

Skye Krichauff, *Nharangga wargunni bugi-buggillu: A Journey through Narungga History* (Wakefield Press, 2011)

As anyone familiar with the archives in relation to Indigenous records would know, there is invariably a vast amount of paperwork to sift through, almost always written from the perspective of the non-Indigenous regulators of Indigenous lives, such as the 'Protector' of Aborigines and the police. Much of it is administrative detail offering little insight into the nature of the relationships between the two cultures. Drawing out an objective and more balanced history from such documents requires a depth of research and a level of detective work well beyond the norm and well beyond what was required for the thesis on which this book was based, namely Krichauff's Masters thesis, completed in 2008 through the History Department of the University of Adelaide.

Krichauff has drawn on an extensive range of sources in the pursuit of her quest, including the 1802 logbook of Matthew Flinders, government correspondence, and the observations of anthropologists, linguists, archaeologists and geographers.

What I like most about her approach, however, is Krichauff's use of oral evidence to substantiate and corroborate the written accounts. We oral historians have of course long beaten our own drum in advocating the value of oral sources, and the consensus has been for quite some time now that orality has just as much validity as literature. Nevertheless, the use of oral evidence outside of the field of oral history, and particularly in the historical realm where paper has been preferred for so long, is still rare. Krichauff has not only used recorded oral histories from the 1960s, but also those of contemporary Narungga people. As an historian, she is therefore not only adventurous in this regard, she demonstrates just how much the oral record can add to a picture of the past. In this instance, it has elicited evidence to support the notion that Indigenous people actively engaged with their colonisers in ways that significantly affected relations between the two groups. As Professor Bill Gammage (cited on the jacket cover) notes, 'it is hard to find work demonstrating this so effectively' as does this book.

The changing nature of Narungga/settler relations is analytically fleshed out from the archival materials with great skill and depth to show how Narungga peoples responded strategically and with pragmatism to the pressures of a rapidly changing physical and cultural landscape. The success of their methods is demonstrated by the existence of a strong Narungga community today, members of which worked alongside Krichauff in the production of this work.

Krichauff personalises the neglected history of the Narungga people by being sure to use their names wherever possible. However, there are some issues that leave me asking questions. For example, I would have liked to have known what the Narungga title of the book, formulated by Narungga language teacher Tania Wanganeen (xi), means. Is the sub-title, *A Journey through Narungga History*, a translation of this, or does it have a different meaning? Perhaps it is something for Narungga people only?

Additionally, the way the term 'Narungga' is used is unusual and unexplained. Throughout the text, Krichauff talks of 'Narungga' instead of 'the Narungga', or

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‘Narungga people’, or ‘Narungga peoples’, all of which are more common terminology. Perhaps this was an attempt to be more inclusive of the range of different Narungga groups? Or, again, did Narungga advisors direct this change of convention, and if so, why? It is my firm opinion that historical writing needs to be transparent about the processes involved if the discourse is to be really educative. This particularly applies to cross-cultural collaborative ventures which inevitably involve political exchanges that can give rise to a skewed historical record – the supposed anathema of historians¹.

I am also not comfortable with perpetuating the unqualified use of the terms ‘King’ and ‘Queen’ when applied to Aboriginal individuals (165). While it is easy to fall into the trap of imitating the language of the era that you are studying, it is generally recognised that these terms were in the past used for Aboriginal men and women who colonisers deemed to be leaders in their groups (or who served other purposes beneficial to the colonisers). This is entirely in line with western constructions of the social system that ascribe echelons of gendered caste. However, the ethnographic record shows that prior to invasion, Indigenous social structures were quite different; indeed some were seen to be ‘a truly classless society and had reached the apogee as far as refined egalitarian socialism is concerned,’² which negates the imposed ideology. In addition, such terms appended to western-imposed patriarchal names for Aboriginal people, such as ‘Tommy’ (165), are also patronising and derogatory, and therefore can be argued to add insult to injury.

Despite these minor issues, I believe this book is a wonderful addition to the South Australian Indigenous record. It provides a picture of Narungga peoples’ adaptation to, resistance against and survival of, the forces of colonisation. It acknowledges their intelligence, agency and dignity and offers a resource that can promote reconciliation. A published work of this kind is also a rare achievement for a postgraduate student, so I doubly congratulate Krichauff.

Sue Anderson

¹ Sue Anderson, ‘Out of the Shadow of Shame: Indigenous Auto/biography and Authorial Recognition’, Unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Australian Studies, Faculty of Education Humanities Theology and Law, Flinders University, 2009.

² Graham Jenkin, *Conquest of the Ngarrindjeri: The Story of the Lower Murray Lakes Tribes*, 2nd ed. (Point McLeay SA: Raukkan Press, 1985).

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