Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century the cattle industry has been one of Australia's major export activities. More than 80 per cent of output from northern meatworks is shipped overseas with desirable effects on the balance of payments. As well as making an economic contribution, the cattle industry has been perceived as playing an important role in the defence of Australia. Periodically concern has been expressed about the 'empty north'. A 1920 Royal Commission, for instance, urged that an intelligent effort be made to populate northern Australia with 'contented citizens'. In 1928 the North Australian Commission argued that the Kimberley district needed to be populated because it was vulnerable: 'It is so rich in natural resources that an enemy could land here and produce all their requirements, and it would take a hundredfold to displace them. Populate it. Population is the surest and best defence.'[1] A flourishing cattle industry was seen as the most appropriate way of populating an otherwise unprotected part of the continent. Indeed it was argued that the maintenance of the White Australia policy 'was held to depend more upon the success of the beef cattle industry than on any other industry in the Commonwealth'.[2] The cattle industry also played an integral part in Australia's international relations. In an era where the imperial bond was paramount, the export of beef was a tangible reminder of the alliance between Britain and Australia.

The success of this industry owes much to the contribution of Aboriginal labour. Given the marginal nature of the country, the fierce international competition and the 'tyranny of distance', it is difficult to imagine how it could have been established without the advantage of a poorly paid labour force. Unfortunately there has been no recognition of this fact in the debates over the Mabo decision, in which the Australian High Court acknowledged the existence of native title to land. Many Australians, and cattle producers in particular, see Aboriginal land claims threatening the future of the industry. The Aboriginal Reconciliation process, which is now inextricably linked with the question of native title, is one of the most important issues that this nation has had to address in its two centuries of European history. It is therefore essential to strip away myth,

misconception and myopia so that the current discussions can proceed in a rational manner. We must remove our blinkers to allow a fuller account of Aboriginal history to unfold.

Until recently historians have practised what Stanner termed the 'cult of forgetfulness'.[3] The process of writing Aboriginal people into Australian history began in the early 1970s with the groundbreaking work of historians including Henry Reynolds, Noel Loos and Charles Rowley. Their work overturned the long-established myth that Aboriginal people gave up their land without a struggle. Their resistance to the occupation of their land is now a well-established part of Australian historiography and it opened the door for a more extensive analysis of race relations. Much of this work which portrayed Aboriginal people as victims of the colonisation process had paternalistic overtones and has been described as 'eurocentric'.[4] In the early 1980s a new historiographical phase emerged, with some writers arguing that Aboriginal people were not simply victims but were active agents in shaping their relations with the European invaders. Henry Reynolds' *The Other Side of the Frontier* was the first work of this type. Others who adopted this revisionist approach included Ann McGrath, Marie Fels, Jon Altman and Bain Attwood.[5] This representation was difficult for some historians to accept because they believed that it portrayed too flattering a picture of the situation. For instance Tim Rowse, in his review of Ann McGrath's book, was critical of the fact that, while she noted the 'nostalgic quality of survivors' memories, she seeks to give substance to that nostalgia, not to undermine it'.[6]

The focus of much of this work has been on the impact of colonisation. Less documented is the contribution which Aboriginal people have made to the Australian economy. In his recent book *With the White People*, Henry Reynolds argued that the importance of black labour 'clearly challenges the still-popular view that pioneering was the exclusive achievement of Europeans and that the Aborigines contributed nothing to the successful colonisation of the continent'.[7] Some work has already been done in this area. Ann McGrath's award-winning book *'Born in the Cattle'* chronicles the importance of Aboriginal labour in the Northern Territory,[8] while Aboriginal labour in the North Queensland cattle industry has been researched by this writer.[9] Regina Ganter's study of the Torres Strait pearling industry is the most substantial work to date on maritime labour.[10] Much remains to be written if we are to have a complete understanding of the process of contact between the races. We need to know why some Aboriginal people chose to help rather than hinder Europeans who entered their territory. As Henry Reynolds has pointed out, the two themes of resistance and assistance, of confrontation and collaboration, are 'deeply rooted in the past and both also lead into the future'.[11]

While the cattle industry has been the area where Aboriginal people have made the most significant economic contribution, it has also been the door through which a large number have passed in their search for a place in the new economic order. Clearly the position of Aboriginal people in society today is very much influenced by the way in which they have been incorporated into the capitalist system. In common with indigenous groups in developed nations including the native Americans, the Maoris in New Zealand, the Ainu in Japan and the Inuit of Canada, Australian Aboriginal people occupy the most disadvantaged position in contemporary society. The literature dealing with global inequality which flourished in the 1970s provides a suitable framework for studying the process of articulation[12] of Aboriginal people with the capitalist system in general and the Queensland cattle industry in particular.

In his study of Latin America, for instance, Laclau argued that capitalism does not evolve mechanically from what precedes it, nor does it necessarily dissolve what precedes it: 'Indeed, far from banishing pre-capitalist forms it not only coexists with them but buttresses them and even on occasions devilishly conjures them up *ex nihilo*.'[13] P. P. Rey also argued that it was possible for two different modes of production to coexist and that it was meaningless to look at one in isolation as they inevitably interacted with each other. The process of articulation goes through successive stages which are characterised by the dominance first of one mode, then of the other. Rey identified three stages in the articulation process: firstly an initial link in the sphere of exchange where interaction with capitalism reinforces the pre-capitalist mode. The second stage occurs when capitalism takes root, subordinating the traditional system but still making use of it. The final stage is reached when the pre-capitalist mode is totally destroyed. Rey argued that capitalism can never immediately and totally

> eliminate the preceding mode of production, nor above all the relations of exploitation which characterise these modes of production. On the contrary during the entire period it must reinforce these relations of exploitation, since it is only this development which permits its own provisioning with goods coming from these modes of production, or with men driven from these modes of production and therefore compelled to sell their labour power to capitalism in order to survive.[14]

Under certain conditions it is in the interest of capitalists to structure the articulation of the two modes in such a manner so as to maintain the pre-capitalist mode which can act as a reservoir of cheap labour.

Some analysts have stressed the importance of internal factors within the traditional mode in accounting for the resistance of pre-capitalist economies to the penetration of capitalism. These internal dynamics influence the style and degree of articulation. Bradby argued that it was

impossible to generalise about this process and demonstrated that in Peru there were two different pre-capitalist modes articulated with capitalism in different ways. The first was a highland society where the natural economy was in an advanced state of decay, and the second was a jungle group where the traditional mode was still intact. In the latter she found that there was very little division of labour, each kinship unit being virtually self-sufficient and internally redistributive. She argued that these internal features made the jungle mode much more resistant to breakdown on contact with capitalism than the highland economic system, which displayed a 'highly individualistic spirit'.[15]

Studying the articulation of the Mbuti hunting band with a farming community, Meillassoux observed that hunting communities will not necessarily be changed by contact with an agricultural mode; they may well be unable to be transformed as the social system of the hunting band is the antithesis of that displayed by farmers.[16] Asch's study of the Dene showed them to be equally resistant to change. He suggested that even when a hunting society adopted new technology which offered improvements on traditional tools, it would not necessarily produce a change within the society. Neither, he argued, would contact with other modes considered more 'advanced'. The key factor in the process appeared to lie in the area of social relations of production in general, and their reproduction in particular.[17] In seeking to understand why southern hemisphere nations including New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile had more in common with societies in the northern antipodes than with their neighbouring underdeveloped communities, Donald Denoon argued that these countries practised a mode of production termed 'settler capitalism'. He maintained that these settler states were 'dominated by social classes committed to an imperial link and the production of export staples'. The state's role in such a society was to influence the way social classes interacted to achieve these objectives.[18]

While operating within the 'articulation of the modes of production' framework, other writers have attempted to give greater prominence to the human element of Marxist analysis. They have looked at the interpersonal relationships existing between the elite and masses in a bid to explain the transition from one mode to another. The patron–client paradigm has attracted considerable interest in explaining the emergence of capitalism in Third World countries. Soiffer and Howe, for instance, have used the model to describe the linkage between stratas in society in a small town in rural north-west Brazil. They found that in the initial stages, the patron was the monopolistic wielder of local power because he controlled the resources. During the early stages of articulation, the impact of the state was indirect. But the state was forced to become increasingly involved in the process to correct cyclical variations, and many

functions previously performed by the patron were transferred to the state. Eventually the patron was deprived of his role as broker and 'reduced to a supplicant for state favour'.[19] An alternative approach which also examines the interpersonal relationships is the notion of economic brokers. It has been suggested that individuals play a major role in connecting the local system with the wider socio-economic system. Norman Long, for instance, argued that the analysis of the modes of production enables us to identify the type of horizontal relation that occurs at local levels 'and helps to describe the ways in which these function to maintain certain types of vertical relations. We are left with a gap in our analysis if we do not also attempt to understand in detail the activities and strategies of such brokers.'[20]

The concept of internal colonialism likewise can be located in the articulation of the modes of production framework. As Wolpe pointed out, 'there are close parallels between the external relationship established by colonial powers over colonized people and the relationship between the dominant and subordinate racial and ethnic groups during the period of capitalist expansion'. The relationship involves two different countries and involves domination, oppression and exploitation. He maintained that the articulation was not always the same but could vary for a number of reasons. 'In one place,' he argued,

> the relationship of capital to the non-capitalist mode of production may revolve around the extraction in different ways—by plunder, or in the exchange of non-equivalent or by means of the process of price formation—of the commodities produced by the latter . . . At another place, the main focus on the relationship may be on the extraction, not of the product, but of labour power . . . While in both these cases the associated political policy turns on the domination and preservation of the non-capitalist societies, in other instances the particular mode of economic exploitation may be destroyed by the non-capitalist societies.[21]

In 1976 Mervyn Hartwig suggested that the theory of internal colonialism was an appropriate framework to analyse Aboriginal–white relations in Australia. He argued that colonisers needed both land and labour to develop the capitalist mode of production. The land could be expropriated through superior European technology but because of Aboriginal people's profoundly different socialisation, their labour was not directly transferable to the capitalist system. He maintained that exploitation could proceed, therefore, 'only through the dissolution of the Aboriginal mode of production and the resocialization of its agents for entry into the capitalist production relations'.[22] He believed that the 'dominant ideological and political practice of the state' was therefore aimed at achieving resocialisation.

Shortly after the presentation of Hartwig's paper, anthropologist Jeremy Beckett applied the theory of internal colonialism to a study of Torres Strait Islanders working in the pearling industry. He argued that the Torres Strait Islanders remained an 'enclave of underdevelopment' not because of their geographical isolation, but because of the nature of the marine industry in which they worked. The Queensland government was committed to ensuring that the marginal pearling and trepanging industries had access to a source of cheap labour. Lacking alternative employment, Islanders had little option but to work for small wages 'but this they could only do as long as they could supplement their earnings with sea food and garden produce. They were thus anchored to their communities, which became part of the industry's support structure.'[23] Beckett was of the opinion that the model of internal colonialism could also be applied to the northern cattle industry, which, like pearling, had a long history of dependence on cheap seasonal Aboriginal labour.

According to Drakakis-Smith, the proliferation of church missions and government settlements as labour reserves where families were looked after while men went out to work for months at a time was internal colonialism in full flow. He pointed out that the dominant mode of production 'used institutionalised power (both temporal and spiritual) to establish a spatial division akin to that [existing] in South Africa. It became a system which was ideologically buttressed by increasing ethnocentrism and racism on the part of the white population in northern and central Australia.'[24]

In a study of an Aboriginal community on the mid-north coast of New South Wales, Barry Morris argued that Aboriginal society 'did not collapse or simply fade away, it was suppressed'. He identified three stages in its incorporation into the European workforce. In the initial stage, Aboriginal people were spatially distributed in camps according to the labour requirements of the European economy. Morris wrote that as a number of families

> were usually involved in the work sites the particular work patterns shared much in common with traditional subsistence patterns. Bush tucker was an integral aspect of this stage with seasonal nature of work permitting the mobility of traditional life. However the introduction of compulsory schooling for Aborigines after 1911 changed this work pattern.[25]

The second phase of Aboriginal employment coincided with the concentration of Aborigines in Bellbrook reserve with the essential feature of their labour market being segmentation. This was based on race: Aboriginal people occupied jobs which had low status and low income and were physically strenuous, with higher rates of unemployment than in other parts of the economy. Morris's third stage in the use of Aboriginal

labour emerged in the 1950s, when structural changes within the rural economy resulted in the disappearance of labour-intensive jobs that Bellbrook people had filled. As a result, unemployment amongst local Aboriginal people was endemic.

Howard maintained that Aboriginal people were transformed into an underdeveloped people because they were denied access to the physical resources, especially land. Additionally, they were permitted to take up only the most menial jobs and were exploited in the labour market. Howard argued that Europeans have been able to maintain the status quo by using dependent Aboriginal elites as cultural brokers or middlemen. These people are conditioned by, and dependent on, white administrators for achievement and often for the maintenance of their status. He pointed out that those who refused to accept this situation were denied access to resources and political legitimacy by whites. In general they were forced to be silent, 'ending up fleeing into the bush, becoming alcoholics or wending their ways into insane asylums'.[26]

Jon Altman studied the articulation of an Aboriginal community with a capitalist welfare state, using three alternative theoretical approaches—modernisation, dependency, and articulation of the modes of production. He concluded that none of these theories adequately explained how a hunter-gatherer community was articulated with the state. His research revealed that the response of the Gunwinggu economy to the intrusion of the state resulted in a number of changes to the traditional system. It became more efficient; a new market sector evolved; and the economic system became more egalitarian. This, as Altman pointed out, was quite contrary to the predictions of the modernisation, dependency and the modes of production approaches. He believed that the eastern Gunwinggu economic system

> has shown remarkable resilience in adapting to changed circumstances following European colonisation. In previous countless millennia, Gunwinggu had extremely limited external contacts. But in the past twenty to thirty years, they have experienced intense and continuous contact with the State. In this time, they have created an economic system, that incorporates important elements of the traditional cultural and economic systems, yet is enmeshed within a complex set of relations with the alien market economy and welfare state. This situation has been possible because, rather than just responding to changed circumstances, Gunwinggu have created their own economic and social environment, within the structural limitations placed on their lifestyle.[27]

Anthropologist Chris Anderson has described contemporary Aboriginal households as 'multiple enterprises' in which some individuals obtain cash income by means of wage labour or social security, while others concentrate on obtaining resources and food and materials from outside

the cash economy, primarily via traditional Aboriginal production means. To explain the existence of 'multiple enterprises', Anderson first tested the validity of the 'informal sector' theory.[28] The modes of production approach made it possible to examine interactions and relations of dominance between the Aboriginal and capitalist modes of production. In his study of the Bloomfield area in North Queensland, Anderson identified three stages in the articulation process. The first began in the 1890s with the expansion of mining, logging, *bêche-de-mer* and the pastoral industries into the area. During this period when these industries relied on Aboriginal labour, the traditional mode was definitely subordinate, but it was in the interest of employers to see that the traditional mode was retained to ensure a pool of cheap labour. As a result of mechanisation and the declining importance of some industries, the second stage occurred between the two world wars. Demand for Aboriginal labour fell and local blacks were forced to fall back almost wholly onto the Aboriginal mode. Unfortunately, because of the disruption to the traditional forces of production by Europeans, the Aboriginal mode could no longer completely reproduce itself; the result was social disruption and a declining Aboriginal population. The third stage of articulation occurred in the mid-1950s, when mission work and social security benefits provided cash which to some extent compensated for the deficiencies in the Aboriginal mode.[29] Although the nature of articulation in the Queensland cattle industry was different, the timing of the three stages corresponds approximately with those identified by Anderson in his study of the Bloomfield area. It would appear then that the modes of production framework is a useful device for understanding the way in which Aboriginal workers in the Queensland cattle industry have been absorbed into the wider economic system.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, labour relations in Queensland became a highly complex issue, involving the state, mission officials, the labour movement and international capital to a greater extent than in other parts of northern Australia. Because of timing, Queensland played a crucial role in the shaping of social relations on the frontier. In the 1880s when the Northern Territory and Kimberley regions were being stocked, the use of Aboriginal labour in the Queensland cattle industry was well established and widespread. It was to Queensland that a large number of graziers turned, not only for their stock but for expertise, both black[30] and white.[31] By 1901 Queensland administrators believed that they were authorities in the use of Aboriginal labour; theoretically workers in the pastoral industry in that state had better conditions and were paid far higher wages than others. Because of the acceptance of this belief, key personnel in Queensland were influential in the formulation of Aboriginal policies in other states. In 1905, for instance, Queensland's

Chief Protector of Aboriginals, Walter Roth, was selected to head a Royal Commission on the condition of Western Australian Aboriginal people.[32] J. W. Bleakley, Queensland Chief Protector of Aborigines from 1914 to 1942, was asked in 1928 to report on the condition of Aborigines and half-castes of central and northern Australia.[33] Queensland also played a key role in the Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, held in 1937. While Queensland set the tone for other areas, the treatment of Aboriginal and Islander people differed markedly between states. There have been some interesting consequences. For instance, there has never been a strike of Aboriginal workers in the Queensland cattle industry, although similar events have occurred in both Western Australia and the Northern Territory.[34]

Crucial to their valuable contribution to the cattle industry has been the Aboriginal knowledge of the country in which they lived. For this reason this book begins with a chapter outlining land management practices at the time of contact. This has been largely reconstructed from the journals of explorers, who were the first Europeans to have contact with Aboriginal people. As Paul Carter has so ably demonstrated in his books,[35] however, these can be a problematic source. According to Carter, explorers' main aim in the publication of their journals was 'not to record history but to *make* it—to establish [their] own historical significance'.[36] Now that some Aboriginal people have obtained ownership of their own cattle stations and others are poised to play a part in the management of national parks in Queensland, the final chapter takes the reader back to the issue of contemporary land management practices. The bulk of the material for this book has come from my doctoral thesis, which is based on government reports, newspapers and station records. Like many others working in the field, I have relied on oral history for the reconstruction of the Aboriginal perspective. Much of this material I have collected myself, but I have also consulted the published oral histories of others, including Bill Rosser's *Dreamtime Nightmares*, Peter and Jay Read's *Long Time, Olden Time* and Paul Marshall's *Raparapa*.[37]

Oral history is a source which has to be used with care. Ann McGrath cautions that it 'offers views of the past as interpreted according to the participant's present'.[38] I found that some Aboriginal informants were keen to tell me what they thought I *wanted* to hear. I was also conscious of the fact that the interpretation of the past varied greatly between those who lived in the coastal towns and those who lived in remote centres. The latter, confronted with mounting social problems, showed a tendency to remember fondly their life as pastoral workers. This was less evident amongst the more sophisticated town-dwellers. With the increasing politicisation of Aboriginal people, the interpretation of the past by those living in more isolated communities may well be quite different in the

future. As Attwood has pointed out, 'oral testimony can reveal as much about the present of a subject as their past, and so has a dual quality elucidating the time of remembering as well as the time remembered'.[39] These issues do not, however, invalidate the use of material from this source. All history, oral or otherwise, is a reconstruction of the past shaped by contemporary values.