

‘TRUE BIOGRAPHIES OF NATIONS?’

**THE CULTURAL JOURNEYS
OF DICTIONARIES OF
NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY**

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NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY**

EDITED BY KAREN FOX



Australian
National
University

PRESS



Published by ANU Press
The Australian National University
Acton ACT 2601, Australia
Email: anupress@anu.edu.au

Available to download for free at press.anu.edu.au

ISBN (print): 9781760462741
ISBN (online): 9781760462758

WorldCat (print): 1097202530
WorldCat (online): 1097202413

DOI: 10.22459/TBN.2019

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The ANU.Lives Series in Biography is an initiative of the National Centre of Biography at The Australian National University, ncb.anu.edu.au.

Cover design and layout by ANU Press

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book had its genesis in a conference held in Canberra in 2016. Titled “‘True Biographies of Nations’? Exploring the Cultural Journeys of Dictionaries of National Biography’, it was organised by the National Centre of Biography (NCB) at The Australian National University (ANU) and supported by the National Library of Australia (NLA), and it sought to bring together practitioners working on national dictionaries of biography, along with librarians, archivists, fellow researchers, and others interested or involved in biographical dictionary enterprises. Heartfelt thanks are due to my fellow conference organisers, Melanie Nolan and Christine Fernon; to Scott Yeadon, Karen Ciuffetelli, and all my colleagues at the NCB; to the National Library of Australia, particularly to Margy Burn and Kathryn Favelle; to the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, which provided funding; to the volunteers, who helped things run so smoothly; and to all the speakers and attendees, who made the two days of the conference so stimulating and enjoyable.

A great many debts have also been incurred in the preparation of this book. First and foremost, I am grateful to all the contributors: Jock Phillips, Turlough O’Riordan, Philip Carter, Melanie Nolan, Susan Ware, Elizabeth Ewan, Shino Konishi, Dafydd Johnston, Barry Jones, David Cannadine, and David A. Wilson. It has been a pleasure to work with each of them, and I am lucky to have had such a gentle introduction to the art of editing a collection. My sincere thanks to you all.

I am most grateful to Melanie Nolan, the chair of the editorial board for the ANU.Lives Series in Biography, who has been a source of guidance and support from the moment this project was conceived. I thank the reviewers of the manuscript, and the members of the ANU.Lives editorial board, for their suggestions and feedback, which was much appreciated. Thanks are also due to the staff of ANU Press, especially Emily Hazlewood, for all their help and support as this book was in preparation, and to Geoff Hunt,

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AN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN DICTIONARY OF BIOGRAPHY¹

SHINO KONISHI

An Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography (IADB) is a new Australian Research Council–funded research project I am leading with Malcolm Allbrook and Tom Griffiths, which seeks to redress the long-standing underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)* by doubling the number of Indigenous biographies within the online *ADB*, and producing a stand-alone published volume of Indigenous short biographies. Yet, rather than just producing 190 new entries, our aim is also to rethink how Indigenous biographies can be conceptualised, being attentive to how and why Indigenous biography is distinctive, and how Indigenous people, who have long been marginalised and excluded from the national imaginary, can now be better accommodated with the *ADB*, and hence be better incorporated within the national story.

¹ This research was supported by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council's Discovery Projects funding scheme (project IN170100012). The views expressed herein are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or Australian Research Council. An earlier version of this paper was presented as the 2017 ANU Archives Annual Lecture, and I would like to thank the Friends of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre for their generous support. I also thank Malcolm Allbrook, Odette Best, Ann Curthoys, Tom Griffiths, Natalie Harkin, Barry Judd, Steve Kinnane, Melanie Nolan, and Jaky Troy for their advice and input on earlier drafts, and Karen Fox for her thoughtful editorial guidance.

In this chapter I will trace the history of the *ADB*, highlighting how it originated during the 'great Australian silence', and the various efforts made since that time to improve its representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lives. I will analyse the way in which Indigenous people are already portrayed in the *ADB*, in order to shed light on how such biographies have been approached in the past, and assess the net effects of the *ADB*'s cooperative structure, which involves myriad authors, guided by autonomous working parties, and overseen by an evolving editorial board. Finally, this chapter will draw inspiration from other national dictionaries of biography, suggesting a range of different directions for the IADB as we embark on this new project.

The *ADB* and the Great Australian Silence

In 1957, at an Australian history conference at The Australian National University, the idea for a national biographical dictionary project was officially endorsed.² This project had been driven by historian Keith Hancock, who, recognising that it did not have the financial support of other national dictionaries of biography, envisaged that the *ADB* would be a voluntary and cooperative venture. Each of the states and territories would have autonomous working parties to decide on subjects and authors, and ANU would provide the staff to edit the entries, and Melbourne University Press would publish the hardcopy volumes. In 1962 the *ADB*'s editorial board appointed the University of Tasmania historian Douglas Pike as the first general editor.³ By 1966, the first volume was ready for publication, comprising 575 short biographies of noteworthy figures, almost exclusively European and Anglo-Australian men, who passed away between 1788 and 1850. The next year, the second volume of 607 biographies also covering 1788 to 1850 was published. Of these original

2 Melanie Nolan, "'Insufficiently Engineered": A Dictionary Designed to Stand the Test of Time?', in *The ADB's Story*, eds Melanie Nolan and Christine Fernon (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013), 5. doi.org/10.22459/ADBS.10.2013.01.

3 Nolan, "'Insufficiently Engineered'", 5–21; and Bede Nairn, 'Pike, Douglas Henry (Doug) (1908–1974)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pike-douglas-henry-doug-818/text20359, published first in hardcopy 2002, accessed online 15 August 2017.

1,182 entries only nine were on Aboriginal individuals.⁴ This degree of exclusion, which seems unthinkable today, was commonplace at the time, and typified what the esteemed anthropologist William Stanner described as the ‘great Australian silence’.

In his 1968 Boyer lectures entitled *After the Dreaming*, Stanner discussed his ‘deep uneasiness about the past, present, and future place of Aborigines in Australian society’.⁵ For his second lecture, Stanner consulted a wide array of books on Australia’s history and current affairs, the ‘sort of books that probably expressed well enough, and may even have helped to form, the outlook of socially conscious people between say, 1939 and 1955’. Disappointed by the disregard shown Aboriginal people and issues, he turned to later works and found that ‘the lack of interest ran on even into the 1960s’. From this study, Stanner concluded that:

A partial survey is enough to let me make the point that inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned into habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the Aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so.⁶

Thus, the colonial myth, stemming from the early nineteenth century, that Aboriginal people would simply ‘melt away’ and play no role in Australia’s future, had ensured that they were excised from the narrative of the nation’s past. Stanner deeply lamented this ‘great Australian silence’, and proposed the kinds of histories which he thought could break the silence:

The history I would like to see written would bring into the main flow of its narrative the life and times of men like David Unaipon, Albert Namatjira, Robert Tudawali, Durmagam, Douglas Nichols,

⁴ See ‘Table 1.2 Representation of Women and Aboriginal Subjects in the ADB’, in Nolan, “Insufficiently Engineered”, 26. Note that there were actually five Aboriginal people in volume one, not four as they list.

⁵ Jeremy Beckett and Melinda Hinkson, “Going More than Half Way to Meet Them”: On the Life and Legacy of WEH Stanner’, in *An Appreciation of Difference: WEH Stanner and Aboriginal Australia*, eds Jeremy Beckett and Melinda Hinkson (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2008), 2.

⁶ W. E. H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Melbourne: Schwartz Publishing, 2011) (Ebook), accessed 14 March 2017.

Daniel Dexter and many others. Not to scrape up significance for them but because they typify so vividly the other side of a story over which the great Australian silence reigns.⁷

Significantly, these histories were all biographical in nature, suggesting that for Stanner, it was through the lives of individuals that Indigenous history could be brought to life. He concluded his second lecture predicting that this 'silence' would not 'survive the research that is now in course', as 'our universities and research institutions are full of young people who are working actively to end it'.⁸ He was right, as the 1970s saw the emergence of Aboriginal history as a distinct field, led by anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians such as Diane Barwick, Jeremy Beckett, Charles Rowley, Sylvia Hallam, John Mulvaney, Peter Corris, Peter Read, Bob Reece, Henry Reynolds, and Lyndall Ryan, as well as the members of Aboriginal History Inc., who established the eponymous journal in 1977, nine years after Stanner's Boyer lectures.⁹

Yet, despite this flourishing scholarship on Aboriginal history, the great Australian silence that Stanner observed from the 1930s through to the 1960s continued to resound within the *ADB* throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Bede Nairn and Geoff Serle were the general editors during this period, and during their tenure implemented some changes to the *ADB*'s processes—most significantly, Serle appointed more editorial staff which allowed an increase in the scale of the volumes and in 1975 he contacted the Refractory Girl feminist collective for advice on how to improve the representation of women in the *ADB*.¹⁰ Yet they did not seem to explicitly

7 Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*. Note that most of these individuals were eventually included in the *ADB* except for Durmagam and Daniel Dexter: Unaipon in 1990, Namatjira in 2000, Tudawali in 2002, and Nicholls in 2012. See Philip Jones, 'Unaipon, David (1872–1967)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/unaipon-david-8898/text15631, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 18 July 2017; Sylvia Kleinert, 'Namatjira, Albert (Elea) (1902–1959)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/namatjira-albert-elea-11217/text19999, published first in hardcopy 2000, accessed online 18 July 2017; Peter Forrest, 'Tudawali, Robert (1929–1967)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/tudawali-robert-11889/text21293, published first in hardcopy 2002, accessed online 18 July 2017; and Richard Broome, 'Nicholls, Sir Douglas Ralph (Doug) (1906–1988)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/nicholls-sir-douglas-ralph-doug-14920/text26109, published first in hardcopy 2012, accessed online 18 July 2017.

8 Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*.

9 See Bain Attwood, 'The Founding of *Aboriginal History* and the Forming of Aboriginal History', *Aboriginal History* 36 (2012): 119–71. doi.org/10.22459/AH.36.2013.06.

10 Nolan, "Insufficiently Engineered", 25.

engage with the new Aboriginal historiography. This was perhaps partly due to the fact that, as Chris Cunneen observed, both Nairn and Serle were traditional ‘blokey’ men who were both ‘criticised by the “New Left” historians of the 1970s’,¹¹ and also due to the fact that Aboriginal history was largely seen as a separate field from Australian history at this time. The 10 volumes (numbers 3–12) published between 1969 and 1990, each containing at least 526 entries, had at most five biographies of Aboriginal people per volume. In fact, the 12 volumes marking the lives of 7,851 significant Australian individuals who passed away between 1788 and 1940 contained a mere 32 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in total (0.4 per cent). It was not until 1996 that the first *ADB* volume which approached parity with the present-day Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander proportion of the population was published (2.6 per cent).¹²

Finally, in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the *ADB* achieved a more representative 2.35 per cent of entries on Indigenous people for volumes 13 to 16, covering individuals who had passed away between 1940 and 1980. This improvement was not just a consequence of the *ADB* catching up to the historiographical shift that began in the 1970s, and was then fuelled by the political assertion, in the lead up to the Bicentenary celebrations of 1988, that ‘White Australia has a Black history’. As Aboriginal history became more mainstream, as evident from its incorporation into school and university curricula, the editorial board also recognised that the *ADB* needed to undergo political changes, and acknowledge that many Australian groups were underrepresented in the *ADB*, primarily women, and people from working class and non-Anglo backgrounds. As Melanie Nolan outlines in her history of the *Dictionary*, the 1980s saw critics from within the *ADB* echo reviewers’ complaints about its lack of representation: editorial board members Ann Curthoys and Heather Radi respectively complained about the overrepresentation of military personnel and the underrepresentation of women (the volumes published up to 1988 each had between 1.74 and 12.89 per cent female subjects).¹³ Such criticisms led to editorial board members Beverley Kingston, Stephen Garton, and Jill Roe’s successful bid in 2001 to fund *A Supplementary Volume of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1770–1980*.¹⁴ With Chris Cunneen

11 Chris Cunneen, ‘Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle: A Fine Partnership, 1973–1987’, in Nolan and Fernon, *The ADB’s Story*, 138. doi.org/10.22459/ADBS.10.2013.04.

12 Table 1.2 in Nolan, “Insufficiently Engineered”, 26.

13 Nolan, “Insufficiently Engineered”, 24–25.

14 Stephen Garton, ‘Staff Profile’, University of Sydney, accessed 15 July 2017, sydney.edu.au/arts/history/staff/profiles/stephen.garton.php.

as managing editor, they produced the *ADB's* 2005 'missing persons' supplementary volume, comprising 565 new biographies, including 167 on women and 50 on Indigenous people (8.9 per cent). However, the result of this initiative was not unanimously praised; for example, some critics argued that in attempting to include more women the volume merely proliferated entries on 'community and charity workers', nurses in particular, amplifying how the *ADB* already represented Australian women's experience.¹⁵

During the same period, there were increasing calls to not only include more Indigenous people in the *ADB*, but also to change the *ADB's* editorial protocols to better accommodate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests. Frances Peters-Little, a Kamilaroi and Uralarai film-maker and historian, and Gordon Briscoe, a Marduntjara historian, criticised the *ADB* for 'failing to identify and include enough indigenous subjects', and for not adapting its editorial processes to acknowledge 'Indigenous conventions of narration and remembrance'.¹⁶ Briscoe also objected to the *ADB's* 'out-dated criterion of only including those who had been dead for at least 20 years'.¹⁷

Consequently, in 2004 an Indigenous working party was created, comprising Peters-Little as the chair, and eight other Canberra-based scholars, including Aboriginal members Dawn Casey, Margo Neale, and Kaye Price. Unlike the state working parties, their role was mainly limited to providing advice on Indigenous cultural protocols to the then general editor Di Langmore, and to ensuring that Indigenous sensitivities concerning deceased persons were respected.¹⁸ However, the Indigenous working party voluntarily disbanded in late 2008 because it did not have the same purpose, responsibilities, and autonomy as the other working parties. Further, the then chair, Samantha Faulkner, who has family connections to the Wuthuthi/Yadhaigana peoples of Cape York Peninsula

15 Mark McGinness, 'Assessing the *ADB*: A Review of the Reviews', in Nolan and Fernon, eds, *The ADB's Story*, 305. doi.org/10.22459/ADBS.10.2013.10. I thank Malcolm Allbrook for drawing my attention to this point.

16 'Profile: Gordon Briscoe (b. 1938) and Frances Peters-Little (b. 1958)', in Nolan and Fernon, eds, *The ADB's Story*, 244.

17 Gordon Briscoe, *Racial Folly: A Twentieth Century Aboriginal Family* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 218–19. doi.org/10.22459/RF.02.2010.

18 'Profile: Gordon Briscoe (b. 1938) and Frances Peters-Little (b. 1958)', in Nolan and Fernon, *The ADB's Story*, 244.

as well as Badu and Moa Islands in the Torres Strait, and I recommended that the membership be opened to Indigenous academics from across Australia to better reflect Indigenous communities and concerns from across the nation.¹⁹

In 2008 Melanie Nolan was appointed as the new general editor, and her previous experience with the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* made her especially attentive to Indigenous issues. In 2014 she recommended that the *ADB* appoint the acclaimed Miriwoong writer and scholar Steve Kinanne and myself to the editorial board, and in 2016, with her support, we reconstituted a new Indigenous working party, enlisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars from across Australia, with Gurreng Gurreng nursing academic Odette Best serving as the inaugural chair.²⁰ Moreover, the new Indigenous working party now had the same function and autonomy as the other working parties, with the added role of advising the *ADB* on Indigenous ethical concerns and cultural sensitivities.

While not all of the *ADB*'s attempts to redress the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since the 1990s were entirely successful, there was a significant increase in Indigenous inclusion in the volumes published from 1996 to 2012 (numbers 14–18). These volumes, covering individuals who passed away between 1940 and 1980, each had between 15 (2.2 per cent) and 26 (3.8 per cent) Indigenous entries. And the most recent volume, number 18, actually exceeded the Indigenous proportion of the population (3.8 per cent).

Yet there is still much work to do. Today there are only 210 biographies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people amongst the approximately 13,000 *ADB* entries. This represents only 1.5 per cent of all entries, nearly half the current Indigenous proportion of the population (2016 census). Furthermore, these 210 entries are unevenly distributed throughout the volumes: only 17 out of 359 online entries covering those who passed away before 1840 are of Indigenous people (4.7 per cent), even though, according to Boyd Hunter and John Carmody's recent demographic study, the Aboriginal population outnumbered the non-Indigenous

¹⁹ Briscoe echoed this point in 2010. Briscoe, *Racial Folly*, 218–19.

²⁰ The other inaugural members are Len Collard, Linda Ford, Natalie Harkin, Barry Judd, Jakelin Troy, and John Whop.

population during this time.²¹ Moreover, in line with the inclusion rate of women in the *ADB* overall, only 46 out of the 210 Indigenous subjects are women (21.9 per cent). Thus, Indigenous Australians are not only vastly underrepresented in the *ADB*, they are also unevenly represented, with the *ADB* depicting a skewed snapshot of Indigenous historical experience. So, who are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people already represented in the *ADB*?

Indigenous Representation in the Current *ADB*

The first two volumes of the *ADB* covered the period 1788 to 1850, and, as previously mentioned, only included nine Aboriginal people: Arabanoo, Bennelong, Biraban, Bungaree, and Colebe in volume one, and Jackey Jackey, Wylie, Yagan, and Yuranigh in volume two.²² Moreover, the online *ADB*, which includes entries from the 2005 supplement, still only lists 20 Aboriginal people for the years 1788–1850. In addition to those mentioned above are Broger and Broughton (who share a single entry), Calyute, Eumarrah, Mokare, Daniel Moowattin, Mullawirraburka, Musquito, Pemulwuy, Tarenorerer, and Windradyne. This group is not only small in number, but also reflects a narrow spectrum of Aboriginal society at the time. All except the Palawa (Indigenous Tasmanian) woman Tarenorerer are men, and 13 lived in what is now New South Wales, four in Western Australia, two in Tasmania, and Mullawirraburka was from Willunga in South Australia. Moreover, these 20 individuals are primarily defined as Aboriginal leaders (nine), Aboriginal guides (six), 'Aborigines' (four), and one as an Aboriginal warrior. The individuals in this group are further divided into a mere nine occupational categories, with some individuals ascribed multiple vocations: six leaders, seven guides, five resistance fighters, three executed criminals, two cultural informants, two murderers, one stockman, two trackers, and one duellist. Significantly, these descriptors suggest that these men, and one woman, were only significant because of their interaction with the British; be it

21 They convincingly argue that the non-Indigenous population would have first exceeded the Indigenous population in the mid-1840s. Boyd H. Hunter and John Carmody, 'Estimating the Aboriginal Population in Early Colonial Australia: The Role of Chickenpox Reconsidered', *Australian Economic History Review* 55, no. 2 (2015): 112–38, 135. doi.org/10.1111/aeht.12068.

22 Note that Jackey Jackey is said to have passed away in 1854 so should be in volume three. Edgar Beale, 'Jackey Jackey (?–1854)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/jackey-jackey-2264/text2897, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 14 July 2017.

through seemingly positive contributions to colonial enterprises such as exploration, or due to their hostility to British colonists and as transgressors of British law.

Yet it is not only the narrow conceptualisation of the Aboriginal subjects' *noteworthy* qualities that is problematic, but also the interests and tone of the biographical narratives, which reflect now outdated representational practices. In volume one, Arabanoo, Bennelong, and Colebe are all primarily discussed as British captives. While Arabanoo passed away from smallpox before returning to his people, Bennelong and Colebe eventually became mediators between the British and the Eora, with the latter serving as a guide for Governor Arthur Phillip's excursions to the Nepean. The biographies also overemphasise the Aboriginal men's seemingly tragic, degraded, and brutal proclivities. Despite being the first Indigenous intermediary, Bennelong was portrayed as "so fond of drinking that he lost no opportunity of being intoxicated" because he 'no longer [found] contentment or full acceptance either among his countrymen or the white men'. Likewise, Bungaree's biography focuses on his role as a leader of the Sydney Aboriginal people, a 'pathetic remnant of their people, [who] spent their days giving exhibitions of boomerang throwing, doing odd jobs, and begging for bread, liquor, tobacco and cash'. "Len' it bread", was said to be 'Bungaree's favoured approach'. And finally, Colebe's entry describes his 'quarrelsome' behaviour, and details his 'particularly violent' treatment of women.²³ While the Aboriginal men included in volume one might have been deemed noteworthy as mediators and guides or leaders of their people, they are ultimately portrayed as victim, alcoholic, beggar, and abuser.

The next *ADB* period, 1851 to 1890, differs significantly from the earlier one. First, it includes a more diverse group, with seven Indigenous men and six women: Walter George Arthur, Lucy Beeton, Dick Cabadgee, Mary Ellen Cuper, Dolly Dalrymple, Dundalli, Cora Gooseberry,

23 Eleanor Dark, 'Arabanoo (1759–1789)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/arabanoo-1711/text23943, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 14 July 2017; Eleanor Dark, 'Bennelong (1764–1813)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bennelong-1769/text1979, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 14 July 2017; F. D. McCarthy, 'Bungaree (?–1830)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bungaree-1848/text2141, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 14 July 2017; and F. D. McCarthy, 'Colebe (?–?)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/colebe-1909/text2263, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 14 July 2017.

Kaarwirn Kuunawarn, Maria Lock, Nathaniel Pepper, Trugernanner, Tulaba, and Tommy Windich. Almost all of the states are represented by this group, which comprises four Tasmanians, three Victorians, two from New South Wales, two Western Australians, and one each from the Northern Territory and Queensland. They are also defined more broadly: in addition to leaders, guides, Aborigines, or Aboriginal women/matriarchs as we saw in the earlier period, the individuals in this group include teachers, landowners, cultural brokers, and evangelists. Their occupations also include the titles 'rights activist', 'postmistress', 'telegraphist', 'farmer', 'explorer', and 'Moravian lay preacher', as well as 'resistance leaders', 'cultural informants', and 'executed criminals' as per the earlier period.

In some respects, this broader spectrum of Indigenous lives included in the 1850–90 volume reflects the evolving history of colonisation, as Aboriginal people became more entangled with Western society and institutions, forming intimate relationships with colonists and former convicts, and engaging more actively with colonial ministries, governments, and commercial interests. Lucy Beeton, for example, was born on Gun Carriage Island in the Bass Strait in 1829, the daughter of a Palawa woman, Emmerennam or 'Bet Smith', and a Jewish sealer, Thomas Beeton. Shayne Breen explains that when George Augustus Robinson evicted the sealers to establish an Aboriginal settlement there, Thomas Beeton was removed, but soon gained permission to reunite with his family, and together they eventually returned to Gun Carriage Island when Robinson relocated his settlement to Flinders Island. Lucy Beeton served as the island's teacher, after the government rejected their request to appoint one, providing religious instruction for the local community children. This work was eventually recognised, and she was given a lifetime lease of Badger Island, and became a prominent and influential trader of mutton-bird products, and advocate of Indigenous interests.²⁴

While the historical context of the second half of the nineteenth century had some considerable differences from the earlier period, arguably the key reason why these entries differ so significantly is due to changing historiographical approaches. Tellingly, only two of these 13 entries were published in the original volumes: the Tasmanian 'cultural informant'

²⁴ Shayne Breen, 'Beeton, Lucy (1829–1886)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/beeton-lucy-12790/text23079, published first in hardcopy 2005, accessed online 14 July 2017.

Trugernanner and West Australian guide and tracker Tommy Windich were included in volume six. Volume four had no Indigenous entries, and the three Aboriginal biographies published in volumes five and six were of people who passed away at a later date: William Barak (1824–1903), Johnny Mullagh (1841–1891), and Pumpkin (1850–1908).²⁵ Consequently, 11 of the 13 entries for this period, including Lucy Beeton's, result from the 2005 supplement, and reveal a stronger commitment to Indigenous inclusion and attentiveness to culturally sensitive representational practices.

The next *ADB* period is 1891 to 1939 (known in *ADB* parlance as 'period 3'). There are 30 Indigenous biographies from this period, 19 of which were included in the original six volumes (numbers 7–12, published between 1979 and 1990). This represents 0.78 per cent of the 3,813 *ADB* entries from this period. In contrast to the more even gender balance in the 1850–90 entries, this period includes 24 Indigenous men and six women. The geographic spread is also more skewed towards New South Wales (nine or 30 per cent) and Victoria (eight or 26.6 per cent); Western Australia, Queensland, and South Australia each have three entries (10 per cent), and Tasmania and the Northern Territory have two entries (6.6 per cent). Whereas the concentration of entries on people from Sydney and the Swan River Colony (Western Australia) for the first period (1788–1850) bears some correspondence to the pattern of cross-cultural contact and establishment of settlements at the time, the uneven distribution for this third period is a product of the *ADB*'s arbitrary new editorial policy. Nolan explains that in 1975 the *ADB* editorial board decided to draw on 'weighted population figures' from the census (most likely the most recent 1971 figures) to determine quotas for each of the working parties. This meant that the more populous states—New South Wales and Victoria—received the lion's share of biographical entries with 27 and 24 per cent respectively, followed by the Armed Services working party with 14 per cent. Next were Queensland (9 per cent), South Australia (8 per cent), Commonwealth (8 per cent), Western Australia (5 per cent), Tasmania (3 per cent), New Guinea (1 per cent), and Miscellaneous (1 per cent).²⁶ Yet the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 1971 did not correlate with the broader state populations: Queensland, 27.9 per cent; New South Wales, 22.6 per cent; Western Australia, 18.2 per cent; the Northern Territory,

25 See Table 1.2 'Representation of Women and Aboriginal Subjects in the *ADB*', in Nolan, "Insufficiently Engineered", 26.

26 Table 1.1 'Number and Proportion of Entries in Period 3 (1891–1939) Allocated to Each Working Party', in Nolan, "Insufficiently Engineered", 24.

17.3 per cent; South Australia, 5.9 per cent; Victoria, 5.5 per cent; Tasmania, 1.8 per cent; and the Australian Capital Territory, 0.4 per cent.²⁷ Thus, for Indigenous people the *ADB*'s quotas are very misleading as they bear little relationship to the 1971 Indigenous population, nor the contemporary populations in period 3. More significantly, they do not reflect the spread of Aboriginal language groups, or locations of key historical events and experience, so only offer a partial view from a window, to borrow Stanner's evocative metaphor.

The next period covered people who passed away between 1940 and 1980, and the *ADB* currently has entries on 87 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people relating to this period. This represents 1.6 per cent of the 5,422 total entries, which is a significant increase on the earlier periods. More significantly, 79 of these were published in the original volumes (13–16, published between 1993 and 2002), illustrating the impact that changing historiography was starting to have on the *ADB* working parties and editorial board as they consciously included more Indigenous subjects in the initial planning. Moreover, for this period, the *ADB* seemed to have relaxed its quota system in relation to Indigenous entries, as there were 34 from New South Wales (39 per cent), 18 from Queensland (20.7 per cent), 14 from the Northern Territory (16 per cent), 10 from Western Australia (11.5 per cent), nine from South Australia (10.3 per cent), and five from Victoria (5.7 per cent).²⁸ This geographic distribution of Indigenous entries seems to better reflect both the 1990s Indigenous population, with New South Wales and Queensland having the highest concentration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, followed by Western Australia and the Northern Territory, then Victoria and South Australia, with Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory having the smallest populations.²⁹ However, the gender division remains unbalanced, as only 19 of the 87 subjects are women (21.8 per cent). More so than in the earlier periods, these biographies appear to reflect broader 'samples of the "Australian experience"', part of the *ADB*'s goal to not only commemorate Australian luminaries, but also the nation's

27 Alan Gray and Leonard Smith, 'The Size of the Aboriginal Population', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 1 (1983): 7.

28 These figures are based on the state of the individual's birth, so are not completely representative due to people's increased mobility at this time: 13 passed away in a different state, and two defence force personnel overseas.

29 See '4102.0—Australian Social Trends, 1994: Population Composition: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people', Australian Bureau of Statistics, 27 May 1994, accessed 17 July 2017, www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/2420d4dd8069c743ca2570ec007853cb!OpenDocument.

‘ordinary people’.³⁰ This period includes Indigenous people from a wider array of occupations, such as factory worker, carpenter, wharf labourer, soldier, public servant, police officer, nurse, and teacher. Yet this also partly reflects the historic policies of assimilation in the mid-twentieth century, which enabled, and even coerced, more Indigenous people to move from missions to rural centres and cities and engage in ‘ordinary’ paid employment (as opposed to the largely unpaid or underpaid labour conditions in the pastoral and maritime industries that Indigenous people who were subject to Protection Acts had experienced). More significantly, 16 of the Indigenous individuals included in the *ADB*’s period 4 are also defined as ‘leaders’, and 12 as ‘activists’ or ‘resistance leaders’, highlighting the political demands for equality and self-determination made by Indigenous activists in protests ranging from the Day of Mourning (1938) through to the Tent Embassy (1972), as well as the historiography of the 1990s, which commemorated this political history and introduced it to a broader audience.

The most recently published period of the *ADB* covered people who passed away between 1981 and 1990 (volumes 17 and 18, published in 2007 and 2012). Of the 1,336 entries, 44 are Indigenous, making period 5 the period of greatest Indigenous inclusion (3.29 per cent). The geographic distribution echoes the previous period, although the gender balance is worse with only 15 per cent of the Indigenous entries pertaining to women. This period has less of a focus on depicting the lives of the Indigenous ‘everyman’ than the previous one, with 25 of the subjects being defined as leaders or activists/campaigners, as well as ‘footballer, pastor, activist and governor’ Sir Douglas Nicholls. Yet, this group also includes Lloyd James Boney (1959–1987), Edward James Murray (1959–1981), and John Peter Pat (1966–1983), who all tragically died whilst in police custody, or at the hands of the police. As Tim Rowse notes in his biography of Boney, the 1980s saw a series of cases ‘in which police were suspected of murder or, at best, manslaughter’, which led to the Commonwealth Government appointing a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1989.³¹ Such biographies reveal that the *ADB* is not focused just on celebrating the nation and its elite, but over time has also embraced its role of shining a light on the nation’s dark histories.

30 Nolan, “Insufficiently Engineered”, 22.

31 Tim Rowse, ‘Boney, Lloyd James (1959–1987)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/boney-lloyd-james-12229/text21935, published first in hardcopy 2007, accessed online 17 July 2017.

An Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography

In 2017 we embarked on a new project which aims to redress the historic underrepresentation of Indigenous Australian people in the *ADB* by producing some 190 new biographies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This will elevate the overall inclusion rate of Indigenous people to 3 per cent of the approximately 13,000 entries published in the *ADB*'s 19 volumes, a figure which roughly corresponds with the current Indigenous population. Yet we do not simply want to amplify the kinds of biographies that already exist, and proliferate 190 new entries on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guides, cultural informants, community leaders, and rights activists. Instead, we want to ensure that the new biographies we produce are more emblematic of the demographic makeup of Indigenous communities, past and present. This means increasing the proportion of Indigenous women, ensuring more language groups and communities from across Australia are represented, and considering the kinds of figures who are important to our people, and not only those who are nationally recognised for their noteworthy contributions to mainstream society.

In order to ensure that the new biographies meet this broader remit, we will adopt a more systematic approach to selecting new biographical subjects than the *ADB*'s usual 'organic' approach.³² This will entail three key preliminary stages. The first is to analyse other biographical dictionaries in order to understand the general criteria thus far used in selecting individuals, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, for inclusion. We will draw inspiration from other national dictionaries such as the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, which also published a stand-alone two-volume Māori dictionary of biography,³³ as well as the *American National Biography Online*, which has an American Indian Heritage special collection comprising 294 biographies, and the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography/Dictionnaire biographique du Canada (DCB/DBC)*. Yet we

32 Nolan, "Insufficiently Engineered", 21.

33 *The People of Many Peaks: The Maori Biographies from The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Volume 1, 1769–1869* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books and Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, 1991); and *The Turbulent Years: 1870–1900: The Maori Biographies from The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Volume Two*, Introduction by Claudia Orange (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books and Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, 1994).

can also look closer to home for inspiration, for instance, the *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography*, which, proportionately, includes a higher percentage of Indigenous subjects (8.7 per cent).³⁴

The second stage of the project involves consulting broadly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in order to ascertain grassroots visions of who should be included, and identify Indigenous cultural protocols in terms of how we research and write the biographical entries. We will do this through online surveys asking Indigenous people to reflect on the importance of a range of different qualities and criteria (identified from the current *ADB* and other dictionaries), and also ask people to nominate figures who are well remembered in their local communities, but who may not yet be nationally known, or who are still to have their life histories researched.

The final stage will investigate new biographical methods in order to identify cutting-edge life-writing approaches in Australia and elsewhere, with the intention of broadening our understanding of how Indigenous biography can be conceived. We are considering several new lines of inquiry. First, we are exploring how short-form biographies exemplified by the *ADB* might better acknowledge and accommodate Indigenous protocols, interests, and sensitivities. This is not only a matter of being sensitive to how we represent individuals who have passed on, but also of working out how we might better accommodate the communal sensibilities of many Indigenous cultures. This includes how we might produce collective Indigenous biographies of families, clans, and organisations, and how, in addressing the ostensible achievements of the Indigenous individual, we might also be more attentive to the instrumental role played by skin groups and Indigenous networks, for example in establishing the Pindan Mining cooperative following the 1946 Pilbara strike. It involves also developing an awareness of the cultural protocols concerning who might be identified as a 'leader' versus a 'spokesman' or 'scribe', as Penny Van Toorn found in her study of Coranderrk.³⁵

³⁴ David Carment, ed., *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography* (Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2008). The *NTDB* features 54 Indigenous biographies out of 618 entries. I thank Robyn Smith for providing a list of all Indigenous biographies in the *NTDB*.

³⁵ Penny Van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006).

We might also consider titles, positions, and occupations of significance to Indigenous world views. For example, the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*'s online advanced search page includes in the occupation field 'tohunga', which translates to priest or expert; 'woman of mana', that is, a woman with significant spiritual power; as well as carver, a role which is highly esteemed and significant in Māori society.³⁶ The closest approximation to the title 'tohunga' that the *ADB* currently uses is the term 'carradhy', an Eora word for a person who performed important ceremonies and mediated between the spiritual and mundane worlds. But this term only appears once, in the biography of Pemulwuy, and it is as a descriptor in the body of the biography, and not used as a title, or keyword in the search interface.³⁷ Four other *ADB* entries use the analogous term 'clever man', and five entries use 'lawman', that is, someone who has been initiated into tribal law and possesses the knowledge to conduct ceremonies. *Carradhy* is also the only Indigenous term used as a title descriptor in the *ADB*, whereas other biographical encyclopedias have employed other such terms. The National Museum of Australia's online biography of 'Old Masters', for example, describes Barraba artist Wally Mandarrk as a *marrkdijbu*, or clever man.³⁸ So perhaps we could emulate this example to incorporate Indigenous language titles in the *ADB* where they are known and appropriate.

Another question to consider is how to broaden interest in the lives of Indigenous individuals beyond the question of colonial impact. The constraints of using Western documentary sources have led to many Indigenous biographies turning on the question of how the state intervened in Indigenous lives, be it through interventionist protection policies, the removal of children from their Indigenous families, or, for historical biographies, how Indigenous people physically and politically resisted colonialism and asserted their rights. How might we write the lives of Indigenous people on their own terms, and frame Indigenous lives within their own cultural milieus? For example, the *DCB/DBC* includes an entry on the legendary figure Dekanahwideh, an Iroquois cultural hero who is commemorated as the founder of the Five Nations

36 See 'DNZB Search', *Te Ara: The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, accessed 17 July 2017, www.teara.govt.nz/en/biography_search.

37 J. L. Kohen, 'Pemulwuy (1750–1802)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pemulwuy-13147/text/23797, published first in hardcopy 2005, accessed online 17 July 2017.

38 'Wally Mandaark', in 'Old Masters: Australia's Great Bark Artists', National Museum of Australia, accessed 17 July 2017, www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/old_masters/artists/wally_mandarrk.

Confederacy.³⁹ Dekanahwideh was born amongst the Huron at what is now Thayendanaga or Deseronto Reservation, and before his birth his mother had a vision that he would ‘plant the Tree of Peace at Onondaga’. He travelled around the Five Nations—Mohawks, Oniedas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas—performing miracles to inspire each to join his mission of peace. He then planted the Tree of Peace, and delivered to the chiefs of the Five Nations the ‘Great Law’. He soon departed, promising to return if they faced extreme danger, and called his name. Dekanawideh’s legend charts the origins of the confederacy, and predates all colonial accounts; in 1654 the Jesuit missionary Le Mercier reported that the legend had been in existence ‘since the earliest times’.⁴⁰ This case suggests we could look to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose lives lie entirely outside of colonial contact and concern.

The example of Dekanahwideh also suggests we might be able to draw on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lore and in the *ADB* include biographies of ancestral beings, or ‘legendary’ figures who shaped the landscapes across the continent and created the natural world as we know it. An example of a particular ancestral being is the Rainbow Serpent, an important figure for many Aboriginal groups across Australia who is closely associated with waterways and billabongs and is known by many names, including the Wagyl for the Noongar people of the south-west. Another is Baiame, a Sky God widely known to language groups across south-eastern Australia such as ‘the Kamilaroi, Eora, Darkinjung, Wonnaruah, Awabakal, Worimi and Wiradjuri’.⁴¹ According to Warrimay historian Vicki Grieves, ‘Baiame is important for creating people themselves and when he completed his creative work he returned to the sky behind the Milky Way’.⁴²

Another question to consider is the lives of non-Indigenous people who might have been incorporated within Indigenous communities. The *American National Biography Online* includes in its American Indian Heritage list Abraham, also known as Prophet, an early nineteenth-century runaway slave who was taken in by the Seminole of Florida. The Seminole

39 Paul A. W. Wallace, ‘Dekanawideh (Deganawidah, Dekanahouideh, the Heavenly Messenger)’, in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 1, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed 17 July 2017, www.biographi.ca/en/bio/dekanahwideh_1E.html.

40 Wallace, ‘Dekanawideh’.

41 Vicki Grieves, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Aboriginal Philosophy, the Basis of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, Discussion Paper no. 9 (Darwin: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009), 9.

42 Grieves, *Aboriginal Spirituality*, 9.

were once part of both the Muscogee Nation, who had been driven out of their lands in Georgia, and the Oconee and Yamasee tribes who had fled the Carolinas in the early eighteenth century. In Florida, they had taken in many runaway slaves, adopting them into their society, and faced many skirmishes with slave owners seeking to recapture runaways. After the 1830 Indian Removal Act was passed, Abraham was involved in the Seminole's resistance to being removed to the Indian Territory, and then upon his surrender in 1837 served as a translator between the government and the Seminole.⁴³ Although Abraham was not Indigenous, Native American historians such as Ashley Glassburn Falzetti argue that it is imperative for such historical figures to be acknowledged within Indigenous histories. In her work on Frances Slocum, a settler woman captured by Miami people who spent the rest of her life in their society and had a number of Miami children, Falzetti suggests Slocum be recognised as Miami for she is the only significant Miami historical figure commemorated in local histories in Indiana. Yet her Miami identity is never acknowledged, a process which Falzetti sees as the archival equivalent of the settler-colonial logic of elimination.⁴⁴

The example of Abraham and Falzetti's argument suggests that the *ADB* could even consider the lives of non-Indigenous people who lived amongst Indigenous groups differently. For example, Worimi historian John Maynard and Victoria Haskins have written a series of biographical portraits of such individuals, *Living with the Locals: Early Europeans' Experience of Indigenous Life*. While not as explicit as Falzetti, their account of the escaped convict William Buckley, who spent 32 years amongst the Wathawurrung people of Victoria, suggests that his biography could be reinterpreted significantly. The *ADB* already has an entry on Buckley, but Marjorie Tipping's biography only briefly mentions his Aboriginal life:

[he] was befriended by Aboriginals of the Watourong tribe, who believed the big white stranger to be a reincarnation of their dead tribal chief. He learnt their language and their customs, and was given a wife, by whom, he said, he had a daughter.⁴⁵

43 Kenny A. Franks, 'Abraham', *American National Biography Online*, February 2000, accessed 23 February 2017. doi.org/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.2000002.

44 Ashley Glassburn Falzetti, 'Archival Absence: The Burden of History', *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 2 (2015): 128–44. doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2014.957258.

45 Marjorie J. Tipping, 'Buckley, William (1780–1856)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/buckley-william-1844/text2132, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 18 July 2017.

In contrast, Maynard and Haskins argue that Buckley had been incorporated into a Wathawurrung family who had renamed him Murrangurk. They suggest that his reticence to discuss significant details of Wathawurrung society, in particular their beliefs and ceremonies, was not an artefact of his ignorance, or their absence of spiritual beliefs, as was often assumed by earlier commentators and historians. Instead, they argue his silence was a sign of his deep respect for maintaining the integrity of secret-sacred knowledge, and his implied incorporation as a Wathawurrung, who renamed him.⁴⁶

At this stage of the project we are just beginning to open up how we might address biography in innovative new ways, and to consider a wide array of questions. Some further possible lines of inquiry are whether we can broaden our conceptions of Indigenous biography beyond the Indigenous person? Inspired by Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice's work on the badger, can we write the biographies of nonhumans such as particular animals which have a special significance for some Indigenous communities, like Leah Lui-Chivizhe's research on the turtle in the Torres Strait or the significant characteristics that totemic animals symbolised for different communities?⁴⁷ Or can we take inspiration from the recent legal recognition of the Whanganui River in New Zealand as an ancestor, and its being given human status as a way of including the biographies of significant landforms in the *ADB*?⁴⁸ Further, could we explore the lives of individuals who lived in the deep past, and write biographies of individuals such as Mungo Lady, who lived 42,000 years ago?⁴⁹ All of these questions suggest new ways in which the *ADB* might explore Indigenous biography, and possibilities for considering new measures of noteworthiness for the nation.

46 John Maynard and Victoria Haskins, *Living with the Locals: Early Europeans' Experience of Indigenous Life* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2016), 26–59.

47 Daniel Heath Justice, *Badger* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014); Addie Leah Lui-Chivizhe, 'Le op: An Islander's History of Torres Strait Turtle-Shell Masks' (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2016).

48 Eleanor Aingie Roy, 'New Zealand River Granted Same Legal Rights as Human Being', *The Guardian*, 16 March 2017, accessed 18 July 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being.

49 Malcolm Allbrook and Ann McGrath, 'Collaborative Histories of the Willandra Lakes', in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, eds Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 241–52. doi.org/10.22459/LHDT.05.2015.14. In 2019 Malcolm Allbrook published his *ADB* entry on Mungo Lady, which was the first biography published under the IADB project. Malcolm Allbrook, 'Mungo Lady (?-?)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mungo-lady-27703/text35292, published online 2019, accessed 3 April 2019.

Conclusion

Over the course of its 60-year history, the *ADB* has arguably come to be recognised as a key repository of Australia's story. It provides an overview of the lives of influential figures who have shaped our nation, and has proven to be an invaluable resource for Australian scholars, teachers, journalists, writers, and students, as well as a general public increasingly fascinated with biography and family history. The *ADB*'s user base has increased over the years, especially since the online *ADB* was launched. The online *ADB* regularly receives around 60 million hits each year,⁵⁰ and its biographies are republished on or linked to a range of other educational, governmental, and commercial websites. Thus, increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander biographies in the *ADB* will provide a means for ensuring that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are better included in the 'Australian story'. Yet we want to ensure that we are included in the national story on our own terms. This means the *ADB* needs to diversify the kinds of Indigenous people included, accommodating both what matters to Indigenous communities, and new biographical approaches which better accord with cultural protocols. Our hope is that the new *IADB* will enhance Indigenous people's pride in our people, past and present, by identifying and recognising significant and interesting figures from across our communities, and enhance our sense of national recognition and belonging. Finally, given the national scale of the *ADB*'s readership, we also hope it will contribute to improving non-Indigenous understandings of the lives, experiences, cultures, and contributions many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made throughout our history.

50 Information provided by Christine Fernon, online manager, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, 27 July 2018.