant personal statement of Aboriginality. Of the greatest importance in establishing Mr. Mippy’s social context is one of his close associates, Yuat author June Headland, whose *Aborigines of Moora* (1995) offers an understanding of Yuat demography and identity. Winmar (1996), another Mippy contemporary, presents valuable cultural material and a study of the linguistic usage of the Balardong, whose territory borders that of the Yuat. More recently, Rosemary van den Berg (2002) focuses on the Nyoongar people in general and their continuing fight for equality and cultural recognition.

These published perspectives of identity, from a range of authors Indigenous and otherwise, serve the thesis by helping to set Mr. Mippy’s convictions of Aboriginality within a broader context, enabling them to be understood, not simply as the vision of one individual but as part of a general resurgence within the wider discourse of Indigenous identity.

### C. Studies in Ethno-biographical theory

Extensive reading in the areas of ethnography and biography finally led me to adopt a combination of those disciplines, under the heading of ethnographic biography (ethno-biography), as the methodology best suited for revealing Mr. Mippy and through him, the cultural world in which he lived.

In establishing the principles of biographical research, the following authors were consulted. Lincoln & Denzin (2000) threw light on the place of authors in their biographical texts as they engage in dialogue with those studied. As to the various forms of life story, the interpretive approach to social texts and the use of new narrative styles of writing, Norman Denzin (1989a, 1989b, 1997) summarised a wide range of possibilities. As explained in chapter one, life histories and stories have been organised in one of two broad categories. First, there is the objective format. This includes the classic, objective, natural history approach (associated with the Chicago School) and the objective hermeneutics position of the “new” school of German life history researchers. The classic approach pits the sociologist against the subject and turns the latter into an object of study. Major exponents of this stance are Shaw (1930/1966) and Burgess ((1930/1966). The “new” life history approach is summarised by Helling (1984, 1987, 1988) and Reimann and Schutze (1987). Its intent is to bring the classic life history approach into line with recent developments in ethnomethodology, sociolinguistics and narrative analysis, joining biographical experiences with sequences of objectively determined social-structural processes. The second category is the interpretive approach, advocated by Lewis (1970), Sloan (1987) Plummer (1983), Sartre (1971/1981) and Denzin (1989b). Because these authors reject norms of evaluation based on validity, reliability, truth, etc. and because they work from the subject’s point of view, I found their mode of proceeding suitable to the particularity of my biographical objectives. As already noted, Berndt’s use of “authentic” was clearly an objectivist and outsiders’ imposition on Aboriginal people. This interpretive biographical format, therefore, well elaborated by Denzin, is the one adopted for this study.

The following authors were invaluable in giving an ethnographic dimension to the genre of biography, enabling me to position Mr. Mippy's life story as a biographical vehicle for an imaginative understanding of the Indigenous community in which he lived and operated. The work of Marcus & Fischer (1986) was helpful in examining the ideology of social progress and outlining new perspectives in ethno-biographical writing. These authors expand on the views of Malinowski (1922) especially the latter's insistence on the need for ethnographers to understand the Indigenous point of view. In favouring the imaginative "evocation" of the cultural subject by experiential interpretations, Tyler (1986) offered another perspective in the cause of ethnographic renewal. Of special importance in determining the shape of the thesis was Herzfeld's *Portrait* (1997), which offered a concrete application of the dual genre of ethnographic biography. His work extends the theory of the "universal singular," enunciated by Sartre (1981) and further elaborated by Denzin (1997, 1989), which defines every human individual as one who both creates and is created by the epoch in which he or she lives.

The foregoing literature helped in establishing the methodology of the thesis as an exercise in ethnographic biography, whose stated objective is to evoke an imaginative understanding of a 20th. Century Aboriginal community as seen through the lens of one of its notable elders.

#### D. Additional Works of Demography, Ethnography and History:

While records of fieldwork, interviews and other research data constitute the core material for this ethno-biographical study, the following books, articles and manuscripts contribute additional information on the demography, ethnography and history of the Nyoongar people. Of specific interest is the literature which bears witness to the self-awareness of the Yuat as a society.



Amongst the earliest accounts of the peoples of the Southwest are the journals and vocabulary of Grey (1840, 1841) and the diaries of Moore (1842, 1844). Another non-Indigenous author, Hammond (1933), bears witness to the early social distribution, kinship and customs of the Nyoongar. Of prime importance to the thesis was the work of Salvado (1851/1977) which, besides being central to an understanding of the Yuat as an identifiable society within the overall Nyoongar community, is the only literary resource specifically devoted to the Indigenous people of the Victoria Plains. Flood's publication (1908) was important in giving an account of 19th. and early 20th. century New Norcia and its people. The perspectives of Hasluck (1942) were also useful in relation to aspects of New Norcia's missionary history, while an account of the New Norcia mission and its inhabitants was available through the unpublished researches of three Benedictine monks, Romans Rios (1924), William Gimenes (1958) and Eugene Perez (1968). The historical accounts of Erickson (1971) and Russo (1980) provided information in the same area. The genealogical survey of Green & Tilbrook (1989) helped to fill in the lines of descent of many Yuat families.

Non-Indigenous views of the history and development of the government settlements at Carrolup and Moore River, provided by authors such as Biskup (1973), Haebich (1988), and Maushart (1993), were called upon to supplement Mr. Mippy's accounts. Perhaps more important in this respect were the Indigenous authors. Nannup (1992), for example, gave a unique "insider's" view of the Moore River Settlement where she was associated with young Edward Mippy in the Settlement store. Drayton (1993), on the other hand, offered a more personal perception of the life of an inmate in New Norcia's institutions. The thesis drew upon Yuat author Headland (1995) to give a demographic and historical assessment of her regional community and of Mr. Mippy's life in particular, while Laurie (1995) supplemented this with a non-Indigenous perspective of the history of Moora and the Midlands district.

All the works considered here were of value in broadening the biographical horizon and in helping to situate Mr. Mippy's life in a wider social and historical context.

#### E. Nyoongar language sources:

Neither a formal study of the Nyoongar language nor of its several former dialects lies within the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, because Mr. Mippy's use of his Indigenous tongue is essential to his life story, reference should be made in this review to the available sources of Nyoongar linguistic knowledge. Amongst the more important of the early nineteenth century, non-Indigenous works which examine the language of the Nyoongar people are those of Nind (1831), Lyon (1833), Collie (1834) and Armstrong (reproduced in Symmons 1841), as well as Moore's *Vocabulary* (1842) and *Diary* (1884). Grey compiled an extensive *Vocabulary* (1840), followed by that of Stokes (1846). Von Brandenstein (1986) and Bindon & Chadwick (1992) mention a number of late 19th. century works, including unpublished manuscripts, some undated, by S. Isaacs, Ednie Hassell, A.A. Hassell (1894), and D. Buller-Murphy. Amongst other works quoted by Brendon & Chadwick are a wordlist by Curr (1886), an edited work of Ethel Hassell (ed.1936) and another by P. Coyne (1980). After the turn of the century, language material was compiled by Rae (1913) and Bates (1907, 1913, 1914, 1944). More recent studies include those of Davis (1969), Douglas (1976, 1982), von Brandenstein (1986) and Mippy and Rooney (1992).

Indigenous works include the vocabulary of Tom Bennell, recorded by Collard (Bennell & Collard 1991), while a Nyoongar dictionary by Whitehurst (1992) has been published to accompany Wooltorton's Southwest language course (1992). The published wordlist of Winmar (1996) is an important witness to the language of the Balardong whose territory adjoins that of the Yuat.

## F. Handbooks of Community-based Action Research

Chapter four of the thesis describes the self-employment project set up in Moora in 1988 by Mr. Mippy in association with myself. This project was not undertaken as an exercise in what is now often referred to as Action Research and for which numerous handbooks, such as Marshall & Rossman (1995) and Stringer (1996), have since become available. The value of formal action research projects, as outlined by these authors, is to engage a community's human and material resources in order to work towards solutions to their common problems. They pursue processes "that are rigorously empirical and reflective (or interpretive); engage people who have traditionally been called 'subjects' as active participants in the research process; and result in some practical outcomes related to the lives or work of the participants" (Stringer 1996: xvi). However, although it shares similar goals and is interesting by way of comparison, the sort of informal research and community development described in this thesis is not tied to the discourse of development in the social sciences.

\* \* \*

The works reviewed in this appendix, published or otherwise, have all contributed to establishing the social, historical and theoretical background against which the voices of Mr. Mippy and his friends may be heard and understood. But central to the study are the voices themselves, emerging through the wide variety of cited interviews, personal memories, commentaries and media reports which are provided in this thesis as the subject matter indispensable for any biography.

## APPENDIX 2

### THE VOCABULARY OF THE LATE EDWARD MIPPY

In this word list, the method of spelling is according to the Nyoongar orthography chosen for this thesis. The initial letter of each Nyoongar word is in upper case. A lengthened vowel is expressed in bold type. Words are listed under the following headings or categories which are common to English grammar:

Nouns

Adjectives

Verbs

Adverbs

Particles, negative & affirmative

Pronouns

Interjections

Interrogatives

#### *NOUNS*

<i>Bardi</i>	bardigrub
<i>Bibi</i>	milk
<i>Bidjara</i>	earth, on the

<i>Binyari</i>	fight
<i>Biri</i>	claw, nails
<i>Boya</i>	money; rock, stone
<i>Boya bridiya</i>	rich person
<i>Bridiya</i>	boss, chief, elder, expert
<i>Boodjara</i>	land, sandy
<i>Bwoka</i>	clothing, dress
<i>Bwoka maya</i>	clothing shop
<i>Daap</i>	knife
<i>Dadja maya</i>	butcher shop
<i>Djanak</i>	devil
<i>Djanak</i>	spirit, evil
<i>Djangara</i>	wild fellow(s)
<i>Djena bwoka</i>	boots, shoes
<i>Djenakabi</i>	featherfoot
<i>Djerang</i>	butter, fat
<i>Djon</i>	dinner, meal
<i>Djookan</i>	sister
<i>Djoolip</i>	loincloth
<i>Dwongk menditj</i>	earache
<i>Dadja</i>	meat
<i>Kaal boorna</i>	firewood
<i>Kaali</i>	boomerang
<i>Kaalil</i>	ant, sergeant
<i>Kadi-kadi</i>	motor car
<i>Kadi-kadi maya</i>	garage
<i>Kaalip</i>	countryman
<i>Keba</i>	drink, alcoholic
<i>Kep</i>	water, rain

<i>Kidji</i>	spear
<i>Kongk</i>	uncle
<i>Kotj</i>	axe
<i>Koobadja</i>	baby
<i>Kool</i>	flea, lice
<i>Koolangka</i>	children
<i>Kooly</i>	discharge
<i>Koomboo</i>	urine, urinate
<i>Koona</i>	excrement
<i>Koondi</i>	club
<i>Koort, Koorda</i>	friend, mate
<i>Kwana waangkiny</i>	fart
<i>Mabarn</i>	doctor
<i>Maman</i>	Creator, father, God
<i>Mandjang</i>	foolish man
<i>Mangk</i>	leaf, tea-leaf, tea
<i>Mangka warla</i>	hat
<i>Maramberi</i>	bread
<i>Maramberi maya</i>	bakery
<i>Marany</i>	food (non meat)
<i>Marany maya</i>	grocer shop
<i>Mardangkoo</i>	lover, sweetheart
<i>Maya</i>	shop
<i>Maya-maya</i>	house, hut
<i>Mena</i>	gum (wattle)
<i>Mili-mili</i>	paper
<i>Minga</i>	ant (gen.)
<i>Miro</i>	spear thrower
<i>Moolyarak</i>	mucous, nasal

<i>Moony</i>	copulation
<i>Moort, Moordman</i>	relation(s), family
<i>Manatj maya</i>	jail
<i>Ngabri</i>	brother(s)
<i>Ngangkoo</i>	beard
<i>Ngooldjar</i>	brother-in-law
<i>Ngoonyang</i>	sugar
<i>Ngoortha</i>	lie, untruth
<i>Nirnt</i>	tail
<i>Noorook</i>	egg
<i>Nyamari</i>	cigarette, tobacco
<i>Nyoongar (Nyoongara)</i>	Aboriginal man (men)
<i>Wadjala</i>	white person
<i>Wana</i>	digging stick
<i>Wangkayi</i>	tribe (eastern)
<i>Wilara</i>	moon
<i>Wilki</i>	clay, white ochre
<i>Woodadji</i>	devil men
<i>Yakaly</i>	punch (n.), blow
<i>Yamadji</i>	tribe (northern)
<i>Yoka</i>	girl, woman
<i>Yuat Nyoongara</i>	regional clan name, Moora

### Birds

<i>Dangkarak</i>	wattle bird
<i>Djidi-djidi</i>	willy wagtail
<i>Djirli</i>	mudlark

<i>Djoonyat</i>	parrot, "28"
<i>Kambikoora</i>	owl, frog-faced
<i>Koolbardi</i>	magpie
<i>Manatj</i>	cockatoo, white
<i>Ngaw</i>	mallee hen
<i>Ngoorlak</i>	cockatoo, black/ white
<i>Walitj</i>	eagle, wedge tail
<i>Wardang</i>	crow
<i>Wetj</i>	emu
<i>Wilo</i>	curlew

Body, parts of

-	
<i>Bibi</i>	breast (f.)
<i>Bily</i>	navel
<i>Biri</i>	nails
<i>Bonitj</i>	knee
<i>Bookal, Bookoo</i>	back, bottom
<i>Daa</i>	mouth
<i>Daalang</i>	tongue
<i>Derda</i>	genitalia f.
<i>Djena</i>	foot, feet
<i>Djowiny</i>	hair (gen.)
<i>Dwongk, Dwonga</i>	ear(s)
<i>Kaat</i>	head
<i>Kobool</i>	stomach
<i>Koordada</i>	heart
<i>Kwan</i>	anus
<i>Kwilk</i>	hip



<i>Maap</i>	skin
<i>Maat, Mada</i>	leg(s)
<i>Mara</i>	hand
<i>Merda</i>	genitalia (penis)
<i>Miyal</i>	eye
<i>Monda</i>	hair, pubic
<i>Moolya</i>	nose
<i>Ngaaly</i>	underarm
<i>Ngangkoo</i>	beard
<i>Ngorlak</i>	tooth, teeth
<i>Woolitj</i>	calf
<i>Yaatj</i>	femur
<i>Yotj</i>	testicles

### Fauna

<i>Bikadoo</i>	kangaroo, sp.
<i>Dilit</i>	blue tongue (species?)
<i>Djoodiny</i>	joey
<i>Dwoort</i>	dog
<i>Kalari</i>	long tailed goanna ( <i>Varanus rosenbergi</i> )
<i>Karda, Kardiya</i>	"racehorse" goanna ( <i>Varanus gouldii</i> )
<i>Kookandjeri</i>	sheep
<i>Koomal</i>	possum
<i>Kooya</i>	frog (gen.)
<i>Kwera</i>	wallaby, brush
<i>Makarang</i>	pig
<i>Maloo</i>	kangaroo, sp.
<i>Ngoort</i>	horse (f.)

<i>Norn</i>	snake (gen.)
<i>Nyingarn</i>	ant eater
<i>Wakal</i>	carpet python ( <i>Morelia spilota</i> ); rainbow serpent
<i>Yakany</i>	tortoise, long necked
<i>Yawarda</i>	horse (m.)
<i>Yongka</i>	kangaroo, grey sp. (gen.)
<i>Yorna</i>	bobtail goanna ( <i>Tiliqua rugosa</i> )
<i>Yorndan, Yorndi</i>	black goanna ( <i>Varanus tristis</i> )

### Flora

<i>Balka</i>	grasstree ( <i>Xanthorrhoea Preissii</i> ); flower stems edible; useful gum, wood.
<i>Born, Borna</i>	onion, white native ( <i>Haemodorum</i> sp.): bulb edible, raw or cooked.
<i>Boyoo</i>	palm, <i>Zamia</i> ( <i>Macrozamia Riedlei</i> ): red nuts, edible when treated & cooked.
<i>Boorna</i>	tree (gen.)
<i>Djirp</i>	native grass (gen.)
<i>Djoobak</i>	potato, little kidney ( <i>Platysace Effusa</i> ): edible tuber.
<i>Kano</i>	round tuber ( <i>Platysace Maxwellii</i> ): edible, raw only.
<i>Kardan, Mari</i>	redgum ( <i>Eucalyptus Calophylla</i> ); not named by NM: medicinal gum, edible seeds.
<i>Kwandong</i>	quondong ( <i>Santalum Acuminatum</i> ): edible red fruit.

<i>Kwardany</i>	blood root ( <i>Haemodorum</i> ): bulb, edible when cooked.
<i>Mangart</i>	acacia ( <i>Acacia Acuminata</i> ); jam or "raspberry jam" tree: edible gum, useful wood.
<i>Mangkatj</i>	banksia ( <i>Proteaceae</i> ); flowers and buds are edible.
<i>Mena</i>	acacia ( <i>Acacia Microbotrya</i> ); "menna gum tree" or "black barked wattle": gum & seeds edible.
<i>Yandjet</i>	reed, filamentous ( <i>Typha Domingensis</i> ); bullrush: edible white stem.
<i>Yornaberi</i>	berry bush, spiky ( <i>Astrolama Xerophyllum</i> ); "white beard": green berries, edible.

#### ADJECTIVES

<i>Badja</i>	furious, wild
<i>Dabakan</i>	gently, quietly, slowly
<i>Daraboort</i>	dumb
<i>Djip-djip</i>	itchy?
<i>Djooroopiny</i>	happy
<i>Dwongaboort</i>	deaf
<i>Kaarang</i>	angry
<i>Kaat moorditj</i>	clever
<i>Kaat wara</i>	mad

<i>Kanan, Kanandjil</i>	true, very true
<i>Kobool wirt</i>	hungry
<i>Koodji</i>	bony, skinny
<i>Koodji</i>	thin, skinny
<i>Koolyi</i>	deceitful, no good, incompetent
<i>Koombar</i>	big
<i>Koorndany</i>	ashamed
<i>Koothara (Koodjal)</i>	two
<i>Kwoba</i>	good
<i>Kwobadjil</i>	best
<i>Maat dily</i>	dirty
<i>Maat wara</i>	lame
<i>Mada wilo</i>	skinny legged
<i>Mendatj (Menditj)</i>	sick
<i>Miyalboort</i>	blind
<i>Mookiny</i>	like, similar to
<i>Moolya yira</i>	proud
<i>Moorditj</i>	strong, excellent
<i>Nalaboort</i>	lazy
<i>Ngabat</i>	greedy
<i>Ngarlangkoo</i>	taboo
<i>Nidja</i>	this
<i>Noyitj</i>	dead
<i>Nyidiny</i>	cold
<i>Wara</i>	bad
<i>Wayan-wayan</i>	afraid
<i>Winyan</i>	weak, pitiable
<i>Woonatj, Wirnatj</i>	bad magic

## VERBS

<i>Baaminy</i>	attacking, hitting
<i>Barang-iny</i>	take(ing), hold(ing)
<i>Bidjara ngoorndil (ngoorndiny)</i>	sleep(ing)
<i>Boya wabiny</i>	gambling
<i>Boolyaka</i>	go, gone
<i>Djinang-iny</i>	look(ing), see(ing)
<i>Kadak</i>	have, have in mind
<i>Kaditj, Kadidjiny</i>	hear, listen, think, know, understand
<i>Koomboo-iny</i>	urinate(ing)
<i>Kooniny</i>	defecating
<i>Koorl-iny</i>	go(ing)
<i>Mardang-iny</i>	love, to be in
<i>Minya berniny</i>	smell(ing)
<i>Moony-iny</i>	to perform sex
<i>Moorik-iny</i>	kill(ing) by sorcery, murder
<i>Nakamoo-winy</i>	look(ing) at
<i>Nganiny</i>	eating, drinking
<i>Ngoortha waangki-ny</i>	tell(ing) lies
<i>Ninyan-iny</i>	kiss(ing)
<i>Nyin-iny</i>	sit(ing)
<i>Waangki-ny</i>	talk(ing)
<i>Wara waangki-ny</i>	swear(ing)
<i>Wayan-iny</i>	being afraid
<i>Wot koorl-iny</i>	go(ing) away

<i>Yaakiny</i>	standing, being
<i>Yira koorl-iny</i>	go(ing) up
<i>Yoongama</i>	give me(imp.)

*ADVERBS*

<i>-boort,</i>	-less, not (neg. adv. suff.)
<i>-djil</i>	very (comparative adv. suff.)
<i>Bokadja</i>	afar, far away, over there
<i>Boorda</i>	soon, afterwards, later,
<i>Kwodjat</i>	already
<i>Nidja</i>	here
<i>Yira</i>	above, up

*AFFIRMATIVE & NEGATIVE PARTICLES*

<i>Kaya</i>	yes
<i>Yoowat</i>	no

*PRONOUNS*

<i>Baal</i>	he, she, it (s.)
<i>Ngadja</i>	I
<i>Ngany</i>	my, mine
<i>Noonda</i>	you (s. & pl.)

*INTERJECTIONS*

<i>Ana!</i>	ah!, fancy that!, etc.
<i>B'rnt dily!</i>	crack!, splash!
<i>Balayi, Baliwa!</i>	beware!, look out!
<i>Ni!</i>	listen!, attention!
<i>Nyiin!</i>	only joking!
<i>Nyon!</i>	pity!, sorry!
<i>Yakayi!</i>	Hooray!

*INTERROGATIVES*

<i>Ana?</i>	is that so?, isn't that so? etc.
<i>Naatj?</i>	what?, which?
<i>Windja?</i>	whither?
<i>Windji?</i>	where?
<i>Yaan?</i>	how? what? how are you? etc.

### APPENDIX 3

The following list represents the more noteworthy achievements, commitments and activities of the late Edward Mippy between the years 1959 to 1990. It was publicly read on the occasion of his reception of the "Advance Australia Award" from the then State Governor, Sir Francis Burt, at Government House, Western Australia, in 1991. The document is reproduced hereunder, as follows: <sup>1</sup>

- 1959: Co-ordinator of New Norcia Football team with Fr. Basil Noseda
- 1959-64: New Norcia Club delegate to Football League meetings
- 1961-64: Central Midlands National Football League selector
- 1960-90: Served on numerous committees on Aboriginal issues
- 1973: Committee of Native Welfare Advancement Council
- 1974-76: Committee of Wanderers Sporting Club
- 1974-78: Joint Co-ordinator of Wanderers Football Team
- 1974-79: Carnival visits with Wanderers team to Geraldton, Meekatharra, Northam, Medina, Quairading, Brookton, Forrestfield, Redcliffe, Kellerberrin and Bunbury
- 1974-79: Vice President, Central Midlands Aboriginal Progress Ass.
- 1988: Presented with Achievement Certificate by Central

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of this document, made available by Diana Brassington of Moora, is held in the New Norcia Archives.



Midlands National Football League

- 1989: Presented with Honour Award by Aboriginal Week Expo
- 1990: Member of Tourist Committee at Mogumber

YUAT GROUP:

In association with Fr. Bernard Rooney, Ned has been of great assistance in regenerating the Nyoongar language and culture not only in Moora, but in other parts of the State. His uncanny ability to pass on information to Fr. Rooney has made them a formidable team. A list of their work together appears hereunder:

- 1984: Taught Nyoongar Language at St. Joseph's School
- 1984: Taught Nyoongar Dance to Aboriginal Youth
- 1988: Consulted with SECWA on Bennett Brook dispute
- 1989: Toured North-west with dance troupe
- 1990-91: Toured North-west with young offenders
- 1988: Involved with Nyoongar Language Conference in Bunbury
- 1989-92: Classes at C.M.S.H.S. and T.A.F.E. on Aboriginal Culture
- 1989: Represented Moora at Aboriginal Studies Conference
- 1990: Involved with production of Yuat Artefacts
- 1990: Advised on the Swan Brewery site (*Wakal* issue)
- 1990: Involved in media coverage of the handing over of the old Mogumber Mission to the Wheatbelt Aboriginal Corporation

1983-90: Tireless worker in schools in the Moora district in the promotion of Aboriginal culture (bush tucker, dance etc.)