



# INDEPENDENT SCHOLARS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA Inc

## NSW Chapter Bulletin 101 March 2021

<http://www.isaa.org.au>

ISSN 2207-614X

Dear Members,

Your Committee is still meeting via Zoom due to the lack of availability of free meeting rooms at the SL NSW. In February we held the first of our series of three *Doing Research* meetings when Christine Yeats spoke on the 'Australian Joint Copying Project' via Zoom. Christine also provided a substantial set of notes on her talk which have been much appreciated by members. The second will take place on 21 April when Prof Grace Karskens will speak about researching the *The Sacred River*. The third is planned for 31 August when Alana Piper will speak on *Crowdsourcing knowledge*. In May we will be holding our first open Forum for the year when Shirley Randell and Hilary Yerbury will speak on their book on *Gender and learning in Rwanda*. All our Zoom talks are available to all ISAA members throughout Australia.

If you have any contributions for the next *Bulletin*, such as scholarly book notes, notes on exhibitions, films or plays, please send them to me by **18 May** at [cjennett@ozemail.com.au](mailto:cjennett@ozemail.com.au).

**Christine Jennett, *Bulletin* Editor**

### DOING RESEARCH: MEETING 2

Wednesday 21 April 2021 2 pm

**Topic: *The real Sacred River: truth-telling and the power of regional histories***

In 2017 human rights lawyer Professor Megan Davis called for a nationwide program of truth-telling through local and regional Aboriginal histories as an essential step towards Makarrata. These histories must acknowledge dispossession, frontier conflict and massacres, but Davis envisages more: deeper, fuller histories involving Aboriginal people themselves; histories that are alive to cultural and spiritual continuities, strategic negotiations, family and community, and the recovery and recognition of significant Aboriginal places and landscapes.

#### NSW Chapter ISAA Executive members

Chair: Lesley Potter

Vice-Chair: Shirley Randell AO

Secretary: Christine Jennett  
(Convenor Work-in-Progress  
Committee; Public Affairs  
Reading Group)

Treasurer: Rodney Nilsen

Immediate Past Chair:  
Christine Yeats (Seminar  
Convenor 2020)

Committee Members:

Grahame Budd AM

Susan Steggall

Hilary Yerbury

Brian Nicholls

Library Liaison:

Gretchen Poiner

Public Events Committee:

Lesley Potter, Christine Jennett,  
David Carment AM, Shirley  
Randell AO, Christine Yeats

Regional Representatives:

John Ramsland

Robin McLachlan

#### **Dates for your Diary**

21 Apr: Doing Research: 2

27 Apr: Public Affairs  
Reading Group

19 May: Open Forum 1

20 May: ISAA NSW AGM

22 June: Public Affairs Reading  
Group

31 Aug: Doing Research 3

18 Sep: Annual Seminar

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### DOING RESEARCH: MEETING 2

Wednesday 21 April 2021

**Topic: *The real Sacred River: truth-telling and the power of regional histories***

Meeting hosted by RAHS and ISAA NSW

In 2017 human rights lawyer Professor Megan Davis called for a nationwide program of truth-telling through local and regional Aboriginal histories as an essential step towards Makarrata. These histories must acknowledge dispossession, frontier conflict and massacres, but Davis envisages more: deeper, fuller histories involving Aboriginal people themselves; histories that are alive to cultural and spiritual continuities, strategic negotiations, family and community, and the recovery and recognition of significant Aboriginal places and landscapes.

How might such collaborative projects be established? How can traditional text-based research be revisited and reinterpreted for this kind of history? How can we use other records, like archaeological and art sites, maps and mapping, photographs, oral testimony, linguistics, ecology and landscapes and, most importantly, Traditional Knowledge?

Regional history is a powerful way to explore the implications, possibilities and challenges of truth-telling that includes but goes beyond frontier violence and massacre history. I will present some of the findings from a current collaborative project, *The Real Secret River: Dyarubbin*.

#### **About the Speaker:**

**Grace Karskens** is Professor of History at the University of New South Wales. She is a leading authority on early colonial Australia and also works in cross-cultural and environmental history.

Grace began her career as a public historian and has a lifelong commitment to bringing good history to wide audiences. She is an active contributor to several significant cultural organisations, including Sydney Living Museums, the State Library of New South Wales and the online *Dictionary of Sydney* project.

Grace's books include *Inside the Rocks: The Archaeology of a Neighbourhood* and the multi-award winning *The Rocks: Life in Early Sydney*. Her book *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* won the 2010 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Non-Fiction and the US Urban History Association's prize for Best Book 2010. Grace's essay 'Nah Doongh's Song' won *Australian Book Review's* 2019 Calibre prize, and her latest book, *People of the River: Lost Worlds of Early Australia*, was published by Allen & Unwin in 2020.



### OPEN FORUM 1

Wednesday 19 May 2021

**Topic: *Gender and Learning in Rwanda: Reflections on feminist epistemology and technocratic governance on empowerment of women***

In February 2011, nearly 50 students enrolled in the new Master's program in Gender, Culture and Development offered at the Kigali Institute of Education in Rwanda. In this ISAA Forum, we will consider how this innovative program of education used a feminist epistemology to underpin learning relevant to a time of significant social change in Rwanda, focussing on the empowerment of women. We will link the technocratic approach to governance found in policy development to the interests and learning outcomes of the first cohort of students. Challenges confronted in the development and offering of the program of education will be used to emphasise the significant achievements of the first graduates of the program. Vignettes drawn from the students' own stories will illustrate these achievements.

#### **About the Speakers:**

Professor Shirley Randell AO, PhD was the founding director of the Centre for Gender, Culture and Development at the Kigali Institute of Education in 2009. After over 20 years of senior policy and administrative work at Commonwealth, State and Local Government levels in Australia, she has provided specialist technical assistance to governments and agencies in Africa and the Asia Pacific Region over the last 20 years. She is a leading expert in

public sector and institutional reform, teacher education, gender mainstreaming and human rights in developing countries.

Dr Hilary Yerbury brings a diverse background in European social and political cultures, anthropology, librarianship and development studies to the important topic of the use of information in everyday decision-making and in social change. She has extensive experience in working globally with young people on development issues at both practical and policy levels and in 2011, spent time at the Centre for Gender, Culture and Development at the Kigali Institute of Education in Rwanda.

## **DOING RESEARCH: MEETING 3**

**Tuesday 31 August 2021**

**Topic: *Crowdsourcing Knowledge: Public Volunteers, Digitisation and Research Objectives***

Criminal Characters is a research project examining both who criminals actually were, and who they have been imagined to be, in order to deconstruct historical and contemporary understandings of ‘the criminal’ as a form of social identity. In particular, it aims to deepen public and academic understandings of the characteristics of historical offenders by using crowdsourcing to transcribe the detailed biographic and criminal career information held in Victoria’s prison registers from the 1850s to 1940s. This paper will use Criminal Characters as a case study for discussing the challenges and opportunities presented by engaging public volunteers to perform research tasks. It will question the degree that the terms ‘crowdsourcing’ and ‘citizen science’ can be considered interchangeable, and how research projects can be designed to incorporate crowdsourcing in ways that promote education and deeper understandings of both specific research and research culture in general within the community. The benefits of such collaborative processes and knowledge exchange for both researchers and volunteers will be explored.

**About the Speaker:** Dr Alana Piper is a Chancellor’s Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Australian Centre for Public History at UTS. Her research interests draw together the social and cultural history of crime with criminological, legal and digital humanities approaches. She has authored over 30 academic journal articles and book chapters, and is currently a CI on the ARC Discovery project 'Sex and the Australian Military, 1914-2020' (2021-2023) and the ARC LIEF project 'Time-Layered Cultural Map of Australia' (2019-2021).



## **REPORTS ON RECENT EVENTS**

**ISAA NSW — *Doing Research Series***

**‘Shedding light on the Australian Joint Copying Project’**

The Australian Joint Copying Project (AJCP) provides researchers with a single access point to records that would otherwise have to be accessed in person at multiple repositories across the United Kingdom or Ireland. The project was inaugurated in 1945 when the National Library of Australia (NLA) and the State Library of NSW signed an agreement to microfilm records in what is now The National Archives (UK) relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. The project was later expanded to include South East Asia and the Antarctic. Filming commenced in 1948 and ceased in 1993, with the last microfilm issued in 1997. All Australian State Libraries, the National Library of New Zealand and the National Archives of New Zealand participated in the project at various stages. From 1960 onwards the project was extended to include other records of Australasian interest in public and private institutions throughout Britain, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. The resulting microfilms form the Miscellaneous Series or M Series.

Beginning in 2017 the NLA began transforming the AJCP content from analogue (microfilm) to digital format through its AJCP Online Project. Today the 7.5 million records of original microfilm have been digitised and are available on Trove.

The key to making the best use of the AJCP material is to understand how the material is arranged and become familiar with the Handbooks. In summary, there are two sets of handbooks:

- The PRO series, which is organised according to provenance — the UK Government department that created and brought the records together.
- The M Series is organised alphabetically by the name of the institution or person whose papers have been copied.

In addition to converting the microfilms to digital format all of the handbooks and finding aids have been digitised and are searchable online. The PRO Series is described by 24 individual finding aids. The M Series is described by 511 individual finding aids, one for each group or collection of records filmed.

One of the achievements of the project team was the creation of a new gateway to the content. You can reach the gateway by moving your mouse over the ‘Using the Library’ heading at the top of the NLA homepage (<https://www.nla.gov.au/>). Select the link to the AJCP under ‘Research Tools and Resources’. This takes you to the new ‘Australian Joint Copying Project’ search page at: <https://www.nla.gov.au/content/australian-joint-copying-project>. You can now start your research.

If you would like a copy of the handout from the presentation about the AJCP on 4 February 2021 please contact Christine Yeats ([ciyeats@gmail.com](mailto:ciyeats@gmail.com)).

**Christine Yeats**



## BOOK NOTES

### *Comrades! Lives of Australian Communists*

editors Bob Broughton, Danny Blackman, Mike Donaldson, Carmel Shute and Beverley Symons

SEARCH Foundation and Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 2020

ISBN: 978-1-876300-0-5

*Comrades! Lives of Australian Communists* is a collection of biographies of 100 Australian Communists. It celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). On 30 October 1920 twenty-six ‘radical socialists gathered in a hall in Liverpool Street’ resolved to establish the CPA. The Party’s membership grew, reaching 20,000 by the end of WWII. In 1951 the Commonwealth Government attempted to ban the CPA, first by legislation – declared invalid by the High Court – and then by the referendum that was narrowly defeated. Membership numbers declined in the following decades, despite a brief upsurge of new members from the ‘anti-war, women’s and counter-cultural movements’ of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1991 a final CPA Congress voted for its dissolution.

The 100 biographies are set out in blocks of time, beginning with the 1920s and concluding with the 1960s and 1970s. The editors have included members from every state and territory within each decade and ‘from as many social movements as possible in which party members were active’. Each biography includes some references and suggestions for further reading. Most are illustrated.

*Comrades!* is the perfect ‘go to’ source for biographical information about those who were associated with the CPA. Many of the names will be familiar to readers – Adela Pankhurst Walsh, Rupert Lockwood, Jack and Judy Munday, Joe Owens – while the names of others may have faded from popular memory.

As Jon Piccini writes in his review of the book:

At its high point, the Communist Party of Australia united thousands of working-class militants in a struggle to transform the world around them. These everyday communists were brave, flawed, and sometimes heroic.

It was not only the ‘working-class militants’ who were drawn to the CPA. There were novelists, playwrights, artists, filmmakers, lawyers and of course Australia’s only Communist Member of Parliament – the activist, unionist, Rhodes Scholar and lawyer Fred Paterson. Paterson was the member for the QLD State seat of Bowen between 1944 and 1950. What linked them was their commitment for a world without war, without divisions of race and class, for a society based on cooperation and shared wealth.

The Appendix lists the additional biographies published on the SEARCH Foundation's website. More will be uploaded as they become available. There are useful indexes to subjects, names, places and organisations. Bertolt Brecht's poem (translated by Jack Mitchell) *In Praise of Communism* is a fitting conclusion to this important addition to Australia's political and social history.

## Christine Yeats



*Talkin' up to the white woman. Indigenous women and feminism*

**Aileen Moreton-Robinson**

University of Queensland Press 2000 (2020 edition)

ISBN: 978 0 7022 6310 1

*Talkin' up to the white woman. Indigenous women and feminism* was reprinted in 2020, twenty years after its publication, with the addition of an Anniversary Preface by the author. In this Preface Aileen Moreton-Robinson links the tragedy and upheaval of the current global pandemic – 'an invisible enemy that socially and physically isolates the living and the dead' – to the untimely early deaths of many Indigenous people through neglect, discrimination and misunderstanding.

This is a small book with a very powerful message for all Australians, in particular 'white feminists' who, for decades, have ignored their privileged position vis-à-vis race. I quote: 'White feminists have either positioned Indigenous women as anti-feminist or they attempt to include [us] by requiring [us] to assimilate white feminist thought'. Whiteness is normalised and 'imbued with power' and Aileen Morton-Robinson is highly critical of white feminists' belief that they 'think, feel and act like and for all women'.

What becomes clear in reading this book is that the subject positions of white feminists and Indigenous women 'speak out of different cultures, epistemologies, experiences, history and material conditions which separate our politics and analyses'. The writing is dense, theoretical and sharp. I hope I have taken its messages on board for further reflection – as an Australian located firmly within the 'subject position middle-class (highly educated) white woman'.

In re-publishing her book, Morton-Robinson hopes to fulfil her aim to: 'stimulate new ways of thinking about racial inter-subjective relations and contribute to the development of understanding, respect and appreciation of each other in the struggle for racial justice and Indigenous rights'.

The book has garnered considerable controversy and some misunderstanding vis-à-vis Moreton-Robinson's meanings and motives but the fact that between 2000 and 2020 it has been reprinted around eleven times attests to the authority and importance of its message.

## Susan Steggall



## FILM NOTES

*High Ground*

Released by High Ground Pictures (Madman Films), 28 January 2021

*High Ground*, an Australian movie directed by Stephen Maxwell Johnson after two decades of preparation, is 108 minutes long and engaged my attention from the opening scene to the last. It is an extraordinary attempt at truth-telling about Australia's Frontier Wars – spanning nearly 150 years of violent conflicts between white settlers and Indigenous Australians. Cultural advisers from Indigenous clans were closely consulted to confirm the shocking brutality endured by Aboriginal people in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Northern Territory scenery is amazing with wild sweeping Kakadu landscapes emphasizing the ancestral lands. And the characters include a new actor, Jacob Junior Nayinggul, the young man Gutjuk, someone we should see much of in the future. Simon Baker plays Travis, the white man protagonist and the story revolves around their relationship. The warrior woman played by Esmerelda Marimowa also impresses.

Gutjuk is only a boy in the gently opening scenes where he is being taught traditional customs by his uncle, Baywarra (Sean Mununggur). A police operation led by Travis to capture Gutjuk's uncle, meant to be bloodless, is sabotaged by other white men who slaughter the families living peacefully in their camp by a waterhole. The uncle escapes and Gutjuk survives after seeing his whole family including his mother brutally massacred. Travis, disillusioned by the failure of the venture abandons the police force, and Gutjuk is raised by local missionaries.

In the intervening 12 years Gutjuk's uncle has gathered a group of men as a gang – The Wild Mob – who have been destroying white settlers' property. Gutjuk and Travis begin a shaky relationship to search and find Baywarra and bring him peacefully to face justice, but neither really trusts the other. Once again, their attempt is sabotaged.

*High Ground* may well be the first of many movies that will continue the exploration of the past tragic history of Australia's colonial settlement. Many of the cast and crew are indigenous and their input has been critical in making a classic account of the damage done by rampant colonialism, exposing the sins of the past and the great injustice that lingers until today. This film is a 'must see' and surely will be followed by many similar accounts of the massacres of the past that will educate all of us about the need to work together to demand reconciliation and justice.

**Shirley Randell**

## **BOOK DISCUSSED AT THE FEBRUARY MEETING OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS READING GROUP**

*Conspiracy Theories*

**Quassim Cassam**

Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 2019

ISBN-13: 978-1-5095-3583-5((pb)

Even if there is plenty of evidence to disprove them, people persist in propagating them. Why?' Philosopher Quassim ... argues that conspiracy theories are forms of propaganda and their function is to promote a political agenda. (Berkeley Books)

Published in 2019 Quassim Cassam's *Conspiracy Theories* predates Trump's 'stolen' election and COVID-19 but he does deal skilfully with some of the enduring conspiracy theories — discussing and rebutting them:

- 9/11 was an inside job
- the Holocaust is a myth promoted to serve Jewish interests
- the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School were a false flag operation
- climate change is a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese government.

Cassam begins by explaining that he has moved from his earlier premise that conspiracy theories were often the result of bad thinking and of the intellectual character traits that result in bad thinking. Now, he believes that they need to be understood in political terms and that the intellectual character of conspiracy theorists is a side issue.

The author sets out his arguments in four interconnected chapters:

- The Real Point of conspiracy theories  
They tell people what they want to hear. Their primary function is to promote a political or ideological agenda rather than tell the truth. What counts is not whether the conspiracy theory is true but whether it's seductive.
- Why are conspiracy theories so popular?  
There is no simple answer to the question. It can be because of their wider political or ideological commitments. It can be a response to being marginalised or conspired against. Conspiracy theories may satisfy a spiritual need — a combination or something different.
- The problem with conspiracy theories

We live in a world in which governments, including western governments, 'are often up to no good' and we do need people to look into their activities. However, conspiracy theorists have made it more likely that genuine conspiracies will remain undetected.

- How to respond to conspiracy theories?

Cassam notes that criticising conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorists is a risky business. He proposes a multitrack strategy — rebuttal, education and outing — for dealing with conspiracy theories and the people who promote them. Ultimately, Conspiracy theories are basically a form of political propaganda and that the response to them also needs to be political.

A key take home message from *Conspiracy Theories* is that when conspiracy theories become dangerous we cannot afford to ignore them. At the same time, refuting them by rational argument is difficult because conspiracy theorists discount or reject evidence that disproves their theories. The problem is not that there is not compelling evidence against them. The problem is that the compelling evidence against them is often buried in books and reports that may be too scholarly for many readers.

**Christine Yeats**



## BOOKS THAT SHAPED ME

A broad range of books have moved, inspired and prompted me to pursue first a career in social work, then as a novelist, then a poet and now in poetry research.

First, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. A certain Miss Biggles, in dark green boucle jumper and dark hair, read it to a class of six-year-olds in a North London school. It touched hidden depths in me.

A group of friends sitting having coffee in Manning House at Sydney University in my late teens persuaded me to read Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (now happily translated as *The Human Phenomenon*). As a Jesuit priest, de Chardin's evolutionary hypothesis of the development of human consciousness meant that he earned the disapproval of the church and the book was not published in his lifetime. The adventure and daring implied in this enterprise appealed to me as well as his exploration of human consciousness in line with my love of *The Secret Garden*.

About this time, I was captivated by Patrick White's early work, *The Tree of Man*. This examination of a man's everyday life, thoughts and feelings inspired my, so far unpublished, efforts to write novels in my fifties and sixties.

When I set out to qualify for post-graduate work, I encountered a dynamic lecturer, Audrey Rennison, who prescribed the text, C.Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*. The thought of using one's imagination in academic studies appealed to a nascent sense of creativity.

When children came along, I dutifully took them to a play group and discovered there, in a small library, Virginia Axline's *Dibs in Search of Self* which I devoured in my quest to find more about the person hidden within.

I reached middle age, often the matrix for change, joined the Movement for the Ordination of Women in the Anglican church and became engrossed in the feminist theology of Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenze's book *In Memory of Her*. Here was a reasoned and detailed apologia for equity for women in the church and society which appealed to the rebel in me. Here was a cause to fight for!

In the eighties, a colleague at the UNSW School of Social Work, Damien Grace, showed me a sample of translation of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry into French in George Steiner's *After Babel*. When I later did three years of French at Wollongong University, I discovered *Nineteenth-Century French Poetry* edited by Christopher Prendergast in the Co-op Bookshop. This confirmed my hunch that there were significant similarities between Hopkins' poetry and that of his French poetic contemporaries. Thus, my current research. And thus, the trajectory of my life in books!

**Monica Dennison**



*If you have any comments on the Book Notes or other items that are published in the Bulletin send them to the editor at [cjennett@ozemail.com.au](mailto:cjennett@ozemail.com.au) and they will be published in the next issue of the Bulletin (deadline is 18 May).*

### **Verbalising can Clarify**

Do you wonder what other people might think of your ideas?

Tired of keeping them to yourself?

Want some genuine, helpful and considered discussion of *your* work-in-progress?

If an ISAA Work-in-Progress meeting interests you, please contact:

[cjennett@ozemail.com.au](mailto:cjennett@ozemail.com.au)

### **Book Notes Exhibition Notes Film Notes**

If you have read a book, seen an exhibition or a film of substance lately that you would like to share with fellow ISAA members send in a piece (up to 300 words) containing its key insights and arguments to: [cjennett@ozemail.com.au](mailto:cjennett@ozemail.com.au) by **18 May**