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Personalising the History Wars: Woretemoetyenner's Story¹

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Abstract:

Warriors in the history wars' do battle over the accuracy and portrayal of Aboriginal history in Tasmania, but for the descendants of the traditional people this contested field is also the site of our families' stories. This paper juxtaposes, via the woven narrative of Woretemoetyenner, a personal perspective against the history wars sterile dissection of official records. Woretemoetyenner's story serves as a personalising frame for Tasmanian colonial history. Born before the beginning of European colonisation, by the end of her life fewer than 50 traditional Tasmanians remained. Her story also shines a light on the lived experiences of that small group of Aboriginal women who form the link between the traditional people and present Tasmanian Aboriginal communities. Most critically, Woretemoetyenner's life is a personal story of a life lived through these now disputed and debated times.

Personalising the History Wars: Woretemoetyenner's Story

Keith Windschuttle chose Tasmania from 1803 to 1847 to begin his challenge to 'the credibility of the received interpretation' (2002, 3) of Aboriginal history. All queried events occurred over 160 years ago; a past era where none of those directly involved are alive or even within living memory. This is especially so in the case of the traditional peoples of Tasmania, whom Windschuttle labels criminals; their attacks on the usurpers of their traditional lands deemed robbery and murder rather than a war against dispossession (2002, 98-99). Their descendants, our family among them, he dismisses as greedy opportunists taking advantage of misguided collective guilt to lay private claim to valuable public lands. Our respectful burial or cremation of our reclaimed stolen ancestors' remains he derides as 'vandalism' (2002, 417-423) and our Aboriginality, he declares 'invented', largely to claim more generous welfare benefits (2002, 432-436).

While disparaging of both the past and present Aboriginal population, Windschuttle's argument is not actually about our people. What is under his intense scrutiny is how the historical record and archival materials of the time are read and analysed by contemporary historical scholars. Unpacking the intricacies of footnotes and insisting on the pre-eminence of the official record in relation to Aboriginal dispossession and deaths, he alleges that much of the previously accepted story of Aboriginal/European interactions in colonial Tasmania is, in fact, 'fabricated'.

But this 'history' that is being so microscopically examined and re-examined, and subjected to claim and counter claim, is also part of our families' stories. While Windschuttle engages in lengthy analysis of the historical records, we wonder about the people themselves. We think about the anger Manggalgenna must have felt as he realised the true intentions of the sealers and the colonists, and the worthlessness of their promises. We imagine his despair when he realised that his sick and disheartened peoples were fatally outnumbered.

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And our hearts break when we read of Mannalargenna's anguish as he watched his homelands disappearing from sight as he too was taken to the Aboriginal 'establishment' at Flinders Island (Plomley 1987).

Personalising the History Wars: The Life of Woretemoetyenner

For us, it is personal. Ironically, and tragically, our major knowledge base for details of our forebears such as Mannalargenna is the same historical record so strenuously pored over and disputed by Windschuttle. We have our family stories and traditions, but when we go looking for more on the individual people we must search out the words written about them by the colonisers and their servants such as George Augustus Robinson. We must venture into the world of archives and libraries. We recently took this journey in search of Woretemoetyenner. The matriarch of many current Tasmanian (and Victorian) Aboriginal people, Woretemoetyenner's life spans the period under Windschuttle's gaze, although she rates no mention in his book.

In offering this woven narrative of Woretemoetyenner's life we make no attempt to engage in any debate about the accuracy of the historical material consulted. Even a cursory delve into the scattered references to Woretemoetyenner in the various written accounts of colonial Tasmania quickly finds contradictions and inconsistencies that immediately disabuse the notion of obtaining any 'one true' account. Rather, our purpose is to juxtapose a personal perspective of Tasmanian Aboriginal history against the sterile dissection of official records that features so prominently in the history wars.

In this endeavour we are painfully aware that our sources are the records of the colonists. These are only interpretable through a knowledge lens of colonialism and its practices, rationalisations, and attitudes towards Indigenous peoples. The records made and the stories told come not from disinterested, objective spectators but by those actively involved in the events and times they are describing. Some stories are repetitious, such as the tale of Woretemoetyenner's infant daughter being thrown into a fire (see Bonwick 1870; Evans 1822; Ling Roth 1899 for example). Such accounts are highly subjective, providing insight into the events construed by the writers as important or interesting. The context, language and framing of the records also reflect the changing nature and framing of Aboriginal/European relations through the 19th century. For example, Bonwick's (1870) romanticising of the relationship between Woretemoetyenner and George Briggs was clearly written at a time when Tasmanian Aborigines, and perhaps also the sealers, were no longer perceived as a direct threat to the colony or the colonists.

More crucially, such records do not reflect in any way the thoughts, recollections and interpretations of events by Woretemoetyenner herself. While we can establish core events using the historical record, we can only conjecture on the circumstances that led to these or their impact. As such, in this narrative we have limited our own imagining or speculation about how Woretemoetyenner felt about key events in her life, or possible explanatory scenarios, to a minimum. This is not because we have not thought about these; we thought and spoke of little else during our research. Rather, we are wary of trying to overlay our own interpretation; preferring readers take these steps themselves in reading this story of Woretemoetyenner's amazing but terrible life and times. With all these cautions in mind, what follows is a family narrative of the life of a real woman who lived, and died, during this debated and disputed period of time.

Woretemoetyenner's World

Woretemoetyenner was born in the mid 1790s in the Cape Portland area in north-eastern Tasmania. As a Trawlwoolway child she lived her traditional Aboriginal lifestyle, living inland during the colder months and moving to the coast for shellfish and other seasonal foods during the summer. The Trawlwoolway were North East people, one of the nine Aboriginal nations that comprised Aboriginal Tasmania and their territory covered five thousand square kilometres. Woretemoetyenner's father, Mannalargenna, was the head man of the North East group.

As a small child Woretemoetyenner may have seen the sails of a European ship on the horizon. But the first direct contact of the Trawlwoolway people with Europeans was likely with the sealers in Bass Strait. In 1797 the *Sydney Cove* was wrecked in the Furneaux Islands.

The bountiful population of seals on the islands were noted during the salvage and by 1802 at least two hundred men were sealing in the Bass Strait islands. The taking of Aboriginal women had also begun. James Munroe, a notorious sealer in the area, stated that while the sealers first captured Aboriginal women for sex, they later found them to be essential companions, able to find food, hunt, and skin seal and wallaby (Mollison and Everitt 1978). By 1803, the European incursion proper had begun with a colonial settlement established at Risdon Cove in the south and another in 1804 at Port Dalrymple, just beyond the outer western edge of Trawlwoolway territory.

Around 1810 Woretemoeteryenner began living with the sealer who would father her five known children. George Briggs arrived as a 14 year-old from England at Port Jackson in 1805. Some sources indicate that Woretemoeteryenner was abducted by Briggs (Plomley 1987), others that she was given to him by her father, Mannalargenna, as a gesture of goodwill to ensure a co-operative relationship between the sealers and his people (Pybus 2000). Given that Briggs learned Woretemoeteryenner's language and was on good terms with her father for many years, it was likely an arrangement rather than a direct abduction. Woretemoeteryenner is also referred to as 'Mrs Briggs' by colonial officials at various times through-out her life and on her death certificate. Neither of these status conventions were afforded other Aboriginal woman who bore children to sealers. Whatever its origins, the Woretemoeteryenner and George Briggs union is no love story. George Briggs took, and this time the evidence points to abduction, at least one other Aboriginal woman and in the 1820s he sold Woretemoeteryenner to another sealer, John Thomas (Plomley 1987).

Woretemoeteryenner's life with Briggs was hard. Plomley and Henley (1990, 33) give a description of the Bass Strait sealers at this time. They write:

The sealers were of various nationalities. Most of them were Englishmen, but those who came to live in Bass Strait included at least one New Zealander and one Otaheitian, as well as an American Negro... The largest group appears to have comprised seamen who had deserted their ships on arrival at Port Jackson or Hobart. Making up a second group were a number of ex-convicts; having served their sentences they seem to have gone to the Straits as a place where they would be out of sight as well as out of mind, and where they could continue a lawless life without much fear of retribution.

The common picture of the interaction between the Aboriginal women and the sealers is one of barbarity and cruelty. George Augustus Robinson reports an Aboriginal woman Bul.rer, telling him how she was captured by the sealer, James Munro, who with others, rushed the family grouping and took six women including herself. Bul.rer reported that at the time she was only a little girl, just crawling and that she had been with Munro ever since (Plomley 1966).

Woretemoeteryenner's Children

In about 1812 Woretemoeteryenner gave birth to her recorded first child, Dalrymple Briggs. This little girl, better known as Dolly, was described later by Evans (1822) as '... a fine child, remarkably handsome, of a copper colour, with rosy cheeks, large black eyes, their whites tinged with blue, long well-formed eyelashes, the teeth uncommonly white, the limbs admirably formed'. Widely regarded as the first living child born to a white man and an Aboriginal woman in Van Diemen's Land (Mollison and Everitt 1978; Ling Roth, 1899), Dolly's place of birth is uncertain. Some suggest she was born on Cape Barren Island (Felton 1984) and others suggest Port Dalrymple (Bonwick 1969). The latter site is more likely given its reflection in her name.

At an early stage Dolly entered the household of Dr Mountgarret, the settlement's surgeon. She was baptised Dalrymple Mountgarret Briggs in 1814 at age two, and is listed aged seven among the Port Dalrymple inhabitants in 1819 (Schaffer 1991). How and why Woretemoeteryenner gave over care of her first born is impossible to tell. Mountgarret left no diaries and family history is mute on this point. Perhaps Briggs, wanting to free Woretemoeteryenner for sealing activity, organised the placement. More generously, Briggs may have been concerned about the child's chances of survival in a sealing camp. Or it may have been at Mountgarret's instigation. Regardless, the arrangement was also an open one with Dolly continuing to see her mother.

Woretemoeteryenner spent the period from 1810 to 1820 with Briggs, sealing and bearing children. We know Woretemoeteryenner was on Cape Barren Island in 1816 from the report of Captain James Kelly.

Kelly (1921), on a voyage around Tasmania, lists George Briggs among the four crewmembers. Briggs, he also notes, had two wives and five children on Cape Barren Island. When landing at Ringarooma Point, Kelly's party was met by a large group of Aborigines. Kelly writes that they knew Briggs well and that one of Briggs' wives was the chief's (Mannalargenna's) daughter. On enquiring after his daughter, Briggs said she and her children were safe on Cape Barren. Mannalargenna replied that he knew for he saw her smoke almost every day.

The next recorded child is Eliza Briggs, born in the Furneaux Islands about 1817, although the earlier reference by Kelly to five children suggests Woretemoetyenner had other non-recorded children who did not live to adulthood. Another daughter, Mary/Margaret Briggs was born the following year. At some point Eliza and Mary also left their mother's care. Mary and Eliza appear on an 1827 list of 'half-caste' girls living with European families in Launceston (Mollison and Everitt 1978).

Around 1819 Woretemoetyenner and George Briggs had another daughter. The tale of what happened to this child is frequently featured in colonial books. The incident occurred when Woretemoetyenner was camped with a sealing party near Port Dalrymple. In our own family story of this child, the baby was about seven months old (Deane 2004). Evans, writing in 1820 (18-19), tells it this way:

(Woretemoetyenner) wandered from her sealing party with a young child at her breast, and, accidentally falling in with a band of natives, was immediately attacked, and threatened to be severely punished: her infant was snatched from her and thrown into a large fire. This treatment inspired the woman with the most desperate courage; she rushed, with the rapidity of lightning, through the horde of barbarians by whom she was surrounded, and in an instant plucked her child from the devouring element, and ran off with it into the woods on the opposite side, whither she was followed by the savages. ... Considerable search was made for her by the men; but finding it useless, they returned to their fire, round which they shortly afterward laid down, and went to sleep. The poor woman having an opportunity to observe this, and finding her retreat well secured, quietly left her hiding place, and, making her escape, before morning reached the town of Launceston, a distance of about ten miles ...

Despite the medical attention of Dr Mountgarret, the child died from her injuries several days later. In 1820, Woretemoetyenner' son, John Briggs was born (Mollison and Everitt 1978). We know from Barwick (1985) that John and his mother had regular contact until Woretemoetyenner was confined at the Aboriginal establishment in 1830.

Voyage to Mauritius

There is no discernible record of Woretemoetyenner's life from 1820 until 1825. Her abandonment by George Briggs occurred during this period and his sale of her, for one guinea, to John Thomas also likely occurred during this time (Plomley 1966; Felton 1984). By now she would have had little choice but to continue to live and work in the sealers' camps as her own people were decimated by disease and frontier violence. But by the 1820s the sealing industry was also in trouble, with sealers having to travel further and further in search of seals.

We know from archival and other records that Woretemoetyenner was a part of a sealing party on at least one of these long-range trips. Originally intended to reach the Southern Indian Ocean islands of St Paul's and Amsterdam, a dangerous trip in itself, this journey was even more fraught. The journey began in 1825 and the group of sealers and Aboriginal women spent some time at King George's Sound in Western Australia. They then sailed on to St Paul's Island but were unable to land because of bad weather. Claiming he was running short of provisions, the ship's captain landed the Aboriginal women and one of the sealers, Taylor, on the Island of Rodrigues, insisting he would return for them when reprovisioned. According to Taylor's record (CSO1/121/3067, #91) he, Woretemoetyenner and the other women waited from May to December to no avail, before finally taking passage to Mauritius. The strains of their lengthy travels and survival in unfamiliar environments took a toll on their health, and one of the Tasmanian women, Wateripita, died in Port Louis. Less than three weeks later, one of the children also died.

Mauritian administrators finally arranged for the group's repatriation and the three women and the remaining child arrived in Sydney in May 1827. One of the three, Menerletterner, was very ill on arrival

and admitted to the General Hospital in Sydney. Later in May, two years after she had set out, Woretmoetyenner returned to Tasmania and was delivered to the commandant at the station in Launceston (CSO 1/121/3067, #70). Here, the other remaining woman also died. Woretmoetyenner's grief at the passing of her last companion is recorded, stating that three Aboriginal women accompanied 'the corpse to her grave, there and all their way to it cried bitterly' (CSO 1/121/3067, #81).

War

The Tasmania to which Woretmoetyenner returned was one of increasing violence. The Aborigines were waging a now desperate war to reclaim their territory from the rapidly spreading colony. During Woretmoetyenner's absence, Governor Arthur issued proclamations empowering settlers and the military to take up arms against Aboriginal groups and authorising the arrest of Aboriginal leaders responsible for attacks. The 1828 Proclamation of Demarcation prevented Aborigines from using any area of land farmed or claimed in any way by the colonisers, with the concession that they were permitted to pass through the settled districts 'when on their passage to the shore, provided their chiefs guaranteed their quietness, and possessed a pass under the hand and seal of the Governor' (West 1971, 277). Not surprisingly the Aborigines ignored its directives and in response the Governor declared Martial Law.

The infamous Black Line also occurred in this period. This plan involved the active pursuit of the Aborigines by means of lines of armed settlers and soldiers. The plan was to drive the remaining people into captivity. The Black Line was a costly failure, using £30,000 and eight weeks of the colony's manpower. It resulted in the capture of only two Aborigines and the shooting of two others (Ryan 1981). Ryan also comments that despite ridicule from the local press, the Line achieved its objective. The sheer numbers of colonists overwhelmed the increasingly sick and dispirited Aborigines and also drove the remaining bands to new and unfamiliar territories.

Imprisonment in the Aboriginal Establishment

In January 1830, Governor Arthur selected George Augustus Robinson to lead a 'Conciliatory Mission' to end the war by persuading the Aborigines to give up their struggle. As Robinson began to bring in fragmented remnants of the Aboriginal population, the next question for the colony was where these people should go. The key criteria were that the Aborigines could not easily return to Tasmania and that the establishment should provide an opportunity for the Aborigines to be 'conciliated and civilised'. After several abortive encampments at inappropriate locations, the Aboriginal establishment was set up on Flinders' Island at Wybalenna; a name signifying, in the language of the Ben Lomond tribe, 'Blackman's Houses'

On 2 December 1830 Robinson sent his coxswain, James Parish, to search the islands for sealing women. Robinson recorded the names of the five women brought from Penguin Island and what he knew of them, including:

Woretmoetyenner, alias Bung, a native of Big Mussel Roe (called Preeluneer) who was taken away when a girl and got a boy at Jew Munro's and is sister to Wotecowidyer, who lived with Brown (Plomley 1966, 296-297).

Of the circumstances under which Woretmoetyenner was taken from the sealers camps Robinson wrote:

Parish said that he proposed calling at Penguin Island and that when he arrived he found one man named Turnbull who was left in charge of things. There was five women, but they had concealed themselves on the approach of the boat – this was the sealers' orders – but their numerous dogs led to the discovery of them by barking. Tekartee, the black woman, went in quest of them, and after explaining the nature of the boat's coming, they accompanied her and was most anxious to get away (Plomley 1966, 294).

We know from Robinson's records that Woretmoetyenner was a part of his 'Aboriginal establishment' from late 1830 till 1841. Mentions of her by name, however, in his diaries are sparse. In part this appears

due to his tendency to view the Aborigines as a group rather than individuals and this seems to be especially apparent when referring to the women. Robinson, for example, often talks about 'a group of women' or 'some of the women' without naming which women these were, although he knew each individually. Robinson also renamed all the Aborigines at the establishment, mostly for his ease of record keeping. Consequently what few records exist refer to Woretemoeteryenner as 'Margaret'. The Journals of two Quaker visitors to the Aboriginal establishment, James Backhouse and his friend George Washington Walker, in the early 1830s also make two specific references to Woretemoeteryenner during this time. In the first they observed some of the women flat oval stones marked with red and black lines to remember and represent absent friends. Some of the women, they wrote, including Woretemoeteryenner, were once taken to the Isle of France (Mauritius). In the second they describing the eating of mutton birds and add that:

Before we left the settlement one of the women named Bung [Woretemoeteryenner] brought us some of the root of the *tara* (*Pteris esculenta*) a fern very common in Van Diemen's Land, and which roasted has an insipid mucilaginous taste, such as would be very acceptable to a hungry person (Plomley 1987, 239).

Mannalargenna, Woretemoeteryenner's father, was also sent to Wybalenna in 1835. Robinson's journal records the deep emotion felt by Mannalargenna on leaving his home country. Robinson wrote:

When we were off Swan Island Mannalargenna the chief gave evident signs of strong emotion. Here opposite to this island was his country; Swan Island was the place I brought him to when I removed him from his country. He paced the deck, looked on all the surrounding objects, fresh recollections came to his mind. He paced to and fro like a man of consequence, like an emperor. Round his head he has tied a slip of kangaroo skin, which added greatly to his imperial dignity (Plomley 1987, 297-298).

Mannalargenna died at Wybalenna less than three months later. Robinson records that a daughter and a son were among those who attended him.

Life at Wybalenna

Although promised freedom to pursue their traditional lifestyles, at the establishment, the Aborigines' lives were increasingly regulated, especially those of the women. Instruction in needlework, housework, cooking, cleaning and attending 'school' were compulsory. Another activity was the weekly market. These markets enabled the Aboriginal participants to 'spend' the monies they had earned by working around the settlement and to sell their own produce. The records for the week commencing 25 October 1836, shows that Woretemoeteryenner (recorded as Margaret) purchased two quantities of sugar and was paid 5/3 for seven kangaroo skins she prepared (Robinson's Journals, Vol. 52).

While Woretemoeteryenner lived this way, her daughter Eliza was ill in Launceston. Eliza was admitted to the Benevolent Hospital where she died, aged 21 years and described in the burial records (51) of St John's Church as "A woman of colour, born in the colony, free" (RGD 34, No. 51, 5086/1837). Within two years, Woretemoeteryenner lost another daughter, Mary (Margaret) Briggs. Her burial record reads 'Half Caste native. Buried 31 July 1839. Aged 21 years' (RGD 34, No.317,145/1839).

The last mention of Woretemoeteryenner in Robinson's journals in 1840 describes what he knew of her history. This is very little considering she was in his direct charge for a decade at Wybalenna and he must have seen her on nearly a daily basis. He wrote:

Ware-mo-deen-ner alias Pung. About 40 years of age is a native of Cape Portland was forcibly taken from her Country by a sealer in name George Briggs by whom she had 3 children who are still living. Briggs afterwards sold her to John Thomas alias Long Tom for a guinea. This man is still living at Launceston and is employed as a seaman on board of Griffith's Schooner. This woman informed me that she saw the sealers rob the Marg-Sloop which was stranded on Penguin Island. Says that Tucker stole the boat belonging to the sloop and concealed it on Cape B that Thomson and a sealer named Little Charley took property away belonging to the sloop. This woman had a husband among the blacks (Robinson's Journals, Vol. 40).

The husband Robinson refers to is probably 'Phillip', (no Aboriginal name is recorded in Robinson's diaries), an Aboriginal man from the Campbell Town area. For how long they were together and what kind of relationship they shared, we do not know. Robinson was in the habit of 'marrying' the Aborigines in an effort to reduce the amount of 'licentious' behaviour between the men and the woman. 'Phillip' died at Wybalenna in March 1839 (Robinson's Journals, Vol. 51).

Release and Return to Family

In Tasmania, Woretmoeteryenner's daughter Dolly lived with Thomas Johnson, an ex-convict, near Perth. Despite Woretmoeteryenner's long interment at Wybalenna, the mother and daughter ties remained strong. In 1841, Dolly petitioned the colonial offices for the release of her mother into her care (CO280/133, 171-171a), writing:

You will no doubt recollect of my speaking to you yesterday about my mother who is at Flinders Island - and whose name is Mrs Briggs. As it is now a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing her, and as my situation and circumstances enable me to keep her with me in comfort may I respectfully beg leave to solicit your interposition through the proper Channel of getting an order for the removal of my mother from Flinders Island to my residence in the Township of Perth.

Any expenses attending her Conveyance to this place I shall be most willing to pay by your obliging and humane kindness I humbly trust you will use your influence in procuring this favour, and for which I shall feel much obliged.

Captain Moriarty, a retired naval officer in charge of troops at Dunorlan, supported Dolly's petition and this support was likely vital to its success. Although relatively prosperous, Thomas and Dolly were not respectable. Johnson was a former convict reconvicted in 1836 for receiving stolen goods and Dolly's Aboriginality was a problem in the now 'Aborigine free' colony. Family stories indicate that she, Thomas and the children often suffered significant social discrimination.

Dolly's petition also coincided with a review of Wybalenna. This review in May 1841, focussed on what were increasingly seen as the exorbitant costs of maintaining the establishment (CO280/133, 150-151). The board recommended Woretmoeteryenner be released into Dolly's care, probably for cost-saving reasons, noting of Woretmoeteryenner that:

she is the wife of a sealer named Briggs, she has a daughter, a half caste who she wishes to join/married to a man named Johnson living in Perth. The Board took an opportunity of seeing these people when passing through that township. They are able to support the mother and equally ready to receive her. 10th June 1841, Signed Wm Moriarty, WF Mitchell (CO280/133, 162-163).

Woretmoeteryenner was the only Aboriginal Tasmanian released from confinement and allowed to return, unfettered, to Tasmania.

Before Woretmoeteryenner reached the Johnson household, Dolly gave birth to her seventh child, Lewis. Woretmoeteryenner was enchanted with Dolly's baby. Recorded interviews with family members in the early 1900s report that: 'When Lewis Johnson lived at Perth, his grandmother, (Mrs Briggs), would go away among the honeysuckles looking for big grubs. When living at Dunorlan she used to take him (Lewis) on her back and go all round the Christmas Hills lighting fires all the way so that it would be known where they were' (Plomley 1991, 49).

In 1846, Woretmoeteryenner moved with Dolly, Thomas and their eight children from Perth to Dunorlan. Now over fifty years of age, Woretmoeteryenner's health was failing. Shortly before her death, Lewis, then aged six, told his mother that Woretmoeteryenner was going to make a really big fire soon and that they had been collecting wood and stacking it into a big hollow tree (Plomley 1991). Woretmoeteryenner was building her funeral pyre. On 13 October 1847, after six years living with her daughter and grandchildren, Woretmoeteryenner died peacefully at Dolly's home. Her death certificate states that 'Margaret Briggs', an 'Aboriginal native of VDL', died of natural causes (SC 195/21).

One week after Woretemoeteryenner's death, Wybalenna was closed and the remaining 47 people, including her younger sisters Wapperty, Wottecowidyer and Teekoolterme, were shipped to another Aboriginal establishment, Oyster Cove, in southern Tasmania. Wapperty, who died there on August 12 1867 is recorded by Ryan as the last of the 'sealing women' (1981, 214).

The Briggs Diaspora: Woretemoeteryenner's descendents

Woretemoeteryenner's descendants are numerous through her daughter Dalrymple and her son John. Dolly and Thomas Johnson had eleven children who lived to adulthood, and although the boys mostly remained unmarried, the girls went on to have large families. Dolly and Thomas' children, their families and descendants continued to live in north-west Tasmania. Our family is proudly part of that lineage.

In 1844 John Briggs married Louisa Strugnell, a Victorian Aboriginal woman and moved from the Bass Strait Islands to the Victorian goldfields. In 1871 the family moved to Coranderk (Barwick 1985,191-192, 220). John and Louisa had ten children, two of whom died in childhood and the Briggs family descended from John and Louisa is also large. The link between these NSW and Victorian Aboriginal people and Woretemoeteryenner, Aboriginal woman of the Trawlwoolway people is, however, relatively unknown. Family memory has it that Dolly and John remained in close contact even after he and Louisa moved to Victoria.

Reflections

Woretemoeteryenner's life story serves as a personalising frame of Aboriginal Tasmanian colonial history. Born before the beginning of European colonisation, by the end of her life fewer than 50 traditional Tasmanians remained. More specifically, her story highlights the lived experiences of that small group of Aboriginal women who form the link between our traditional people and present-day Tasmanian Aboriginal communities.

Critically, Woretemoeteryenner's life is not just part of an historical period. It is an individual story of survival in the face of overwhelming forces arising from the dispossession of herself and her people from their lands and their traditional lifestyle. Colonisation shaped every aspect of her life, yet she still lived her own life. In contrast to the objectification of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people so jarringly evident in the history wars, Woretemoeteryenner's story is a personal story of a real woman living through these now disputed and debated times. More personally, her story is our story. In our writing and researching the difficulty and harshness of her life frequently overwhelmed us. We take some comfort in her last few years spent with her family; the only one of our old people ever released from confinement.

Finally, there is one overwhelming, indisputable fact that none of Windschuttle's confrontations, accusations or revisions can overturn. The purpose of colonisation was dispossession. Our forebears' land was usurped in its entirety and the rapid deaths of our people, the vast majority occurring within 30 years of first contact, were a direct consequence of that colonisation and dispossession. Only we, their descendants, remain. And it is our obligation to make the reality of who they were and the lives they led an ongoing part of Tasmania; not as objects in ideological battles over historical interpretation, but as individuals and as a people with contemporary reality.

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