

Abstract

Exploring the conduct of Bennelong and Musquito provides insight into both *collaboration* and *resistance* and the way responses to occupation move between these polarities.

The language of *invasion* and *resistance* to describe British intrusion and the Aboriginal response derives from 20th century wartime experience and was intended to alter the portrayal of settlement and to valorise Indigenous reaction.

Collaboration and *collusion* were largely omitted yet they are a corollary of *invasion* and *resistance*. While not comfortable concepts, they nuance Aboriginal response as they do the European experience, confirming a universal human condition and evading Indigenous exceptionalism.

Bennelong and Musquito, Collaboration and Resistance: Exploring Indigenous and European Responses to Occupation.

In July 2017 the renowned Bangarra Aboriginal Dance Company produced a controversial portrayal of the first contact Aboriginal, Bennelong at the Sydney Opera House, on the site where Bennelong had lived in a brick dwelling constructed for him by his colonial patrons.¹

In the midst of the performance a voiceover asked of the character Bennelong ‘resistor?... collaborator?... traitor?...” and the company danced the tragic dilemma. Tragedy is the usual lens through which Bennelong has been viewed rather than odious “collaborator” and Emma Dortins and Kate Fullagar justly question the persistence of the trope of tragedy.² The colonial binary of “savage” and “civilised” with its patronising concern for the “savage’s tragic plight” has weighed heavily on colonial interpretation and persists in contemporary discourse.

The Indigenous quandary to invasion and occupation still tends to be seen as exceptional rather than merely human. Keith Vincent Smith emphatically questions the ‘persistent notion’ of Bennelong as ‘a willing collaborator’ preferring to see him as a ‘clever politician’. Such an insistent characterization, however, evades the repeated pattern that successful collaboration inevitably employs political wiles in its opportunism but is nonetheless collaboration.³

The use of language like “collaborator”, “resistor” etc. brings the vocabulary out of its colonial setting and decidedly within contemporary usage, employing the prism of historically recent wartime experience to shed light on earlier colonial interpretations. The unconcealed objective of that scholarly exercise from the 1970s onwards, was to valorise Indigenous responses to white intrusion by a shift to the wartime language of occupation and invasion, and to even lend a dash of the heroic. Omitted, however from that early binary of “invasion v resistance”, is any uncomfortable suggestion of collusion or collaboration.⁴

After WWII “collaborator” shifted its hitherto sense of positive cooperation, to imply sinister and deep disloyalty, standing in direct contrast to the heroism of “resistance”. Interestingly, in recent years, there has been an eruption of literature in holocaust and genocide studies forcing a re-examination of the contradictions of collaboration and resistance, and even the enormity of unassuming accommodation, of merely being ‘bystanders’ to recognizable wrongs.⁵

Nothing quite typifies this revisionism as the reassessment of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. In the aftermath of war, despite murmurings, they were seen as the guiding couple both of Existential philosophical literature and Left resistance however both Deidre Blair and Carole Seymour-Jones have painted a less flattering view.⁶

Between 1943 and 1944 Simone de Beauvoir worked as sound director for Radio Vichy and Sartre was far less involved in *Combat* than he portrayed. Indeed, they far more resembled the mass who accommodated themselves to occupation or to a lesser or greater degree, colluded. Simone de Beauvoir is reputed to have responded to the many post war accusations by suggesting everyone collaborated and in a sense, she was right that it was difficult to avoid in the everyday world.

The line drawn between the multiple forms of collusion, collaboration and resistance could be dangerously elastic, contradictory and deeply conflicted. It certainly does not easily separate into discreet categories but mirrors the turmoil of the times and struggles of human response to oppression, whether to external occupation by others or internal domestic repression.

There is, for example, the strange instance of Kurt Gerstein, a devout German Christian caught in the dilemma of both rendering unto Caesar and serving God and morality. He joined the Waffen-SS in 1941 with the

intention, he claimed, of subverting Nazi intentions, yet at least loosely conscious his involvement could draw him into collusion with potential wrongs.

In 1942 he was ordered to test Zyklon B in the Belzec death camp and witnessed the murder of over 5000 Jews. At the same time, and at great personal risk, he began spreading alarming information of these crimes to others in Germany, Sweden and elsewhere abroad, including the Vatican, providing the earliest intimations of the genocidal horror of the Nazi Final Solution. Both the attraction and revulsion, the seductive *frisson* of Nazi practice obviously warred within him, along with an odd naïveté and quixotic innocence, but it illustrates the profound complexity of any response.⁷ It was simultaneously resistance and collaboration and untangling the contradictions made for an epic post war interpretive puzzle. Simple distinctions, contrasts and opposites are not always easily obtained.

What puzzles the outside observer most is the difficulty many under occupation have in discerning the moral contrasts which otherwise appear so patently obvious. The Louis Malle film *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974), with script by Nobel laureate Patrick Modiano, follows the story of an ordinary country boy who attempts to join the Resistance. He is rejected and ‘so guilelessly enlists’ in the French Gestapo instead. In this ‘powerful and disturbing film’, Lucien, the central character, ‘seems an entirely thoughtless collaborator’ without moral conscience ‘or any sense of guilt’ demonstrating how ‘easy it is’ in wartime ‘to become complicit’.⁸

The most common response to collusive behaviour under occupation or under a repressive regime is to excuse it as necessary “survival” as though that tidies it away from further scrutiny. Survival obviously animated the German condoned Jewish Council in occupied Holland, but they trod an extremely fine line between defending the Jewish community and collaborating with Jewish deportation to extermination camps. Nearly 80% of Dutch Jews were wiped out, greater than elsewhere except in Eastern Europe.⁹ Of course, at core it is about “survival” but perversely it was anything but. Even trying to do as little as possible inevitably contributes to continuing oppression. Doing nothing, the sin of omission, does not exclude moral contribution.

Collaboration gathers together complex contradictory responses, some utterly murderous. The actions of the Jewish *Kapos*, the functionary guards or *Funktionshäftling* in the concentration camps confound conventional expectations of moral decency. Desperation makes demons of us all, but some embrace the possibilities with fewer qualms than others. The *Kapos*

did not just evade their own termination; they actively contributed to the demise of others and went further to visit considerable cruelty.

There are parallels in colonial practice, particularly the native police in Queensland¹⁰ and Victoria¹¹ where Aboriginal recruits were formed into murderous militia aiding in the “dispersal” – a potent euphemism - of Aboriginal “troublemakers” on the frontier. Obviously, this militia, often recruited from distant districts, were assisted in their efforts by traditional enmity and a lack of pan-Aboriginal identity, but the enthusiasm that some lent to their task went beyond to embrace a collusive vengeance and malice, the ideology of their oppressors.

Vengeance often colours reaction. In the Ukraine, Nazi collaboration provided some who had suffered appalling famine in the forced collectivization an opportunity to wreak revenge on the hated communist overlords as well as Jews. When Putin describes the current Ukrainian regime as “Fascist” he is drawing on an historical cue no one has forgotten. Similarly, the Croatian *Ustasha* used Nazi collaboration as an excuse to massacre some 700,000 Serbs.

So persistent are the vile instances of collusive behaviour under repression or occupation, that finding even nominal moral resistance seems rare, yet it weaves its way through the venality. The actions of Otto and Elise Hampel against Hitler’s repressive regime are analogous to those under occupation and illustrate an extraordinary defiance. Though poorly educated working people without a past of previous political activism, they penned hundreds of simple postcards and scattered them about the city calling on their fellow Berliners to sabotage workplaces and express civil disobedience to the regime. Most of the cards were simply handed immediately to the Gestapo. Few circulated, none acted on, and it was inevitable they would be caught, and later beheaded in Plotensee prison in March 1943.¹² A gesture so poignant and yet so pointless speaks volumes of the human spirit.

The stories of collaboration and resistance are so saddening and universal that to **not** find them in Aboriginal colonial experience would be unusual and instances are inevitable in the invasion and occupation of Australia. Ironically it is *collusion* and *collaboration* that most strongly evidences the contested concept of *invasion* to describe Australian settlement since such behaviour is an absolutely unavoidable corollary to *invasion* and *occupation*.

It is, of course, uncomfortable and inconvenient to an unalloyed narrative of courageous *resistance* but what the Bangarra performance makes explicit is that *collusion* and *collaboration* also have to be taken into account if a nuanced view of the Aboriginal response is to be understood, and the character of Bennelong and others appreciated beyond the patronising rubrics of *tragedy* or *victim*.

The shadow of an Indigenous exceptionalism, however, has to be discarded. What is axiomatic in examining *resistance*, *collaboration*, *collusion*, and all other elements of *bystander* and *accommodation* behaviour under occupation, is that these are uncomfortably common *human* responses that are not unique to any ethnicity.

The experience of WWII in Europe may have been in the context of the cultural milieu of a repeated history of invasion and occupation, which is not shared in the colonial context of Indigenous and white interface, but this may make for differences because of unfamiliarity but not exceptionality. It remains a profoundly human pattern of response. Bennelong, then, has to be viewed against the broad pattern of behaviour under occupation.

Bennelong as *collaborator*?

Initial Aboriginal reaction to British intrusion was mixed: fear, retribution, suspicion and avoidance though occasionally too, supreme disdain. From an Aboriginal view, their world and its values were central and Europeans were utterly peripheral. Theirs was a supreme command of place that withered quickly under the cultural onslaught.

The British presence was a perplexity. Perceived originally as the dead returned to life, this was no “savage” superstition but a logical, prosaic aspect of their minutely observed world. When the corpse of a black man bloats and blisters in the rotting sun, the skin splits to reveal a pink inner dermis, the colour of the new intruders. Death and pink skin were literal but such manifestations were meant to eventually vanish. These corpses not only stayed they kept on coming.

Aboriginal avoidance of the incomers was solved with the well-tried imperial habit of capture and taming.¹³ It was long practiced by the Romans, for example. In one notorious instance, the Romans took as hostage Arminius (c.18 BCE), the son of a German chief. Brought to Rome, “tamed” and given Roman citizenship, military training and command, he later inveigled three Roman legions into an ambush in the Teutoburg Forest where 20,000 were slaughtered. Collaboration may still harbour resistance

and can vacillate between impulses as becomes clear in the later case of Musquito.

The first of the British captives, Arabanoo died in the virulent outbreak of disease in May 1789, soon after occupation. The next attempt at abduction came with Bennelong and Colebee in November 1789. Lt. William Bradley, in charge on that day, was appalled - 'the most unpleasant service I was ever ordered to Execute'. He was shaken by the unspeakable terror of the two 'miserable wretches' and the distress of women and children on the shore 'crying & screaming'.¹⁴

But it was, as the astute Tench clearly recognised, a brutal exercise in power. The first impulse of the British, Tench believed, may have been to 'win their affections', but the principal intention was 'to convince them of the superiority we possessed', and in his mind, garnering Aboriginal 'affection', *without* demonstrating British superiority 'would be of little importance'.¹⁵

These are the attitudes and actions of an invader, a *conqueror*, not some benign and accommodating co-habitation of simple settlers.

It was about power and the captives knew it full well. Colebee, who was a chiefly warrior of some standing, fairly quickly made good his escape but Bennelong lingered in the ease and novelty of his detention. While Colebee had been present, Bennelong had remained subdued and a difference in status was obvious and well noted. After Colebee escaped, Bennelong suddenly emerged as an extroverted and exuberant centre of attention.

As Clenndinnen has suggested, Bennelong seized the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the British and to use the connection to advantage with his own people. He became a *cultural broker*,¹⁶ leveraging his connections to improve his own status. This is the opportunity provided by collaboration under occupation – the chance for those of marginal status to scramble to the top of the dung heap.

Bennelong eventually escaped though it took little subterfuge. It was assumed his sexual appetite required satiation, but it had just as much to do with the increasing shortage of food in the Camp. Interest in the presence of the incomers hinged on their abundance – which is simply power otherwise defined – and as that waned so did Bennelong's interest, though his fortunes did not prosper after his departure.

The reunion of Bennelong and the Governor was one of those seminal historical moments in the founding of the colony. A whale that had beached itself at Manly drew several hundred Aboriginals to a gorging feast and Bennelong sent a slab of stinking blubber to the Governor as a gift. When Phillip arrived at what he reasonably perceived as an opportunity to re-establish connection, there appeared to be a hastily assembled performance prepared for him. In the ceremonious exchange and beach reunion Phillip was gifted a short spear but as he approached a man introduced to him at some distance from the group, the warrior snatched up his spear and hurled it at the Governor, piercing his shoulder. The alarm was instant and retreat was an immediate hasty scramble.

The meaning of these frightening events must have bewildered the British and it is to Phillip's credit no retribution was exacted. The incident has been more recently understood as a ritual punishment for the abduction of Colebee and Bennelong as well as general punishment for other sundry wrongs.¹⁷ This is culturally consistent; it was a necessary reprisal from an Aboriginal point of view before any reconciliation could take place and crucially Bennelong orchestrated it. Thereafter the avoidance that had characterised relations dramatically eased.

Obviously these events centred Bennelong in the new arrangements as an important intermediary and he seized the opportunities presented. As Tench astutely observed his importance among local people 'arose in proportion to our patronage of him',¹⁸ the kind of tangible reward sought by all collaborators.

At the beach reconciliation, before the spearing of Phillip, Bennelong, the cultural broker, had demanded hatchets, knives and other desired goods, part of the reciprocity that was essential for cordial relations. These gifts were beyond the usual exchange as the new weapons gave considerable technological advantage with the consequential wounds considerably more severe.

Bennelong's clambering for improved status was not uncontested. The British had made him a leather and tin shield – quite a dazzling piece of defensive weaponry of which he was extremely proud. It eventually disappeared and at first he shamefacedly claimed it had been lost before admitting the Cammeragal confiscated and destroyed it as it was deemed 'unfair to cover himself with such a guard'.¹⁹ In other words the shield gave him an unfair advantage in combat and thus was seen as cowardly, however it had probably more to do with Bennelong getting beyond his

station and being put in his place. But who and what were these Cammeragal who were obviously social arbiters of considerable power?

Bennelong had railed against the Cammeragal and encouraged the British to attack and destroy them,²⁰ attempting to use the incomers to further his own personal political aims, an extremely common collaborator's ploy. Collins recognised the crucial role of the Cammerra in the important initiation and the tooth evulsion ceremony as well as in 'contests or decisions of honour', which explains their intervention in the matter of the shield.²¹ But Collins also saw them as a *super* "tribe", in the Latin sense of *over* or *above*, a separate headman group, rather than a "tribe". To add to the confusion King²² saw Cammerra as an *individual* warrior with whom Bennelong had battled.

While the view may be contested, the Cammerra seem most likely to have been the warrior and ritual headmen described by AW Howit²³ as *Gommera* (the 'g' and 'c' are readily interchangeable as are the vowels 'a' and 'o'), which would explain more clearly why Bennelong was in awe of their power.²⁴ It is significant, however, that not long after Bennelong had railed against the Cammerra, urging the British to attack them, Bennelong himself was officiating at the tooth evulsion initiation ceremony usually conducted by the Cammerra.

This appears strange indeed, a fairly sudden alteration. Had Bennelong's status appropriated from his collaboration with the British altered the Aboriginal power structure and diminished the authority of the Cammerra? This would seem the obvious explanation but we may need to delve further.

The shift in Bennelong's status may well have had much to do with his connection with the British but the collapse of Indigenous society was possibly a more potent factor. The arrival of the British had had a profound effect on the demography, doubling in a short time the population of the Sydney region and placing inordinate strain on food resources, for both white and black. Added to that was the sudden eruption of disease within a year of the arrival of the fleet in April-May 1789. The combination of population pressure, food shortage, disease and even possible genetic vulnerability²⁵ had a devastating impact, compounding the death toll of the smallpox epidemic. The 50% death rate suggested by Bennelong to Phillip would have been no exaggeration and may well have been much greater, approximating the levels in South America of 80-90%.²⁶

The social collapse would have dramatically altered the power relationships, removing the old men who arbitrated the social order and

supervised the rituals – men like the Cammera. This would have allowed Bennelong to challenge the accepted order and even be so bold as to conduct the important initiation ceremonies. So Bennelong's shift in status was assisted in two ways: by his relationship with the British as cultural broker but also by the social collapse around him.

The extent of that collapse can be seen in the disappearance of the Cammera headmen but also of the culturally central initiation practices themselves. Bennelong directed the last recorded initiation ceremony in the Sydney area in December 1797, that is, *within nine years* of the arrival of the British, which is an astonishingly rapid evaporation of cultural practice.

The importance of this cannot be underestimated. Initiation was an awesome “born again” transformational experience wherein boys became men. Without that they remained as children, traditionally unable to marry or assume warrior status. The significance was profound, the loss, catastrophic.

Bennelong then was not just an opportunistic collaborator but also one who used that advantage to step into the power vacuum created by the devastating dying and social collapse taking place around him. Simply accusing him of collaboration does not adequately explain the bewildering alteration that consumed the Aboriginal world and through which Bennelong navigated.

The apogee of Bennelong's British collusion was his invitation to accompany Phillip to England, which surely in his mind sealed his special status in British eyes. While his contrast with other new world exotica did not quite measure up, as Kate Fullagar suggests,²⁷ it was nevertheless a pinnacle experience for Bennelong though on his return to Sydney the atmospherics had greatly altered. The speed with which Sydney had changed left him marginalized, less central to the concerns of the new Governor, Philip Gidley King. Now in the Governor's residence he dined at the servants' table. No longer an important notable and mediator, he had become an inconsequential Indigenous pet.

Again a pattern is discernible for the fate of collaborators is often oddly problematic. Both Anton Mussert, leader of the Dutch Nazis, and Vidkun Quisling in Norway were not viewed with particular favour by Hitler and though useful collaborators, they were largely marginalised once their importance passed.²⁸

The toweringly thoughtless dismissal by authority was not lost on Bennelong, who increasingly distanced himself from Government House. This, of course, was seen as evidence of an “inability” to civilize and further confirmation of the “ingratitude” of the “natives” for the opportunities proffered – the kind of ingratitude that speaks from Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” – *Take up the White Man’s burden – and reap his old reward, the blame of those ye better, the hate of those ye guard.*²⁹

Rage, resentment, impotence and alcoholism, these are the recognizable and formulaic responses to this kind of towering condescension and though Keith Vincent Smith endeavours to grant Bennelong a continuing prestige among his own people, it was really only among a shattered remnant of various hearth groups where his status still had some sway.³⁰ Descent into impotence and alcoholism is one path, resistance or a murderous vengeance is another and that was the route of Musquito.

Collaboration and Resistance: the case of Musquito.

Collaboration does not simply contrast as the moral opposite of resistance: it is a complex and multifaceted dilemma that comes in perplexing varieties and definitional difficulty.

The Danes under occupation in WWII had a “good war” in that the Nazi overlords interfered minimally in civil conduct, but does that constitute collusion? The Swedes, who were not under occupation, had an even better war, trading valuable iron ore with the Nazi regime at considerable profit and the Swiss, bankers of the Third Reich, did very nicely too but does that constitute a form of collaboration? The British under occupation in the Channel Islands accommodated themselves in that aloof way the British have perfected. Whether that constituted collaboration is moot, though it would seem the British bulldog’s tongue lolled and wagged its stumpy tail. Even more contradictory was the response in Yugoslavia where the Serbian *Chetnik* forces vacillated between collaboration with Nazi occupation against the Communist Partisans and cooperation with the Partisans in resistance to the Germans. Occupation only nuances the usual partisan politics and this is observable also in Aboriginal society in the Sydney region as Bennelong eloquently illustrated.

The kinship that was so central to Aboriginal identity affords insight into the relationships and clan identities in the Sydney area. Bennelong’s sister was married to Gnung-a Gnung-a (also known as Collins) who came from the Hawkesbury Broken Bay region. Gnung-a Gnung-a was a brother to Phillip and also of Musquito who was to raise rebellion and resistance on the Hawkesbury.³² Both Gnung-a Gnung-a (Collins) and Musquito (Y-

erran-gou-la-ga) were drawn by Nicholas-Martin Petit of the French Baudin expedition when visiting Sydney and included in Péron's *Atlas*.³³

This complex genealogy shows that the Aborigines were all intimately interconnected by marriage and kinship over a vast area, connecting the Sydney people with others at some distance. These were not the discreet "tribes" conceived by the British but a people focused on integration and connection. "Collins" and "Phillip", for instance, had obviously engaged in the common Aboriginal practice of exchanging names with British notables. This was a usual way of constructing kinship and cementing association and it was a link that had occurred quite early in the occupation of Sydney, even though Collins and Phillip originated from the inland *tugarra* or "woods" region.

This is strongly contradicted by Naomi Parry³⁴ who, for instance, saw the Musquito of the Hawkesbury resistance as distinct from the Musquito who frequented Sydney, a not unreasonable suggestion as the British were somewhat careless (and unimaginative) in the names they pinned on Indigenous personalities. She sees the regions as distinct whereas the movement of Aborigines was constant over a considerable range.

Part of the contradiction Parry perceives is in the disparity of personalities. The Musquito of Sydney is frequently in drunken fights, which does not apparently align with the belligerent warrior of the interior, yet this is also part of the contradiction between accommodation and resistance. Aborigines were attracted by the abundance and temptations of the British presence but also, despite occupation, continued traditional ways. They still accessed the ritual sites around Farm Cove and Woolloomooloo as well as engaging in occasional bouts of warfare and resistance in other arenas.

The regions of Aboriginal living were constantly being swamped by white expansion, Sydney at first and then the Hawkesbury, a rich resource site of yams, mussels, orchids, lilies and floating *nardoo* ferns as well as possum and kangaroo. It had rich alluvial soils, however, which attracted the whites in search of fertile farmland away from the stubborn clay of Sydney. Clashes were inevitable but what compounded the problem were the crops brought by the British.

They may have rooted up the staple Indigenous foods, yams and fern roots, with their pigs, but they brought with them rich substitutes, corn and potatoes, Indian foods from the New World Americas. The importance of these foods was not only their ease of cultivation – corn does not require

the fine tilth of wheat - but their ease of storage, something the Aborigines soon learned. After one corn raid, Tedbury led settlers to a cache of 'at least 40 bushels of corn'³⁵ or about 1.3 tonnes, an astonishing haul.

What is also important was that corn and potatoes not only produced more per hectare than comparable crops, but they were also more calorific with greater protein content.³⁶ It is not surprising that the Aboriginal corn raids coincided with the growing and harvesting season and shaped the resistance movement on the Hawkesbury. And herein lies the great contradiction of Aboriginal resistance in the Sydney arena. The disease that fractured Aboriginal society and culture, initially muted resistance, whereas the New World foods literally fed it. These were storable yet portable high energy "fighting foods". Aboriginal resistance would not have been as significant except for Indian foods.

The first resistance leader was the charismatic Pemulwuy: declared an outlaw in 1802, he was dead within half a year. Reports suggest 'artifice'³⁷ and subterfuge but betrayal from within seems likely, always the great risk under occupation. After Pemulwuy's demise the mantle moved to Musquito whose orchestrated attacks in the Portland Head area from June 1804 – often involving upwards of 300-400 warriors – was forcing settlers to relinquish their holdings.³⁸ These were substantial battle groups, often involving those from the distant 'interior of the mountains',³⁹ and though the size has been questioned⁴⁰ they mirrored the kind of assemblages he later mustered in Tasmania.

By June 1805 his numerous 'outrages' on the Hawkesbury led to a 'General Order' naming him as the principal leader of the attacks and urging his 'apprehension'.⁴¹ Musquito had been a frequent and rowdy visitor to Sydney⁴² sufficiently well known to be painted by Petit in 1804 but this is a frequent characteristic of activist, resistance or revolutionary figures: they become "people in-between" cultures.⁴³ Like Jose Marti, the Cuban revolutionary who had lived in the USA, Musquito had 'lived in the monster' and knew 'its entrails'.⁴⁴ He moved among them with familiar association yet harboured an inner rage at their presence.

Rev. Samuel Marsden who loathed Musquito⁴⁵ manipulated the complex threads of local Aboriginal politics to force Musquito's capitulation,⁴⁶ and led to his incarceration in Parramatta gaol. It was a betrayal that would have made a Gestapo officer blush with pride, but once in gaol Musquito created mayhem in an attempted escape, threatening to 'destroy every white man within'.⁴⁷

The dilemma of what to do with Musquito tested the legal competence of Judge Advocate Richard Atkins who advised Governor King that essentially Musquito could not be tried because he did not understand the ‘meaning and tendency’ of his actions.⁴⁸ Though some commentators suggest Christian baptism was the obstacle to trial, Atkins was simply asserting the common law requirement for both *actus reus* (an intentional act) and *mens rea* (a guilty mind), which Musquito clearly lacked.⁴⁹

The solution was banishment,⁵⁰ a well-practiced method of moving troublemakers about the empire without the inconvenience of a trial that would have been required under domestic British law. Musquito was exiled to Norfolk Island, sent on the *Buffalo*, 22 August 1805.⁵¹ While there he became a charcoal burner, a trusted yet dangerous occupation, and was sufficiently compliant to earn a recommendation for his repatriation though this never occurred.⁵² After 8 years and the abandonment of the settlement, Musquito was transferred on the *Minstrel II* in 1813 to Van Diemen’s Land.⁵³

Van Diemen’s Land at that time had only 1092⁵⁴ colonists and convicts, half of whom were of Norfolk Island origin so Musquito was known or known of. He moved into the interior assisting with shepherding but he also made himself useful tracking bushrangers. This led Governor Davey in 1814 to recommend his repatriation to Sydney, the second time this occurred though again this failed to happen.⁵⁵ Musquito later became, as JE Calder described, the ‘faithful servant’ of Edward Lord,⁵⁶ the notoriously wealthy owner of vast tracts of land in the interior where Musquito’s skill and knowledge was invaluable. He continued to assist in the tracking of bushrangers and again he was recommended for repatriation, this time by Governor Sorell, but once more it did not occur.⁵⁷

It has been suggested by Bonwick, Melville and others like West,⁵⁸ that Musquito’s retreat into the bush and his alliance with the Tasmanian Aborigines stemmed from the immense resentment occasioned by the failure to repatriate after such long collaboration. While undoubtedly so, it was more the mix of careless indifference and the disdain accorded collaborators, rather than deliberate inaction that really infuriated Musquito. It festered like gravel under the skin and his alliance with the Tasmanian Aborigines was really a return to warrior regard fired by a determined dignity. It was a pure rage created by the constant pattern of disregard despite his attempts to ingratiate himself.

Musquito’s alliance with the Tasmanians was sparked by rage and shaped by an alignment of critical factors. The demographic inundation of people

transported after the Napoleonic wars as well as the vast flocks of sheep that invaded the interior Aboriginal hunting grounds, disrupted Aboriginal foraging and landscape maintenance and triggered a catastrophic social collapse, opening them to the charismatic influence of Musquito.

The population numbers do not seem to us large but *proportionally* the magnitude⁵⁹ was immense. White incomers increased from 2367 in 1817 to 9514 in 1824,⁶⁰ a fourfold increase in 7 years. In contrast, the total Aboriginal population by 1824 had declined in 20 years to about 1200, approximately a quarter of the pre-contact population, a social collapse by any reasonable definition.

As Belich has observed ‘spasms of intense Aboriginal resistance correlate with [demographic and economic] booms’⁶¹ and the boom period in VDL emerged between 1818 and 1824 and spiked dramatically thereafter. 1824 represented that point of tension where the flood of British compelled Aboriginal reaction and resistance, and the commencement of the Black Wars.⁶²

Musquito had a significant role in that early period with ‘high notions of his own worth’. He would ‘stalk into the cottages of the settlers’ and ‘seat himself with great dignity’. His followers, upwards of one or two hundred would patiently await ‘his signal to approach’. According to West as his influence ‘enlarged, it became more pernicious’ and deeds ‘of great enormity were committed at his direction; several by his own hand.’⁶³ He exhorted the Aborigines repeatedly to kill the white men ‘kill DRYER [white women], kill LUTERTEIN [white men]’.⁶⁴ His aim of vengeance was absolute.

He was no nascent democrat but a vicious warrior intent on leadership and direction, the sort necessary to be effective. As a NSW outsider, however, the alliance was extremely unusual. What he had to offer was vital knowledge, an understanding of the methods of resistance. What he had in common with the Tasmanians was a visceral hatred of white presence. It was a timely historical conjunction.

His rage though was utterly understandable and his often-expressed grievance⁶⁵ can be discerned in his influence on Kickerterpoller, Black Tom,⁶⁶ who in many respects became a more murderous figure than Musquito. Adopted into a well to do white household, Tom was, according to his foster mother, ‘a good and useful lad, so obliging and gentle, so honest and devoted to his master’.⁶⁷ And there of course is the unconscious clue – devoted to his master and intended as a servant to the household. It

simply did not occur to those so hierarchically bound that others would not simply assume their “place” without question.

Musquito pointed out the obvious. ‘He pictured the hopelessness and aimlessness of his future.’ What would he ever be but a ‘slave of the whites’? Would he ever be allowed to take a ‘wife among them’? Would they ever allow him equality with whites? Musquito represented the Europeans as ‘the enemies of their race’⁶⁹ and in saying this to Tom, Musquito did no more than voice his own visceral contempt and hatred of white society.

Musquito did not simply organise sporadic raids but orchestrated a pattern of conflict that became understandably recognised in its immediate aftermath as the Black War, the only time the term *War* for conflict on Australian soil has been used as a proper noun, such was the capitalised importance. It was *the Black War*, akin to the Partisan guerrilla activity of WWII and the Malayan Emergency (1952-68). As Robinson observed the Tasmanians considered ‘every injury’ inflicted ‘upon White Men as an Act of Duty and patriotism’ and considered those who suffered ‘punishment as Martyrs in the cause of their country.’⁷⁰ While this is Eurocentric language, the sentiments are both recognizable and universal.

The size of the battle groups Musquito mustered again has to be appreciated, not in raw numbers, but *proportionately*. In the central and eastern area, the “settled districts” where Musquito operated and the region where the Black War was most intense, the Aboriginal population in 1824 was only about 1000.⁷² Even allowing for some inflation, the fact that Musquito was able to muster, according to West, battle groups of up to 200, meant Musquito could command from 20 to over 40% of the male⁷³ cohort of the region for concerted operations, which was mobilisation on a huge scale.

The figures may be argued but the magnitude was significant and indicates the surprising extent of his influence. His reach and command were quite remarkable with a reputation that extended well beyond even the considerable mobs he could muster.

The impact and influence of Musquito and the frequent assertion he was a catalyst for the Tasmanian Black War has always been controversial. Before Musquito the Tasmanians had ‘never committed any acts of cruelty, or even resisted the whites’⁷⁴ and the ‘Darkies were as quiet as dogs...’⁷⁵ The only ones who had ‘done any mischief’ were corrupted by Musquito, who ‘with much and perverted cunning, taught them a portion of this own

villainy.⁷⁶

The role of Musquito's 'villainy' in directing these mobs would have made him a figure of awe and almost legendary standing. It was not only among the whites that he achieved a mythological significance but among the Tasmanian Aborigines as well. It was not just that Musquito was a known and recognisable scapegoat upon whom whites could heap blame, he actually did command a fearsome capacity to inflict vengeance and terror.

The crime for which Musquito was eventually tried⁷⁷ and hanged, the murder of Hollyoak and Mammaoa, occurred at Grindstone Bay on Tasmania's east coast near Triabunna. The area was a traditional hunting ground and place of Aboriginal congregation. It was also the site of an earlier confrontation, the murder of John Kemp in 1818,⁷⁸ involving Musquito.⁷⁹

His command of the group of about 64 Tasmanians is undoubted and the conflict with Radford, Hollyoak and the Tahitian shepherd, Mammaoa, appears to have arisen over the callous shooting of an Aboriginal woman in the back, as 'cruel a thing as he ever saw done', according to Black Tom.⁸⁰ None of this emerged in the trial, only an apparently unprovoked attack on the murdered victims.

Musquito went to the gallows along with Black Jack Roberts on 25 February 1825, strung up among thieves and murderers, their warrior struggle reduced to criminality.⁸¹ That day, standing in the crowd was George Augustus Robinson who would one day take the war weary, straggling remnants of the Tasmanian Aborigines into exile on Flinders Island. Far from the proceedings reflecting 'credit' on the feelings of the newly appointed Sheriff, the whole 'melancholy arrangements'⁸² were far from satisfactory. Robinson watched the botched hangings with dismay as slip shod arrangements saw the men 'put to great suffering',⁸³ slowly strangled, their legs thrashing in the air.

Musquito endeavoured by collaboration and collusion to ingratiate acceptance, had found the task futile, and was condemned to lowly insignificance. His return to warfare had been a return to warrior regard and leadership, that long abandoned path of the remembered past.

Conclusion.

The path of collaboration and collusion under occupation or oppression is a jangle of attempts to avoid, survive or keep the oppressors at bay. It shocks us the way decent people act so collusively yet close observation of

the twists and turns people employ to survive tends to remove any easy judgment.

There is nothing exceptional about Indigenous responses to occupation, and while there has been the often-used euphemism of “coming in” to describe Aboriginal acquiescence to white presence, it is at heart a saddening surrender. Before that are all the manifold responses to occupation: collusion and collaboration to access the opportunities of the dominant culture as well as a staunch resistance frequently marred by betrayal. Some embrace the opportunities to further personal ambition and some to exercise vicious personal demons. Some turn the impotence of occupation into a rage and valiant resistance. The full panoply of human response is portrayed from the most vicious to the most heroic, from the most base to the most dignified and sublime.

Bennelong and Musquito in the Aboriginal reaction display many of the responses to occupation and grant a richer insight into Indigenous conduct by admitting a view, though uncomfortable, through the lens of collaboration and collusion, of the the inescapable corollary of resistance.

¹ Clarissa Sebag-Montefiori, “Bangarra’s Bennelong review – Aboriginal warrior’s conflict portrayed in dramatic suspense”, *The Guardian Australia*, July 1, 2017.

² Emma Dortins, “The many truths of Bennelong’s tragedy”, *Aboriginal History* Vol. 33, 2008.

Kate Fullagar, “The story of Bennelong is potent and evocative – but it is being contested” *The Guardian Australia*, July 8, 2017. Also

<https://katefullagar.com/2017/07/09/bennelongs-contested-history/>

³ Keith Vincent Smith, *Bennelong*, (Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 2001), 57.

⁴ The emphasis on this binary contrast is evident in the title of Noel Loos seminal work, *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European relations on the North Queensland Frontier, 1861-1897*. (Canberra: ANU Press, 1982). The central architect of the new language was Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1982)

⁵ David Cesarani & Paul A. Levine *‘Bystanders’ to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation*. (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

⁶ Carole Seymour- Jones, *A Dangerous Liaison: A revelatory new biography of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre* (NY: Overbook Press, 2009); Deidre Blair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography*, (NY: Touchstone Books, 1990).

⁷ Valerie Herbert, “Disguised Resistance? The Story of Kurt Gerstein.” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol.20, No.1, Spring 2006, 1-33.

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- ⁸ William Boyd, "Introduction" to Patrick Modiano, *The Occupation Trilogy: La Place de l'Etoile; The Night Watch; Ring Roads* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), xi.
- ⁹ Paul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish catastrophe, 1933-1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).
- ¹⁰ Jonathon Richards, *The Secret War: a true history of Queensland's Native Police*. (Brisbane: QUP, 2008).
- ¹¹ Marie Hansen Fels, *Good Men and True: The Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District 1837-1853*. (Melbourne: MUP, 1988).
- ¹² The saddening story of Hampels was fictionalized by Hans Fallada in the novel *Alone in Berlin*, (London: Penguin, 2017).
- ¹³ Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 288; Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne: Text, 1998), 25; Isabel McBryde, *Guests of the Governor; Aboriginal Residents of the First Government House* (Sydney: Friends of the First Government House Site, 1989), 7-9.
- ¹⁴ William Bradley, *A Voyage to New South Wales; The Journal of Lieutenant William Bradley RN of HMS Sirius, 1786-1792* (Sydney: Public Library of NSW, 1969), 181-183.
- ¹⁵ Watkin Tench, *Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay and A complete Account of the Settlement of Port Jackson* in ed. L.F Fitzhardinge, *Sydney's First Four Years* (Sydney: Library of Australian History, 1979), 35-37.
- ¹⁶ M.C. Szasz, *Between Indian and White worlds: The cultural broker*. (Norman, OK: Red River Press, 2001).
- ¹⁷ see Smith, Clendinnen, *Dancing.... 124-126*, and Karskens, *Colony...378-85*, for example. Stephen Gapps, *The Sydney Wars* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2018), 76-78, however is dismissive of this interpretation. The subsequent rapprochement however seems to confirm the cultural interpretation of Clendinnen, Karskens et al.
- ¹⁸ Watkin Tench *A complete account of the settlement of Port Jackson in New South Wales, including an accurate description of the colony; of the natives; and of its natural production...* (London: G. Nicol and J. Sewell, 1793), 83.
- ¹⁹ David Collins, *An Account of the Colony of New South Wales etc.* (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1798 [1975]), 498.
- ²⁰ Smith *Bennelong* 80, quoting John Hunter's observations.
- ²¹ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony*, 352-353.
- ²² Philip Gidley King, *Journal of Philip Gidley King*, (Sydney: Mitchell Library, April 1790), p. 405. A painting of this "Chief" features in Drawing 53 of the Watling Collection: National History Museum.
- ²³ AW Howitt, *The native tribes of south-east Australia*. (Canberra: Facsimile of 1904 edition, 2001), p 314.
- ²⁴ see Michael Powell & Rex Hesline "Making Tribes?: Constructing Aboriginal tribal entities in Sydney and coastal NSW from the early colonial period to the present." *Journal of the Royal Historical Society*, December 2010.
- ²⁵ This is a controversial thesis of significance. See Peter Roberts-Thompson *et al.* "Immune dysfunction in Australian Aborigines" *Asian Pacific Journal of Allergy and Immunology*, Vol.23, 2005, 135-44 and Peter Roberts-Thompson, "The Impact of Introduced Disease into Tasmanian Aboriginal Populations and its role in Depopulation" *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings*, Vol.61 No.2/3 December 2014, 119-135.
- ²⁶ H.F Dobyns, *Their Number Become Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press,

1983). F.M. Black, “An Explanation of High Death Rates Among New World Peoples When in Contact with Old World Diseases.” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 1994, 37:295; F.M. Black, “Disease Susceptibility Among New World Peoples” in Francisco Salzano & Magdalena Hurtado (eds), *Lost Paradises and the Ethics of Research and Publication* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁷ Kate Fullagar, “Bennelong in Britain”, *Aboriginal History* Vol. 33, 2008.

²⁸ David Littlejohn, *The Patriotic Traitors: A History of Collaboration in German Occupied Europe, 1940-45*. (Stanford: SUP, 1972).

²⁹ First published in the *New York Sun* 10 February 1899.

³⁰ Keith Vincent Smith “Bennelong among his people”, *Aboriginal History* Vol. 33, 2008.

³² see Smith, “Bennelong among his people”, 13. Smith gives a useful genealogy.

³³ François Péron & Louis Freycinet, *Voyage de découvertes aux terre australes....etc.* commonly referred to as the *Atlases* (Paris:1807-1816).

³⁴ see Naomi Parry “ ‘Hanging no good for blackfellow’: looking into the life of Musquito” in *Transgressions critical Australian Indigenous histories*, Aboriginal History Monograph 16, 2007.

³⁵ *Sydney Gazette* 19 May 1805.

³⁶ see Kenneth Kiple, *A Moveable Feast: Ten Millennia of Food Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁷ *Gazette*, 24 June 1804. Also see “Journal of Samuel Smith” p44, cited in Peter Turbet, *First Frontier: The Occupation of the Sydney Region 1788-1816* (Sydney: E publication, Rosenberg, 2011), 125, for involvement of Henry Hacking.

³⁸ *Gazette*, 24 June 1804.

³⁹ *Gazette* 28 April 1805.

⁴⁰ Turbet, *First Frontier* p142.

⁴¹ *Gazette*, 9 June 1805, 4.

⁴² *Gazette*, 16 October 1803.

⁴³ Michael Roberts, Ismeth Raheem & Percy Colin-Thome, *People in Between: The Burgers and the Middle Class within Sri Lanka 1790s to 1960s*, (Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Book Publishing Services, 1989).

⁴⁴ Jose Marti, “Letter to Manuel Mercado, 18 May 1895” in Deborah Schnookel & Mirta Muniz (eds), *Jose Marti Reader: Writings on the Americas* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1999), 253.

⁴⁵ Samuel Marsden, “The Reverend Samuel Marsden’s Report to Archdeacon Scott on the Aborigines of NSW (2 December 1826), Appendix VIII, in WN Gunson, *Australian Reminiscences and Papers of LE Threlkeld: missionary to the Aborigines 1824-59*, Vol.2. (Canberra: 1974), 347.

⁴⁶ *Gazette*, 7 July 1805, 2; 23 December 1804, 2; 13 January 1805.

⁴⁷ *Gazette*, 11 August 1805, p2.

⁴⁸ *HRNSW* 5, 653-4, Atkins to King, 8 July 1805.

⁴⁹ Michael Powell, *Musquito: Brutality and Exile: Aboriginal Resistance in New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land*, (Hobart: Fullers, 2016). 61.

⁵⁰ Michael Powell, “The Clanking of Medieval Chains: Extra-Judicial Banishment in the British Empire”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, April 2016.

⁵¹ Reginald Wright, “Appendices – II Shipping Movements” in Raymond Nobbs (ed) *Norfolk Island and its First Settlement 1788 –1814* (Sydney: 1988) 210f). Musquito arrived 5 September 1805.

⁵² *HRA* Series I, Vol.5, King to Castlereagh, 27 July 1806.

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- ⁵³ Wright, "Appendices etc.", 186f.
- ⁵⁴ ABS *Historical Population Statistics*, 2008.
- ⁵⁵ Macquarie to Davey, Re Permission for Musquito to Return to Sydney (Reel 60004,4/3493, p251), 17 August 1814, *Colonial Secretary Index 1788-1825* SRNSW.
- ⁵⁶ James E Calder, *Some Account of the Wars, Extirpation, Habits, &c., of the Native Tribes of Tasmania* (Hobart, 1875)
- ⁵⁷ HRA Series III, Vol.II, Sorell to Macquarie, 13 October 1817, 284.
- ⁵⁸ James Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, The Black War of Van Diemen's Land* (London: 1870); Henry Melville (ed. G. Mackaness) *The History of Van Diemen's Land from the year 1824 to 1835* (Sydney: DS Ford Printers, 1959, originally 1836); John West, (ed. A.G.L. Shaw), *The History of Tasmania*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971, originally 1852).
- ⁵⁹ see Michael Powell, "Assessing Magnitude: Tasmanian Aboriginal Population, Resistance and the Significance of Musquito in the Black War", *History Compass*, August 2016.
- ⁶⁰ ABS, *Historical Population Statistics*, 2008.
- ⁶¹ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The settler revolution and the rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939*. (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 263.
- ⁶² Nick Clements, *The Black War in Van Diemen's Land* (Brisbane: QUP, 2014).
- ⁶³ West, *History of Tasmania*. 268.
- ⁶⁴ NJB Plomley, *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1987). Robinson's Journal 3/10/1837. See NJB (Brian) Plomley, *A word-list of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Languages* (Launceston: QVMAG, 1976). Various forms: loderwinner, lut.te.win, 318; drie, dryerlooner, 460.
- ⁶⁵ Henry Melville, *History of Van Diemen's Land*. 40.
- ⁶⁶ Robert Cox, *Broken Spear: The Sundered Life of Black Tom Birch*, (Hobart, 2019)
- ⁶⁷ Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians*. 96.
- ⁶⁹ Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians*, 96.
- ⁷⁰ NJB Plomley (ed), *Friendly Mission: The Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson*. (Launceston QVMAG, 2008), 489.
- ⁷² Nick Clements, *Frontier Conflict in Van Diemen's Land, An Attitudinal and Experiential History*, Unpublished PhD University of Tasmania 2013, 332, estimates about 1000 based on Reynolds total population in 1824 of 1500 though Reynolds is working on a more generous base of a pre-contact population of 7000 which is probably close to actuality.
- ⁷³ A gender balance is assumed though by this stage the percentage of women was probably much less than the male and the number of children was also alarmingly low.
- ⁷⁴ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 16 July 1824, 2.
- ⁷⁵ Bonwick, *The Lost Tasmanian Race*. 78.
- ⁷⁶ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 16 July 1824, 2.
- ⁷⁷ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 3 December 1824, 3. Trial of Musquito and Black Jack.
- ⁷⁸ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 28/11/18, 1.
- ⁷⁹ Bonwick, *Last of the Tasmanians*. 95.
- ⁸⁰ NJB Plomley, *Friendly Mission*. 347. There is some doubt by Plomley that this refers to Hollyoak and Mammoa however the specific reference to 'Musquito and Black Jack' credibly suggests it refers to Grindstone Bay.
- ⁸¹ *Colonial Times and Tasmanian Advertiser*, 5 January 1827; *Hobart Town Gazette* of 25 February 1825.

⁸² *Hobart Town Gazette*, 25 February 1825.

⁸³ Robinson's Journal 25 February 1825 A7022 Vol. 1 pt.4 cited in Vivienne Rae-Ellis, *Black Robinson*. (Melbourne: MUP, 1988), 16.