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Intangible Heritage of Indigenous Australians: a Victorian example.

Intangible Cultural Heritage is broadly defined in terms of "oral traditions, expressive culture, the social practices, ephemeral aesthetic manifestations, and forms of knowledge carried and transmitted within cultural communities" (Kurin, 2007). The approximately 250 separate Australian Aboriginal language groups inhabited a continent of great climatic and environmental diversity. These separate societies developed socio-economies specific to their own environments, affected by both attributes and limitations (Builth, 2006). Despite the consequent vast regional differences in the tangible material culture, there is an underlying thread that joins these groups via shared spiritual values. In essence, their relationship with their environment is based on a highly evolved awareness of the non-material world, the spirit of their country, and it has nurtured them via language, stories, song, dance and ceremony through climatic extremes and more recently, invasion. A spiritual and ecological knowledge base pertaining to each language landscape, plus a national communication network, evolved over thousands of years to a level that is yet to be understood by non-Aboriginal people in this country. (This direction for the Australian societies proceeded at the expense of material and monumental development which occurred in many other societies.)

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Intangible heritage of indigenous Australians: a Victorian example.

Introduction

This paper discusses indigenous intangible cultural heritage and what this may mean in Victoria, Australia, today. The subject of intangible cultural heritage is examined initially on a broad scale but is brought down to localised issues and the repercussions for a particular family. For Australian Indigenous peoples as a whole a number of questionable premises have been applied that were initiated by influential anthropologists in the 1930s and remained unchallenged for many decades. These assumptions of Australian Aboriginal societies became the accepted premise upon which all other hypotheses were built. It can be no coincidence that these premises made it much easier to justify colonial conquest of this continent.

The history and destructive nature of the colonial expansion into and across Victoria with its displacement of Indigenous society and prevention of access to country has made precious both tangible and intangible cultural heritage for its traditional owners. It is argued in this paper that intangible heritage is more important for the recovery and strengthening of culture following the dramatic losses which commenced 175 years ago.

Background

In order to be able to appreciate the intangible cultural heritage of Indigenous Australians there is a great need to acknowledge questionable anthropological premises that continue to underlie and affect all aspects of Indigenous life in Australia today. These premises include the presumption that life was hard across this continent, that Aboriginal people were nomadic and low in numbers due to the harshness of the environment; and therefore Aboriginal groups evolved risk minimisation skills and survived only as hunter-gatherers adopting a "hand to mouth" foraging economy; and that the entire population numbered 300,000 when Europeans arrived here (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930).

These assumptions concerning Aboriginal occupation of this continent have consequently formed the foundation of our continuing joint relationships, be they academic, political or personal. Such a lack of appreciation of past Indigenous economies, technology, communication and social systems has detrimentally affected our interaction since the beginning. It is only relatively recently that archaeological research has uncovered another side

to the economies of this "ancient race" [Builth, 2002, 2007; Lourandos, 1997; Mulvaney and Kamminga, 1999; Murray, 1998]. Repercussions of this general ignorance include our failure as a nation to question why there were so few Aboriginal people alive in the mid to late 1800s. It appears to be accepted as survival of the fittest and part of a "natural evolutionary outcome". It was not until the late 1800s in the State of Victoria that the churches finally established missions as refuges for the few remaining survivors (Builth 2002). And why, in the 21st century, is historian Keith Windschuttle (2002) publicly questioning the occurrence of massacres of Indigenous Tasmanians, and other effective attempts at cultural genocide such as separating Indigenous children from their families and country? Butlin provides an explanation for colonial behaviour:

> As in the case of the Americas, the arrival of Europeans meant not merely 'contact' with Aborigines but the destruction of Aboriginal society and populations and the transfer of their resources *to the benefit of both the new arrivals and those who remained in Britain* (1993:2). (Butlin's italics)

Considering the *modus operandi* of colonial occupation it is no wonder that there are feelings of both unease and defence on the part of individuals and governing institutions concerning the present economic misfortunes of most Indigenous Australians. Despite, or because of this, relationships remain diminished.

Intangible Heritage, Academia and Politics

Intangible cultural heritage is broadly defined in terms of 'oral traditions, expressive culture, the social practices, ephemeral aesthetic manifestations, and forms of knowledge carried and transmitted within cultural communities' (UNESCO, 2003). When the physical and the tangible have long ago been taken and the former Indigenous owners have been displaced, sometimes all that remains is the intangible. Internationally, attempts are being made at reparation of the treatment of Indigenous peoples by past colonial powers.

In 2003, at the biennial General Conference of UNESCO, its Member States voted overwhelmingly for the adoption of a new international treaty: the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. According to Article 2.1 of the Convention (UNESCO 2003), intangible cultural heritage means:

> the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their

interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (Kurin, 2007:12)

More than material cultural heritage, the intangible is greatly influenced by the politics of the past and present. The work of archaeologists and anthropologists in reconstructing the past and bringing that information into the present has always been beholden to the political agenda of then and now. Commencing in Australia in the 1930s, scholars of the new discipline of anthropology purposefully by-passed Victoria and other southern settled environments and travelled northwards to observe and document the 'real Aborigines' who were considered to still have connections to their traditional lands and customs (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930; Builth 2002, 2006). Unfortunately, one of the consequences of concentrating on the arid and semi-arid environments, with their own specific social and economic requirements, was the formation of the premise of 'the wandering foraging nomad adapted for survival in a harsh land' to be applied across all groups. It was so much easier that there was no obvious evidence left to the contrary of different types of Indigenous economies and social systems that had developed in the cooler southern latitudes, such as like Victoria.

The academic study of the anthropology of Aboriginal people in (the northern half of) Australia informed the various Governments who subsequently formed policies and passed laws. The ramifications continue. The present state of play in relation to the position of Indigenous knowledges in our society today is the result of past and present Federal and State policies (see McQueen, 1996).

What the politicians appeared to overlook was that this continent of great climatic and environmental diversity had spawned approximately 250 Australian Aboriginal language groups speaking perhaps 600 – 1000 different languages and dialects (Blake, 1981; Horton, 1994:592-601) (see Figure 1). As with the languages, cultural communities or societies developed socio-economies specific to their own environments, affected by both attributes and limitations. Despite the consequent vast regional differences in the tangible material culture, there is an underlying thread that joins these groups via shared spiritual values. In essence, their relationship with their environment is based on a highly evolved awareness of the non-material world, the spirit of their country, and it has nurtured them via language, stories, song, dance and ceremony through climatic extremes and more recently, invasion. A spiritual and

ecological knowledge base pertaining to each language landscape, plus a national communication network, evolved over thousands of years to a level that is yet to be understood by non-Aboriginal people. (This direction of communication proceeded at the expense of material and monumental development for Indigenous societies on this continent.)

The now accepted premise of a much lower Indigenous population than was the case prior to European occupation is acceptable only if it occurred as a consequence of disease having affected the population at the time of contact. Archaeologist, Christophe Sand, has found that throughout the Pacific in the 18th and 19th centuries, an average of 94% of Indigenous peoples died from exposure to alien diseases following visits by European explorers (Sand, 1996, 2000). Extrapolating from Sand's findings, a figure on the combined Indigenous population of this continent immediately prior to the arrival of Cook in 1788 is therefore closer to three million rather than the suggested 300,000 proposed in 1930 by the first academic anthropologist at the University of Sydney, Radcliffe-Brown. Oral accounts of high numbers of dead swept this continent prior to the movement west of the Europeans. These deaths have been attributed historically to diseases such as influenza and/or smallpox which support Sand's Pacific findings. Gunditjmara of South-west Victoria told of the large numbers of their people who had passed away due to illness and the consequent need to dispose of the dead in volcanic craters on the lava flow due to traditional funereal practices being impossible (Savill, 1976).

One supposes that the political and social consequences of the British acknowledging an Indigenous occupation by three million people, compared with 300,000, would have been profound. In 2009 the Indigenous population of Australia had reached 300,000 (Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Why would a continent of only 300,000 speakers evolve 250 separate language groups with 600 plus dialects? This does not make evolutionary sense, especially as the continent had developed a remarkable communication and trading system across its length and breadth (Mulvaney, 1976: Macfarlane, 2005) showing the language groups were not isolated. In 1993, Butlin called for a re-estimation of precontact Aboriginal populations to determine a stable stationary population at 1788 by the use of demographic modelling. His suggestion has not yet been taken up.

Despite the huge losses in population as a result of the recent occupation of this land by non-Indigenous nationalities, there has been a failure to quell an existing cultural knowledge or separate people from it. This is despite a prolonged and determined effort at eradicating such

relationships, for instance, by authoritarian control preventing the speaking of language. Despite incarceration of the survivors in Missions, or their displacement to alien country, the knowledge lives on in individual families. This, surprising to some, includes some in the southern settled regions of the continent that no longer are able to live on their traditional lands. These people are now considered by most Australians to be 'merely' urban Aborigines, but their inherited intangible cultural heritage remains with them, and the nature of it means that it will not easily be forgotten. As long as it remains a part of these people's history it will connect them to their often alienated country. That means there is an ongoing possibility that these families could reconnect.

Archaeologists have traditionally undertaken their training in and practised on analysing tangible cultural heritage. This is understandable considering the origins of the discipline. Largely an investigation into the remains of another's (often exotic) material culture, it was undertaken almost exclusively without involvement in any intellectual analysis of descendants of the original producers of this material. Such an approach, by definition, excludes or diminishes the role of the intangible in the culture under investigation. Exclusion of the intangible in the methodology of training archaeologists (until quite recently) was perpetuated by a system which historically has excluded those being studied from any participation as either teachers or students.

The study of Australian Aboriginal archaeology as a university discipline was established in Australia at the Australian National University in the 1960s. Much earlier, museum researcher, Norman Tindale, had excavated Devon Downs rock shelter in 1929 in order to understand the antiquity and chronology of Aboriginal occupation. The ANU archaeologists trained under the Cambridge University School. Initially they used the same methodology despite the living presence of the direct descendants of the creators of the material remains. The juxtaposition of the divergent philosophies of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies involved is ironic. There are two component players in the process: those who arrived to study the past and those who were being studied. The earlier phase of amateur archaeology in Australia, that of stone tool collecting, was carried out without any respect for the living descendants of the tool makers. Griffiths argues that 'Their understanding of their collections was built upon an invention of cultural discontinuity, upon the severance even of Aboriginal memory' (Griffiths, 1996:51). It was not until the 1970s that Cambridge trained Australian archaeologist, John

Mulvaney, 'was urging fellow archaeologists that priority be given to "Aboriginal-oriented research", by which he meant working with the people themselves' (Griffiths, 1996:44).

As reliable dating methods became available, the archaeologists obsessively focussed on locating the oldest physical remains of past Aboriginal culture, and thereby receiving the highest academic accolades. The Aboriginal peoples of this continent are now recognised as having the world's oldest continuous culture. The largely unrecognised connection between the archaeological sites and the present descendants' understanding of them is the enduring intangible cultural knowledge.

The underestimation of the intangible in our intellectual analysis of culture via an archaeological methodology, of itself inevitably leads to an absence of cultural understanding and empathy. An ancient object loses its meaning outside its context, and its intangible context is as important, if not more important, than knowledge of its providence or its dateable age.

Intangible cultural heritage is, therefore, arguably more important than the tangible as it brings the past into the future, not just the present, by bringing successive generations on their journey with meaning and purpose. And it provides the *raison d'etre* for the relationship of indigenous people with their past. The intangible brings past and present connections of all types – be it with their language, their relationships, country, or the creatures, landscape or seasons they live with, into reality by making sense of them. This is what the analysis of material culture through archaeological excavation alone will never achieve.

The Role of Intangible Heritage at a Local Level

Intangible cultural heritage needs to be recognised as the continuing Spirit of this country. It is more significant to the survival of Indigenous culture than past material remains. Languages are both tangible and intangible and were/are the gate-keepers of the sacred. Language itself is oral history. The many languages across this continent provided their native speakers with access to a restricted knowledge of their landscape and all that was within it – especially the secret information that was dangerous for outsiders to gain access to. Language provided all clan members with exclusive membership. Knowledge has always been power. The existence of so many languages across this continent supports the case for the existence of closely held spiritual knowledge that was kept within the boundaries of the language and enabled their

speakers to retain power and control over a specific area. Restricted oral histories, as keepers and transmitters of the sacred and secret, are now essential as replacements for the previously separate and restricted language and dialect groups.

The Indigenous language divisions of the area now known as Victoria can be seen in Figure 2 (also see Barwick, 1984). Following a continent–wide pattern, the language divisions of south-west Victoria reflected geographical divisions (Critchett 1990:45). This makes sense from a Spiritual perspective when understanding that Creation stories are based on landscape features.

> The area was not, as Major Mitchell described it, 'a fair blank sheet'. All of it was intimately known and named [by the local indigenous people]: each marsh, waterhole, hill, mountain, lake and fall had a name. Each river which flowed all year round had a name which covered its whole length… But also 'every local reach' in these rivers had a distinguishing name. Even a clump of tea-tree scrub had its own name so that it could be precisely referred to (Critchett 1990:47).

Clark (1990) has described 59 clan territories from the five *Dhahurd wurrung* dialects of the Gunditjmara.

European land invasion of the future western districts of Victoria commenced illegally from Tasmania in the early 1830s and its affect on the Indigenous population and their society was devastating. George Augustus Robinson toured western Victoria from 1841-43 and estimated the Djab Wurrung population to the north of Gunditjmara in 1843 to be between 1400 and 2320 (Clark, 2000). Dawson's (1881) estimate of the population at the time of European contact was approximately 5000 based on 120 per clan. Christie (1979) has argued that in the western districts between 1835 and 1845 the losses to the Aboriginal population were 70%. Clark (1990:104) states that he can account for a third of these deaths at the hands of the squatters, the rest he explained by 'introduced disease, changes in diet and extra-tribal conflict', presumably meaning losses of access to traditional or indeed any food resources resulting in near starvation. Clark cites Gottreux who claims that between 1850 and 1857 there was a further 50% decrease in the Djab Wurrung population. In the late 1860s any surviving Djab Wurrung were relocated to the newly formed Aboriginal stations/missions at Lake Condah, Framlingham and Coranderrk. The census of April, 1877, showed there were 1,067 Aborigines remaining in the entire State of Victoria, with approximately 50% residing on mission stations. At this time only 12 were recorded as living within the traditional Djab Wurrung language area (Clark 1990). The loss of country, traditional food sources, and even

access to water, essentially amounted to the destruction of the Aboriginal socio-economy in western Victoria (Christie, 1979; Critchett, 1990; Cannon 1990). The situation was extremely grim for Indigenous Victorians by the time Missions were established in the late 1860s.

It can be understood that the individuals or families who managed to survive this horrendous process were forced to reconsider their cultural priorities. Some parents decided that their children had a greater chance of fitting in to the new regime if they were not burdened with the full gamut of cultural knowledge which came with responsibilities (pers. comm., Johnny Lovett, 1999). So it can be appreciated that cultural knowledge underwent a metamorphosis for the relatively few survivors of this 'genocide'.

I was surprised to discover that some Indigenous people were not really interested in the material findings of their forefathers' and mothers' domestic activities. For instance, that the knowledge of how different foods in a pre-contact scenario were caught and cooked, was no longer information relevant to their present lives. To put this into perspective, the archaeological information discovered from investigation no longer assists people in a modern context and it need not be passed on traditionally in the way that many oral histories served. Food is most often obtained by other means and the old methods are no longer a necessity for survival, however, it needs to be stated that despite readily available sources of food, many Aboriginal groups or families believe it is important to retain knowledge of their former ways. Often wild foods are caught or obtained to subsidise commercially purchased products. Knowledge of where and how to obtain these resources certainly forms part of a family oral history.

Oral history takes many forms. It includes a wide spectrum of information that ranges from the sacred, to the secret, to the secular. It includes family genealogies and therefore provides evidence for connection to country which is arguably now of greater importance than in past times and crucial for the right to speak for country. Previous State and Commonwealth policies of removing families from their traditional country or individuals from their families contributed to a loss of oral history which had the desired consequence of reducing that all-important cultural connection and the individual's position within their family and society. It is the retention and even regaining of this knowledge that is vital for families and clan groups to resume a place in their society and country.

Today, oral history includes secret knowledge held only by certain families or individuals and includes knowledge of power places or sacred sites within their landscape. These have been continually re-empowered through ceremony for millennia and are often associated with particular totems represented by spiritual animal/plant connections. The full stories or song-line connections of these places are generally only known to a very restricted number of people due to the historical losses of important people and the land itself. The known oral histories remain just that and include details of these places and how they fit into the spiritual belief system ─ previously, now and forever (Bird Rose 1996).

It is important to understand that information was earned not just learned. Today this concept is not well understood, hence the Hindmarsh Bridge affair in South Australia. One group of *Ngarrindjeri* women claimed women's knowledge had been fabricated which formed the basis of the case against building a bridge over the lower Murray River joining Goolwa to Hindmarsh Island or *Kumerank* (Bell, 2001; Simons 2003). The truth was that the information was restricted knowledge ─ only passed on to very few others and selfishly guarded from becoming common knowledge (Simons 2003:217). Doreen Kartinyari knew it and, as she explained before she passed away, she made the mistake of letting this information be known to certain non-indigenous people as she tried in vain to save a sacred place from interference. Such interference with the sacred meeting place of the salt and fresh waters was believed to have negative cultural ramifications for the place and her people, including a loss of fertility. Visiting the region today leaves none in doubt that such a premonition has indeed come true, with fresh water no longer entering the river and lakes, nor salt water coming in from the sea. Both are separated and seemingly beyond human repair. The consequence of the polarised and divisive cultural opinions ─ arising from a belief system of which many were ignorant but some were aware ─ has produced division among *Ngarrindjeri* families and friends.

The Last Gunditjmara Chief

The existence and role of the chiefs in south-west Victoria has long been debated amongst anthropologists and archaeologists (Critchett in Dawson, 1981; Lourandos, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1991, 1997; Builth 2006). This is directly related to the discovery and the socio-economic implications of the extensive eel aquaculture facilities across the wetlands and river systems of this region and, in particular, the Mt Eccles lava flow (Coutts, 1978; Builth 2002, 2006, 2007, 2008; Lourandos, 1977, 1980, 1997; Williams, 1988; Clarke 1994). However, such is the direct lack of evidence in an archaeological context for the existence of great chiefs, this subject

could now be termed 'intangible heritage'. Ethnographic and historical documentation support current family oral history which claims direct descent from the once powerful leaders of an area which included Lake Condah and the former country of five separate clans across this rich, fertile, permanently-watered country. Being thus, and in close proximity to the arrival port of the European invaders, these people were the first to lose their land and most of their population (Builth 2002). Subsequent amalgamation of Aboriginal refugees from a wide area, including from outside traditional Gunditjmara clan country, at the newly established Lake Condah Mission in 1868 (Clark 1990) has its consequences in a wide spectrum of cultural knowledges of the immediate area. Due to historical circumstances caused by the European land grab, a number of families from a wide region have had to inhabit another clan's country but are lacking in the oral histories concerning its significant cultural and spiritual landscape. The cultural landscape history, including creation stories and other spiritual and cultural heritage knowledge, is reserved for the family who has direct descent from the former clans' head man or *Wungit,* and who are understandably reluctant to share their knowledge. It is most unfortunate that most of those families originating outside of this country no longer have connection to their own ancestors' country. This scenario was replicated where-ever missions or Aboriginal stations were established in Australia.

The office of Headman or Chief was hereditary in the Gunditjmara nation. The former Lake Condah Mission Supervisor, Stahle writes in 1880 that 'when a Headman died, his son, or failing him a near male relative, became Headman ... this was the law before the white men came to the country' (Howitt 1996:306). Dawson (1881) claims that every tribe has its chief who is looked on in the light of a father and whose authority is supreme. When a tribe is moving across country, the chief with another from his group goes first to obtain permission from the next chief to pass across the territorial boundary with his people.

When a chief dies, the best male friend of the deceased is appointed to take charge of the tribe until, at its next great meeting the succession is decide by the votes of the chiefs. The eldest son is appointed, unless there is some good reason for setting him aside. Otherwise, the office goes to the deceased chief's eldest brother, or to his younger brothers and their successors (Dawson 1881:5, 6). The succession by the eldest son seems to have been the most common choice. Howitt (1996:307) writes that as Dawson had such exceptional opportunities of observation from early European settlement he accepts his account as being accurate. Dawson

was one of the very few ethnographers who used Aboriginal informants directly to obtain information.

The great Gunditjmara Chief or *Wungit*, Bourn Bourn of south-west Victoria, oversaw a changed power regime beginning in the 1830s as his people and neighbouring clans lost their country to British squatters. When Robinson met the *Yiyar conedeet* in May 1841 he recorded the names of just six men, eight wives and six children. He lists Bourn Bourn or Boorn Boorn as the clan head and describes them as belonging to the country at '*Pol.er.wer.er*' or the Fitzroy River and who inhabit '*Boorn Boorn*' (Mt Eckersley) located near Heywood (Clark 1998).

Bourn Bourn's leadership extended to five neighbouring clans following the loss of their own leaders. He was noted by Robinson to be in control of not only the Mt Eckersley clan but also of the now combined clans from Mt Clay (*Cart gunditj*), *Kilgar gunditj* (Convincing Ground), and *Eurite gunditj* (Portland) (Clark 1990, 1998). His son, known colloquially as King Billy, inherited his father's responsibilities in relation to caring for country and the clans' surviving inhabitants sometime between 1841 and 1860 (see Fig. 3 for extent of these territories). His role as *Wungit*, Headman or Chief included making strategic and far-reaching decisions on their behalf (Dawson, 1881; Builth, 2006).

In 1869 Billy King was described by Joseph Shaw, superintendant of Lake Condah Mission, as aged 38, 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighing 164 lbs (in Brough-Smyth, 1876, Vol 1:2). He was therefore born in 1831 and so was 10 years old when Robinson recorded details of the surviving clan members. King Billy died aged 63 in 1894 having fathered five children. He was therefore 29 when he took over the Ettrick/Darlots Creek clan in 1860. King Billy of the Mount Eckersley tribe killed King Dick from the Ettrick tribe in October 1860 (*Portland Guardian*, 19th October 1860). He then took over responsibility for the Ettrick clan. He was married at Ettrick Station. His wife, Hannah was born in 1843.

The Lake Condah Mission was established in 1868 with 70 people having been brought in from a wide area to one relatively small and walled area that included Lake Condah and part of the lava flow (Clark, 1990; Massola, 1970). King Billy consequently lost his leadership and traditional land management role to the Mission authorities. The consequences of the inclusion of families and individuals previously from outside the traditional Gunditjmara territory altered

the long-established and hereditary family power regime that had evolved from the economic benefits of the eel aquaculture systems at Lake Condah and on the local Mt Eccles lava flow. The repercussions of the Mission history continues through to the present and have resulted in the descendants of the hereditary chief being denied a resumption of their role in culture and land management. This family, who were named the Kings by the Mission superintendant in recognition of their hereditary position (Massola 1970), is the only family in western Victoria who survived the brutal land-grab and who can prove their direct descent from named hereditary Victorian chiefs. Angus King succeeded King Billy and was described as 'Old Angus King, reigning King of the Lake Condah Aborigines' by Basil Hardy (Savill 1980:20). In 1919 King Billy's son John, aged 49, petitioned the government to stay at Lake Condah following its official closure (Savill 1976).

Despite this family proving Wungit or Headman positions going back two generations before the Mission, other families, who have not demonstrated a pre-Mission residency in the Lake Condah area, have gained ascendancy of power to the exclusion of the traditional owners (interpreted as recognised clan members from the area shown in Figure 3 prior to European contact). Such a situation is only possible as a result of Government policies which have resulted in all residents of the Lake Condah Mission, from 1868 in a post-Mission scenario, becoming equal inheritors of the larger Gunditjmara traditional territory without recognition of pre-Mission clan membership, including for Native Title purposes.

The present situation for the descendants of King Billy is that they inherited knowledge of the secret and sacred across their traditional clan country. Whether they now inhabit urban streets or back on country, the connection and the knowledge will not go away and, indeed, they believe that both will become relevant again one day. The last Chief's descendants believe that what they know is necessary to make good the land and the health of its people.

Remains of the domestic complex belonging to King Billy and his family prior to their relocation to Lake Condah Mission in 1867, are known to his great great grandson, Jimmy Onus, who was shown them by his grandfather, Angus (pers. comm., J. King Onus, July 2006)(Figure 4)(see also *Australian Heritage Magazine* Sept 06). As former Chief over the coastal areas of Portland/Narrawong through Tyrendarra/Mt Clay up the Darlots Creek and over the Mt Eccles/Lake Condah area, these physical remains are evidence of ethno-architecture that supports the notion of Chief or Wungit as elite member of the society; and are

quite unlike the usual stone circle remains from former dwellings (Clark and Geering, 1986)(Figure 5)(Builth, 2002). The remains show a large 8.0m diameter main room with attached ante-chambers; a large cleared area in front of the entrance and some adjacent small dwellings (Figure 6). The complex supports the claim by Dawson that chiefs and their family were treated differently. It also supports the claim that control of a fish species via aquaculture and seasonal harvesting ─ and its use as a commodity ─ resulted in a stratified society for Gunditjmara and not the egalitarian hunter-gatherer Aboriginal society most anthropologists believe inhabited this continent (Builth 2002, 2006).

Government Directions

Today, the State of Victoria is attempting to make amends for past government policies, injustices and actions. These were the policies that led to the purposeful separation of families and clans from their lands, or the purposeful relocation of families or clan remnants to other groups' traditional country.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act* 2006 and *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations* 2007 have, as one practical objective, the creation of a state-wide overlay of Representative Aboriginal Parties or RAPs, Indigenous groups with powerful roles to play in relation to the protection of cultural heritage across their particular area of jurisdiction. However, choosing a RAP, that is, deciding who speaks for country when ─ as at Lake Condah ─ up to four groups have applied for this status in a given area, is the decision of a State Ministerial appointed Aboriginal Heritage Council composed of ten Indigenous representatives from across Victoria. How can this Council be sure that, ultimately, the appropriate people are speaking for country? Decisions such as theirs will have long-term ramifications for cultural heritage management and especially for intangible cultural heritage. If the right people are not speaking for country what will be the long-term effects? Surely this is an issue of huge consequences for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Victorians, including academics and practicing archaeologists/anthropologists.

Caution must be exercised by those in power and they should not hasten to make amends for past injustices. Irrevocable and permanent decisions on behalf of someone else's cultural heritage may be at stake here. And worse, Indigenous peoples, families or larger groupings, must not be pitted one against another as has happened in the past as a result of government insensitivities.

Kurin (2003) has argued strongly that empirical research, analyses and theoretical work have been insufficient to safeguard intangible cultural heritage (see also Bouchenaki, 2007). This is because it is not possible for professional researchers to perform the role. Such a role, with a positive outcome of protecting or even retrieving intangible heritage, has to come from the owners of the heritage. However, this does not mean that there is no role for professional researchers. Archaeologists/anthropologists, cultural geographers/historians, etc. can assist in identifying historically displaced people with their past connections. Intangible cultural knowledge, which can only be documented through a relationship of trust, is vitally important to assist in putting the final pieces in place when deciding who should speak for country.

A Hopeful Future

My observations, while working closely with traditional owners, is that they believe intangible cultural knowledge can be reborn in particular individuals who are able to get back in touch with the Spirits of their traditional country. They are the descendants of the old people who held this knowledge. This process of enlightenment can be described as a metaphysical manifestation, one that does not fit into a present scientific paradigm. It is, in some way, genetic. And it is fed by connection to country because it is the spiritual essence of that country and the Spirits of the old people who speak through their descendants. Roheim (1925) has written of this phenomenon especially in relation to Gunditjmara, who were ethnographically documented as having the ability through dreams to gain spiritual knowledge directly from the Spirits of their country.

In Australia there is hope for a spiritual, cultural and, eventually, a socio-economic rebirth for Indigenous Australians. It will be a renaissance in the 21st century based on a real if intangible connection of people with their ancestral lands. It will be based on the recognition of the essence and value of culture as a provider of hope, providing meaning from the past for the future. This is not only feasible but is, indeed, a practical solution to the unsatisfactory consequences of past government policies and their repercussions.

Conclusion

Kurin (2003:10) has written that national governments adopting the UNESCO treaty on the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Would be legally bound by the Convention to designate and empower organisations to document intangible cultural heritage and create inventories thereof, and also to encourage the presentation, preservation, protection, and transmission of intangible cultural heritage by working closely and cooperatively with the relevant communities.

UNESCO believes that worldwide, intangible cultural heritage is truly endangered (Bedjaoui, 2004). The policies of past Australian Governments have left their mark with the legacy of a severely reduced intangible cultural heritage for the Indigenous people of the southern part of this continent in particular, and the focus of this paper has been on the State of Victoria. Let the demands of UNESCO be the challenge for our present Government and let some wrongs be righted by assisting traditional owners to reconnect to land, thereby enabling the intangible cultural renaissance to commence.

Reconnection to land will provide a reconnection to Spirit; rejoining a long-time cultural history with the land that made it. The landscape formed the relationships, language, dance, music and symbols which held a people's identity for millennia and still holds it despite recent disconnection arising from violent European land acquisition, displacement policies and language loss. The Spirit of the land is there in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage but it is the intangible which remains the conduit for that reconnection.
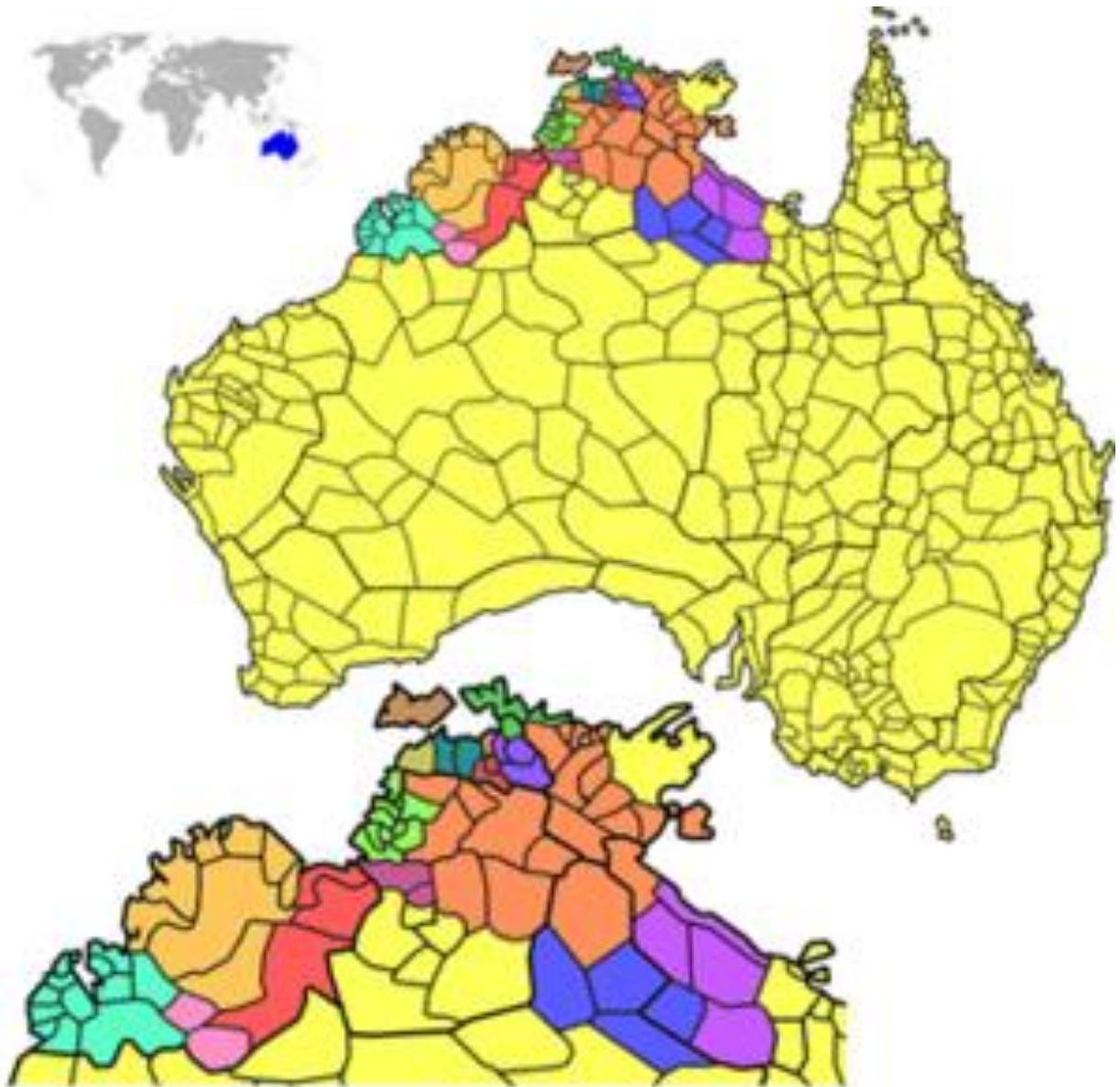
Figure 1: Indigenous language divisions across the continent of Australia (Horton 1994)
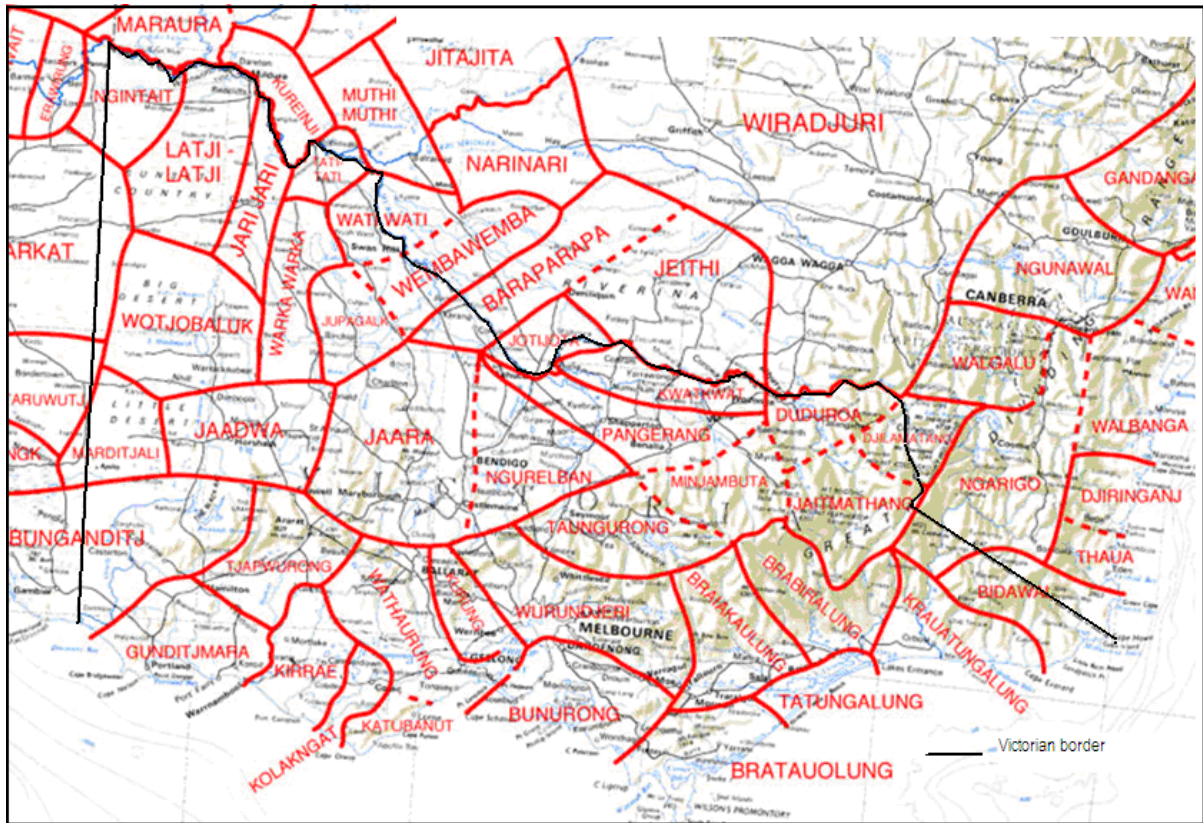
Figure 2: Tindale (1974) map of Indigenous language areas in Victoria

from **http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/tindale/boundaries.htm**.
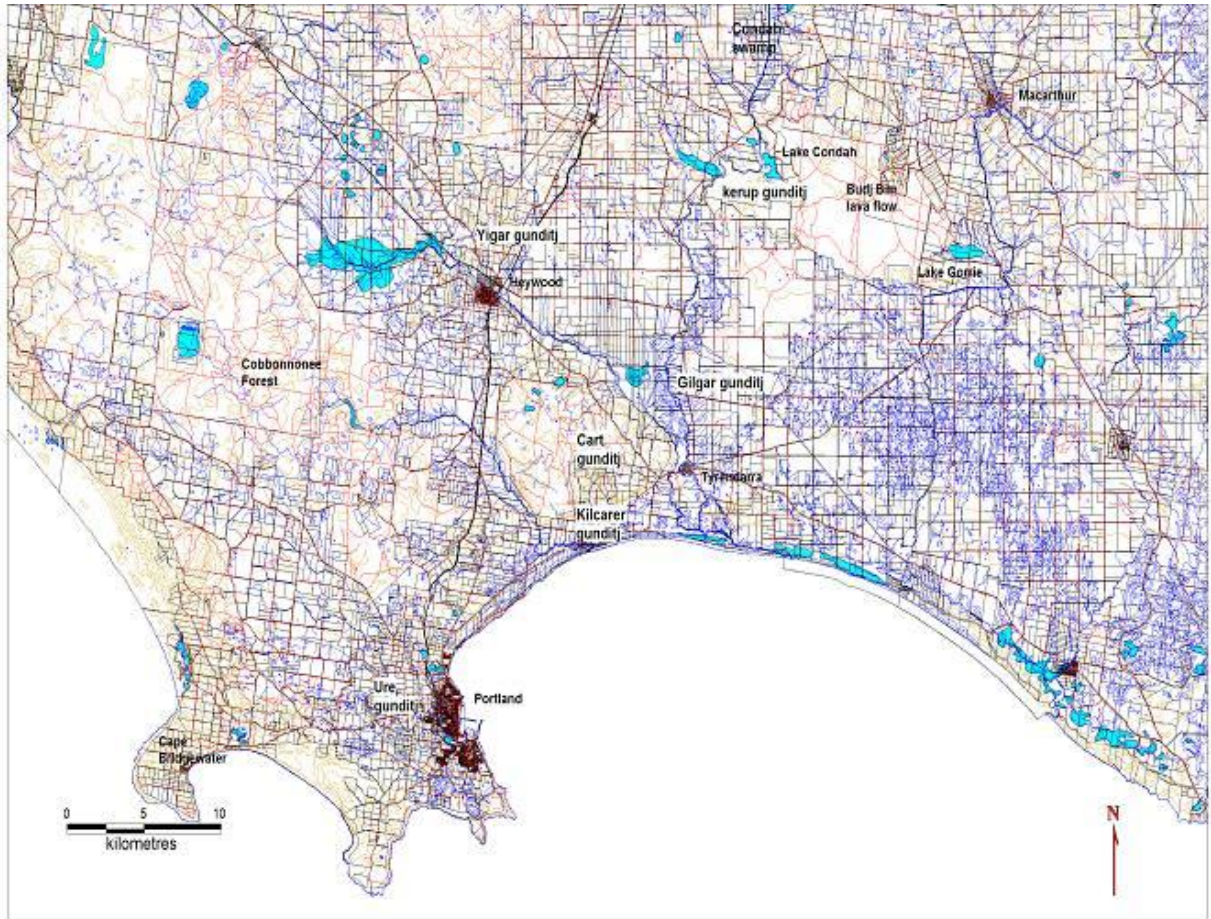
Figure 3: Area and clans under jurisdiction of King Billy in 1860, after Robinson in Clark 2000 (map H. Builth)
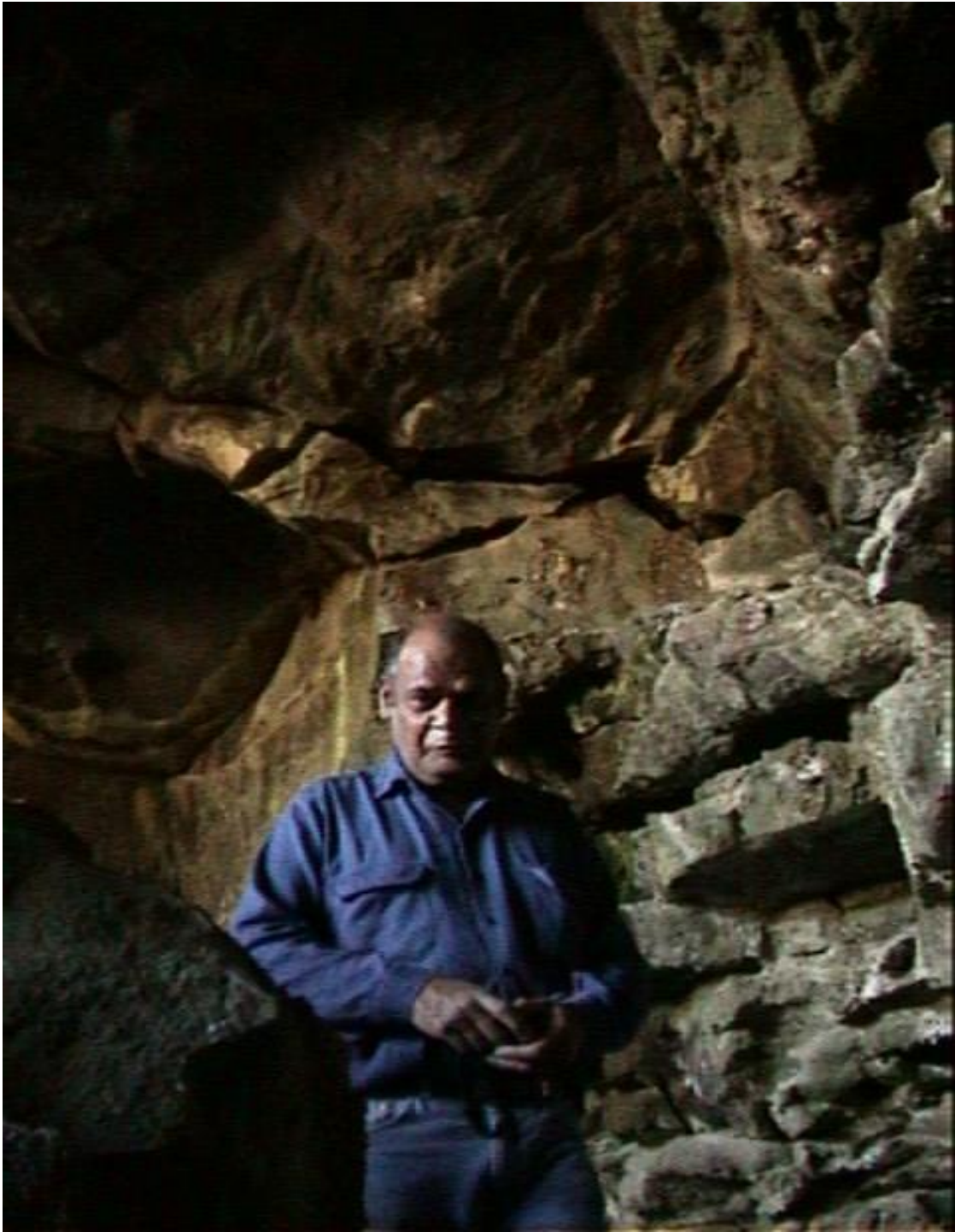
Figure 4: Jimmy King Onus, great great grandson of King Billy (photo H.Builth)

Figure 5: The stone remains of various dwellings on Mt Eccles lava flow (photos HBuilth)

Figure 6: **Part of the remains of the complex associated with King Billy's residence (photo H. Builth)**

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