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‘NECESSARY SELF-DEFENCE?’:
PASTORAL CONTROL AND NGARRINDJERI
RESISTANCE AT WALTOWA WETLAND, SOUTH
AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

This paper explores frontier encounters between the Ngarrindjeri Nation and pastoralists with reference to Waltowa Wetland—a wetland located on the eastern shores of Lake Albert in South Australia (SA). Numerous accounts of this culture contact are framed by a colonial discourse of the ‘necessary self-defence’ taken by colonists to defend resources that included Ngarrindjeri Ruwe (country); however, little consideration is given to the ongoing agency and resistance of the Ngarrindjeri Nation to these imposed regimes of resource control. By first considering long-term Ngarrindjeri management of Yarluwar-Ruwe (sea-country), this paper frames the European colonisation of Waltowa Wetland as historical mismanagement and maintains Ngarrindjeri resistance to this mismanagement was seen as a threat that resulted in conflict between Ngarrindjeri Old People and pastoralists. Lastly, we explore how cultural memory has impressed these past hostilities onto place in the present, thereby symbolising the ongoing significance of these events.
Introduction

This paper sets out to explore frontier encounters between the Ngarrindjeri Nation and pastoralists in the Lower Murray Lakes area of South Australia (SA), with a focus on Waltowa Wetland—a shallow wetland located on the eastern shore of Lake Albert (see Figure 1). In order to contextualise these interactions, this paper commences by discussing the broader South Australian setting. Following this, we consider the long-term management of *Yarluwar-Ruwe* by the Ngarrindjeri Nation and the historical mismanagement that followed the arrival of settler colonialism in SA; this mismanagement includes the clearing of native vegetation and the introduction of exotic livestock associated with the establishment of pastoralism (see Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006:14–16). In doing so, we maintain it is not possible to understand the conflict between Ngarrindjeri Old People\(^1\) and pastoralists without reference to Ngarrindjeri resistance to this mismanagement and the associated regimes of resource control. In order to explore the significance of these encounters and the inherent silences that exist within historical accounts, we also discuss the cultural memory attached to Waltowa Wetland, in particular a built structure located at Tatiara Station today. Within this paper, cultural memory—also often referred to as social memory—refers to collective memories of frontier violence and resistance that are shared amongst the Ngarrindjeri Nation; memories that are not necessarily recorded historically (see Krichauff 2017; Lorey and Beezley 2001; Novak 2006; Trigg 2009). Thus, we consider how Ngarrindjeri cultural memory and material traces converge at Waltowa Wetland, highlighting the ‘inextricable link’ between place and memory (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004).

\(^1\) The term ‘Old People’ is used to refer to Ngarrindjeri ancestors who have occupied Ngarrindjeri *Yarluwar-Ruwe* since Creation (see Bell 2008:111).
Figure 1 Location of Waltowa Wetland and Tatiara Station in South Australia (Source: Karina Pelling and CartoGIS CAP ANU).
Waltowa Wetland and the Establishment of the South Australian Colony

Recent archaeological investigations indicate Waltowa Wetland supported the gathering of Ngarrindjeri Old People for the production of stone tools prior to European colonisation (Wiltshire 2017), challenging long held ideas concerning the ‘degeneration’ of stone tool use within the region (Hale and Tindale 1930:204; Mulvaney 1960:54, 74). Contemporary Ngarrindjeri knowledges similarly attest to Waltowa Wetland’s long-term and ongoing importance as an economic and cultural resource. Specifically, Waltowa Wetland once supported a variety of native fauna including long-necked tortoises (*Chelodina longicollis*), yabbies (*Cherax destructor*), catfish (*Tandanus tandanus*), golden perch (*Macquaria ambigua*) and swans (*Cygnus atratus*)—the eggs of which were frequently collected by Ngarrindjeri Old People until the wetland declined in the 1960s (Hemming et al. 1989; Trevorrow and Rigney in Bjornsson 2005:22). Waltowa Wetland also supported a variety of native vegetation, including rushes (*Cyperus gymnocaulos*), which are an important cultural resource used for weaving (Bell 2008; Hemming et al. 1989; NLPA 2013); however, the wetland’s capacity to sustain these economic and cultural resources is limited today due to ongoing degradation as a result of historical mismanagement.

The importance of *Yarluwar-Ruwe* and the right of Ngarrindjeri Old People to manage this economic and cultural resource was ignored by early colonialists, who described SA as ‘waste and unoccupied’ (*South Australia Act 1834*). Despite this, Surveyor General E.C. Frome (1840:4) later described the resource potential of areas surrounding Waltowa Wetland, which he simply referred to as a ‘swamp’ (see Figure 2):
The rising ground at the back of these flats, though sandy, yet affords excellent back runs for cattle and the hills are well timbered with banksia, casuarina and some of the largest pines I have seen in the colony. Along the eastern and southern shores of Lake Albert the same character of country continues; the soil, however, appears to be still better and the flats more extensive, particularly 15 miles from the entrance where we crossed a swamp formerly a deep inlet from the Lakes.

In 1836 during his proclamation speech, Governor Hindmarsh declared Aboriginal occupants of SA as British subjects. Similarly, the *Letters Patent of 1836* delivered to the King in the same year authorised the colonisation of South Australia, providing:

...that nothing in those our Letters Patent contained shall affect or be construed to affect the rights of any Aboriginal Natives [sic] of the said Province to the actual occupation or enjoyment in their own Persons or in the Persons of their Descendants of any Lands therein now actually occupied or enjoyed by such Natives.

In doing so, this document initially appears to recognise Ngarrindjeri rights to their economic and cultural resources. Taken together, the Letters Patent and Proclamation were often thought to reflect a ‘different’ or more humane colony, although they did little to modify the reality of the South Australian frontier following European colonisation (Foster and Nettelbeck 2012:181; also see Rigney et al. 2008).

Before the colony of SA was officially established by these documents, hostilities between Ngarrindjeri Old People and *krinkaris* were inflamed by the kidnapping and mistreatment of Ngarrindjeri *miminar* (women) by sealers occupying Kangaroo Island in the 1820s and before (Jenkin 1979:26). In an attempt to escape, one Ngarrindjeri *mimini* (woman) swam the notoriously rough waters of Backstairs

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2 White person, the dead or ghost; when European colonialists first arrived in *Yarluwar-Ruwe*, Ngarrindjeri Old People thought they were ghosts and referred to them as such (Bell 1998:141; Trevorrow in Hemming and Trevorrow 2005:244).
Passage between Kangaroo Island and mainland SA with her young child strapped to her back, only to be found:

...on the beach just above high-water mark, with the baby tied to her back. She had swum Backstairs Passage, and then, in a state of utter exhaustion, crawled up the shore and died.
(Taplin 1873:8)

Ngarrindjeri Old People continued to experience such encounters for the following two decades, until the first major conflict event occurred in 1840 following the wreck of Maria on a reef near the Coorong. Hostilities soon roused over the survivors’ sexual transgressions with Ngarrindjeri miminar—or a potential misunderstanding over payment—resulting in the deaths of the Maria crew (Anderson 2015:7; Foster et al. 2001). At the time Charles Bonney detailed how two Ngarrindjeri Old People were ‘summarily’ punished in a display of deterrence for their defensive actions:

We succeeded in capturing about forty natives [sic], and two of their numbers were pointed out by their companions as the murderers. A sort of court martial was constituted, and these two men were declared to be guilty of the murders and were hanged in the presence of their tribe. This summary method of punishing the native criminals, though not strictly legal, had a most beneficial effect on this tribe of natives who, though very numerous, never committed another outrage on the whites.
(Bonney n.d.:15)

This action sparked debate about the application of British Law and the constitutional rights of those involved in such events. It became clear at this stage that ‘pioneering South Australians placed great value on the violent theatre of the gallows, as it was thought to pacify a troublesome Indigenous population, who did not share British culture or language’ (Anderson 2015:4).

Whilst the Rufus River massacre in 1841 marked a culmination of frontier conflict within the central Murray River region of SA (Burke et al. 2016:153; Hemming 1983a, 1983b; Hemming and Cook 1995), it seems the Maria incident only inflamed existing feelings of hostility between Ngarrindjeri Old People and pastoralists. As Faull (1981:17) pointed out, the Maria ‘...incident, with the publicity it received, made an indelible impact on black/white relationships throughout the
colony’ and that ‘[f]urther violent incidents insured that relationship remained strained’. With increased pastoralism into remote areas of SA, violent encounters became more frequent. For example, in 1841 overlanding parties bringing sheep and cattle into the South Australian colony describe being ‘attacked’ and in the following year Port Lincoln was in ‘a near state of siege’, with Aboriginal people ‘attacking’ all pastoral stations (Foster et al. 2001; Foster and Nettelbeck 2012; Hemming 1983a, 1983b; Hemming and Cook 1994). For the most part, such accounts describe the actions of pastoralists as defensive (Burke et al. 2017:167).

Additionally, as outlined by Foster et al. (2001), numerous accounts of frontier conflict relate to the ‘theft’ of sheep. Johnson F. Hayward (1929:29), a pastoralist in the northern districts of the South Australian colony, reflected that ‘in every case that I missed sheep…I followed them…till I rescued my sheep or punished the thieves’. Hayward’s attitude was that Aboriginal people needed to be ‘chastised’ or ‘terrified’ (Foster et al. 2001:6). John Bull (1878:69), a pastoralist in the Port Lincoln district, suggested that ‘dread needed to be established’ in order to ensure the safety and lives of the property. Consequently, several strategies—typically involving firearms—were put into place to secure the land. In other words, violence was used as a means to reinforce regimes of pastoral ownership and control. By the late 1890s the pioneer legend of ‘subduing the land and battling the elements’ had emerged, which shaped the depiction of Aboriginal people on the frontier as hostile, a nuisance and ‘trespassing interlopers’ in their own land (Foster et al. 2001:10); all the while obscuring their ongoing agency and resistance to newly imposed, colonial regimes of control.

Despite these accounts, the early South Australian frontier is the least known from the colonial archives and was often characterised by humane dealings with Aboriginal people (Rogers and Bain 2016:86). By focusing on early culture contact between Ngarrindjeri Old People and pastoralists in the region of Waltowa Wetland, this paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of early frontier conflict in SA. Additionally,
focusing on Waltowa Wetland affords consideration of encounters along the overland route between Adelaide and the eastern states, which was established in 1844 and travelled around the eastern boundary of the wetland (see Figure 2). Relationships between Aboriginal groups and krinkaris along such routes were notoriously strained. Referring to the overland stock route in the central Murray River district of SA, Burke et al. (2016:170) described the nature of this relationship:

Fear, or at least anxiety, conditioned many European responses to travelling through the landscape...bringing enormous quantities of men, goods and stock within what was a highly territorialised Aboriginal landscape, that crystallised the tone of later encounters...This combined with proprietary attitude of Europeans towards their stock and possessions as precious sources of personal profit, was a deadly mix. As layers of encounter built up along the route, attitudes towards Aboriginal people hardened and violence become even more acutely anticipated.

The resources of Waltowa Wetland were vital to the success of the overland route and in turn the colonisation of SA, which relied on its freshwater soaks to replenish large numbers of livestock. Despite this, most official accounts refer to this wetland simply as a ‘swamp’, disguising the importance of this area to both the Ngarrindjeri Nation and pastoralists who relied on it. For a short period between 1846 and 1849, the western margins of Waltowa Wetland were also a stopover on the mail route between Adelaide and the lower south east of SA; a task that was undertaken by police due to fears of violent encounters with Ngarrindjeri Old People in the region (Linn 1988:38–39). Given how heavily the resources of this wetland were depended on during these formative years in SA, we suggest Waltowa Wetland was one of the first areas within Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar-Ruwe to be heavily affected by historical mismanagement. Additionally, many early overland routes overlapped with previous Aboriginal pathways (Burke et al. 2016; Hemming and Cook 1994), indicating the placement of the route through Waltowa Wetland was likely a continuation of Ngarrindjeri routes through the region. It should therefore come as no surprise then that attempts by Ngarrindjeri Old People and
pastoralists to maintain control over this resource resulted in conflict.

**Figure 2** Map derived from 1844 South Australian Company documents showing overland route; note Waltowa Wetland’s location on the eastern shore of Lake Albert is simply referred to as ‘swamp’ (Source: Karina Pelling and CartoGIS CAP ANU).

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Ngarrindjeri Management of Yarluwar-Ruwe

The Ngarrindjeri Nation are the Traditional Owners and native title holders for Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar-Ruwe, which consists of the lower Murray River, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert, Encounter Bay and northern Kurangk (Coorong) regions of SA. At the heart of the Ngarrindjeri Nation lies the philosophy of Ruwe/Ruwar (land-body), an interconnected understanding that governs Ngarrindjeri connection, rights and responsibilities to their lands, waters and all living things. The health of the Ngarrindjeri people is deeply interconnected with the health of Ngarrindjeri lands, waters and all living things; its long-term health vital to ensuring the long-term health of the Ngarrindjeri Nation. A core principle of this philosophy is the Ngarrindjeri concept of Yannarumi, which broadly translates to ‘Speaking as Country’. The Ngarrindjeri Nation have a responsibility to ‘Speak as Country’ to ensure the health of Yarluwar-Ruwe and in turn the Ngarrindjeri Nation (Hemming et al. 2016:5). Therefore, the philosophy of Ruwe/Ruwar and the concept of Yannarumi have informed Ngarrindjeri management of Yarluwar-Ruwe since Kaldowinyeri (Creation), with areas such as Waltowa Wetland being cared for and managed by generations of Ngarrindjeri people.

In line with this philosophy numerous characteristics of the Ngarrindjeri Nation also contribute to this ongoing management. For example, the Ngarrindjeri Nation was comprised of at least 18 Lakinyeri (clans) each consisting of an extended family that held exclusive resource rights and responsibilities for the management of a distinct territory of Yarluwar-Ruwe (Bell 1998:549–54; Berndt et al. 1993:25–56; Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006:8; NLPA 2013; Tindale 1974:23–55). Given their territory specific rights and responsibilities, Lakinyeri families occupied these areas to the extent that they have been described as very densely settled, permanent villages.

3 Whilst there are differing accounts regarding the number of Lakinyeri (see Bell 1998:208–209; Berndt et al. 1993:29; Radcliffe-Brown 1918:228–229; Tindale 1974:23–25), the Ngarrindjeri Nation (2006:8) formally recognises 18 Lakinyeri; however, the late Elder, Tom Trevorroow (pers. comm. 2012), believed there were more. Subsequently, the Nation's peak organisation, the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA), is seen as a unification of these Lakinyeri (Rita Lindsay Jnr in Bell 2008:83).
In one early account Surveyor General E.C. Frome (1840:4) referred to ‘(the) permanent nature of the huts of the natives [sic]’.

As a result of these distinct territory rights and responsibilities, each Lakinyeri held detailed localised knowledge and worked with other Lakinyeri in order to contribute to the broader management of Yarluwar-Ruwe (Hemming et al. 1989). All Lakinyeri shared some responsibilities in order to manage Yarluwar-Ruwe on both a micro and macro-scale. Gammage (2011:3) argued this management strategy was used by Aboriginal people more broadly, stating:

What plants and animals flourished were related to their management...Detailed local knowledge was crucial. Each family cared for its own ground...They knew every yard intimately, and knew well the ground of neighbours and clansmen [sic], sharing larger scale management...

The Ngarrindjeri Nation also use a land/body philosophy to describe Yarluwar-Ruwe, which is considered a whole, integrated and living body with individual areas described as limbs or organs (Bell 1998:264–5; Berndt et al. 1993:13–14). For example, wetlands such as Waltowa Wetland are considered a ‘liver’ or ‘kidney’ (T. Trevorrow and M. Carter pers. comm. 2011)—a fertile nursery critical to the life cycle of Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar-Ruwe, fostering new life, nurturing living things and filtering nutrients into the surrounding landscape (see also Hemming et al. 2002; Hemming et al. 2016:5; NLPA 2013:68; Trevorrow and Rigney in Bjornsson 2005:22). The names of certain areas within Yarluwar-Ruwe also reflect this land/body metaphor; for example, the toponym Kurangk is Ngarrindjeri for ‘neck’ or ‘long neck of water’ (Bell 1998:265; Berndt et al. 1993:14; Meyer 1843:41). As such, ‘(the) health of the individual parts [of Yarluwar-Ruwe] still has relevance for the survival of the whole body’ (Bell 1998:264). In this respect, each Lakinyeri was responsible for the management of a particular territorial
‘limb’ or ‘organ’ to ensure the health of the entire body of Yarluwar-Ruwe.

In addition to this, each Lakinyeri was also interconnected with a different species of animal and/or plant as part of a kinship system; as the Ngarrindjeri Nation (2006:12) explain:

Ngarrindjeri people hold cultural and spiritual connections to particular places, to particular species of animals and plants, and all elements of the environment are part of our kinship system. Particular animal and plant species are the Ngartji (totem or special friend) of Ngarrindjeri people, who have special responsibility to care for their Ngartji. To care for Ngartji is to care for country.

Caring for Ngartjis and Yarluwar-Ruwe went hand-in-hand to ensure all living things thrived and flourished as part of the ongoing management of Yarluwar-Ruwe; one could not flourish without the other (Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006:12). In relation to this, Linn (1988:5) pointed out that the majority of Ngartjis were associated with water, demonstrating the importance of maintaining healthy waters in order to maintain healthy habitats for such Ngartjis. Lakinyeri members were not allowed to harm or consume their Ngartji, ensuring the Ngarrindjeri Nation maintained a sustainable relationship with all living things.

The Ngarrindjeri Nation also emphasise the active role of Kaldowinyeri ancestors in the establishment of stories, meanings and laws that inform Ngarrindjeri interests, rights and responsibilities in the ongoing management of Yarluwar-Ruwe. As the Ngarrindjeri Nation (2006:8–13) emphasise:

As [Kaldowinyeri ancestor] Ngurunderi travelled throughout our Country...He gave to his people the stories, meanings and laws associated with our lands and waters of his creation...He taught us, don't be greedy, don't take any more than what you need, and share with one another. Ngurunderi also warned us that if we don't share we will be punished. Ngarrindjeri respect the gifts of Creation that Ngurunderi passed down to our Spiritual Ancestors, our Elders and to us. Ngarrindjeri must follow the Traditional Laws...Our lands and waters must be managed according to our Laws to make them healthy...
Stories and laws established by *Kaldowinyeri* ancestors emphasise the importance of observing morals such as respect and sharing, as well as the punishment associated if these morals are not observed. For example, the story of Thukeri—in which *Kaldowinyeri* ancestor Ngurunderi plays a central role—demonstrates the importance of observing such morals:

A long time ago two Ngarrindjeri men went fishing in a bay near Lake Alexandrina to catch the *thukeri mami* (bream fish). They set off in their bark canoe to catch the big fat *thukeri*. They fished and fished until their canoe was over full and they said we have plenty of *thukeri* we will paddle to shore before we sink. As they paddled to shore they saw a stranger coming towards them so they covered up the *thukeri* with their woven mats they said this man might want some of our *thukeri*, when they approached the shore the stranger said to them 'hey brothers I'm hungry have you got any fish to share', but the two Ngarrindjeri men said no we haven’t got many fish we only have enough to feed our families. So the stranger began to walk away then he turned and said you have plenty of fish and because you are greedy and don't want to share you will not enjoy the *thukeri* fish ever again. As the stranger walked away the two Ngarrindjeri men laughed at him. When the two Ngarrindjeri men unloaded the *thukeri* on to the banks to scale and clean them, they saw that their nice big fat *thukeri* were bony and they didn't know what had happened. The two Ngarrindjeri men went home to the campsite in shame and told the Elders what had happened. The Elders were angry and said the stranger was Ngurunderi our Spirit Ancestor and because you two were greedy and would not share with him he has put a curse on our *thukeri mami*. Now all the Ngarrindjeri people will be punished. (Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006:8)

By promoting morals, such as sharing, these stories and laws further ensured the Ngarrindjeri Nation maintained a sustainable relationship with *Yarluwar-Ruwe*, all living things and each other. In doing so, the Ngarrindjeri Nation (2006:28) maintain: 'Our economy has always been based on the sustainable use and trade of our natural resources'.

This resulted in resources that were ‘abundant, convenient and predictable’ (Gammage 2011:87), which in turn supported a large and thriving Ngarrindjeri Nation who occupied and enjoyed *Yarluwar-Ruwe* for generations. As a
result, Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar-Ruwe has been argued by some to be the most densely populated region in Australia prior to colonisation (Berndt et al. 1993:18; Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006:11; Radcliffe-Brown 1918:229–231; Tindale 1974:111). Therefore, the philosophy of Ruwe/Ruwar and the concept of Yannarumi that informs ongoing Ngarrindjeri management ensured a healthy Yarluwar-Ruwe and in turn a healthy Ngarrindjeri Nation prior to the introduction of pastoralism by settler colonialism.

**Historical Mismanagement and Ngarrindjeri Resistance**

The long-term Ngarrindjeri management of Yarluwar-Ruwe was overlooked by early colonists (NLPA 2013:67). In order to recognise this ongoing management, early colonists needed to understand the complex nature of the Ngarrindjeri Nation. Regrettably, early colonists described the Ngarrindjeri Nation as ‘savages’ (Angas 1847) and ‘a strange people’ without history, religion, forethought, hope or future (Woods 1879:xxxviii). Furthermore, the Ngarrindjeri Nation was seen by colonists to passively accept the colonisation of their Yarluwar-Ruwe and their people (see Jenkin 1979). In reflecting on the colonisation of New South Wales, English and Gay (2005:2) pointed out: ‘This idea of passivity was mirrored by settler inability to understand that Aboriginal people and their social systems had shaped the very structure of the landscape they moved into’. Similarly, Gammage (2011:17) argued:

> It might seem a small jump to think them [landscapes] man-made [sic] as in Europe. In fact the leap was so vast that almost no-one made it. Almost all thought no land in Australia private...To think otherwise required them to see Aborigines as gentry, not shiftless wanderers. That seemed preposterous.

As a result of this colonial mentality, Yarluwar-Ruwe was perceived to be a ‘natural’ resource waiting to be claimed, controlled and utilised, despite the existing and ongoing system of ownership and management carried out by the Ngarrindjeri Nation. In reference to the colonisation of Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar-Ruwe, Linn (1988:7) accurately observed:
the land represented different hopes for the British...who
 came to the area [and] viewed the land in different ways. One
group wrote of its scenic nature; the other saw how it could be
used in practical ways by settlers.

Furthermore, Linn (1988:13) pointed out, ‘their [colonial]
perception of the land as a place for flocks and herds, to be tilled
by the farmer and to yield up its fruits, was the spirit behind
their explorations and descriptions’. This perception
commenced the abuse, misuse and mismanagement of
Ngarrindjeri *Yarluwar-Ruwe*.

Prior to this mismanagement, many early colonialists
including J.F. Bennett, John Morphett, W.H. Leigh, Alexander
Buchanan and Edward Snell described *Yarluwar-Ruwe* as
resembling a beautiful English park, due to the treeless,
perennial grassed plains that characterised the area (Gammage
2011:16,41). For example, Charles Sturt (1849:229-30)
described one area of *Yarluwar-Ruwe* as:

...(belts) of scrub on barren or sandy ground, its character is
that of an open forest without the slightest undergrowth save
grass...In many places the trees are so sparingly, and I had
almost said judiciously distributed to reassemble the park lands
attached to a gentleman’s residence in England.

These plains were the result of the ongoing management by the
Ngarrindjeri Nation, which included the deliberate and
controlled use of fire. Gammage (2011:4) argued that such
management provided similar resource yield as agriculturally
based activities, even in times of drought and flood. As such,
some of the first early colonists to occupy *Yarluwar-Ruwe*
documented Ngarrindjeri Old People’s ability to control fire:

...a bush fire broke out between Nairne and Mount Barker; the
natives [sic] were very active in subduing the flames, which, but
for their assistance, would have destroyed a considerable
quantity of crops.

*(Sturt 1850)*
Historical documents describing the early colonisation of areas including Waltowa Wetland also praise ‘gentlemen’ station owners, who bargained with Ngarrindjeri Old People to confine or cease their management of *Yarluwar-Ruwe* through the use of controlled fire:

In order to induce the natives [sic] to be careful not to burn the grass during the dry season, several gentlemen, stock-holders owning runs around the Lakes, have offered rewards to them to extinguish all bush fires that may occur on their runs...D.McFarlane, Esq. has promised the natives [sic] of the Peninsula (Lake Albert) several blankets and two fat bullocks, as soon as the rainy season sets in, when all danger of bush fires is past. The natives [sic] are now very careful not allowing bush fires to spread, knowing if they do, they will lose their reward. (Sturt 1850)

Ironically, the ease at which pastoralists were able to colonise *Yarluwar-Ruwe* was the result of the long-term and ongoing management they sought to cease. Consequently, the mismanagement of *Yarluwar-Ruwe* began with the arrival of *krinkaris* and the issues they faced following colonisation was due to their disruption of this long-term management (NLPA 2013:2).

The colonisation of *Yarluwar-Ruwe* resulted in the clearing of native vegetation that had provided resources and habitats for all living things including Ngarrindjeri people. Due to the minority of *krinkaris* within *Yarluwar-Ruwe* during early phases of settlement, Ngarrindjeri Old People were employed from the 1840s to assist with the clearing of this native vegetation, as well as harvesting crops, shearing and wool washing (Jenkin 1979:127–128; Kartinyeri and Anderson 2008:19, 97; Linn 1988:122; Sturt 1850; Tindale 1934; N. Gollan pers. comm. 2009). The late Elder, Doreen Kartinyeri (in Kartinyeri and Anderson 2008:7), stated, however, that Ngarrindjeri Old People ‘...didn’t want to cut the trees down because so much had been cleared and so much had been destroyed, but they had to do that work or they wouldn’t get paid or they’d get their rations cut’. Ngarrindjeri Old People were also employed to erect fences that separated and segregated *Yarluwar-Ruwe*, once again threatened with a suspension of rations if they refused to work (Kartinyeri and Anderson 2008:21–2). In an act of resistance, Ngarrindjeri Old
People secretly dismantled fences around Raukkan (Point McLeay) and Teringie, using the wire to dry rabbit skins that were later sold (Kartinyeri and Anderson 2008:10, 22). Despite being employed against their own will, Ngarrindjeri Old People made a significant contribution towards the establishment of pastoral communities that exist in *Yarluwar-Ruwe* today. As such, the pastoral history of *Yarluwar-Ruwe* is very much Ngarrindjeri history (cf. Harrison 2004).

Livestock, exotic pests and weeds were also introduced into *Yarluwar-Ruwe*, which impacted upon the soils, altered sedimentation and further depleted resources and habitats. The loss of native fauna and flora resulted in a loss of Ngarrindjeri *Ngartjis* (Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006:13). Despite this, territory specific rights and morals of sharing continued to underpin Ngarrindjeri lifeways. Ngarrindjeri Old People were prepared to share *Yarluwar-Ruwe* and its resources with *krinkaris*, expecting them to share their resources in return (Trevorrow in Hemming and Trevorrow 2005:243–244); however, Ngarrindjeri procurement of sheep as a newly introduced resource was perceived through pastoral eyes as theft. For example, in August 1846 Ngulgoorunger (also known as Pelican) was sent to trial in Adelaide and prosecuted for ‘stealing’ sheep from the northern shores of Lake Albert (Linn 1988:36). In many cases, however, Ngarrindjeri procurement of sheep contributed to growing hostilities between Ngarrindjeri Old People and pastoralists. This hostility combined with the isolated nature of pastoral activities was a recipe for the fear and anxieties that resulted in conflict (Faull 1981:18; Linn 1988:36–37; Rogers and Bain 2016:86; Watson 2002:113–115). In reference to Waltowa Wetland, anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt detailed an account shared with them by Ngarrindjeri Elder Margaret (Pinkie) Mack:

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4 Recent studies suggest major depositional and geochemical changes occurred in the upper sediments of *Yarluwar-Ruwe*, which correlate with increased rates of erosion and sedimentation associated with European colonisation (Murdoch 2009:33). Broader diatom studies from Lake Alexandrina and the Coorong also highlight the impact of European colonisation, with a widespread increase in salinity in the area (Fluin et al. 2009).
Mack said, some Aborigines had killed a sheep on Tatiara Station and when this was discovered, members of the local group were shot and their bodies burnt. While these instances were undated, they nevertheless demonstrate that conditions had deteriorated and that Aborigines were justified, when they were able, in responding aggressively. (Berndt et al. 1993:293)

Whilst this information was recorded in the early 1940s, the date of this event is not known; however, the level of fear and anxiety these hostilities produced is demonstrated in an article by the *South Australian Register* (Anon. 1846), which details how ‘one of the South Australian Company shepherds at a station near Lake Albert, hung [sic] himself, by means of a handkerchief’. Similar instances of conflict also occurred in the region south east of Ngarrindjeri *Yarluwar-Ruwe* in 1848, where pastoralist James Brown allegedly shot Old People for stealing sheep. Brown made a court appearance in Adelaide in 1849, although the charge was dropped for an apparent lack of evidence (Anon. 1849; Smith 1880:62).

For the most part, however, episodes of violence by pastoralists are glossed over in many of the ‘official’ histories, whereas attempts by Ngarrindjeri Old People to defend their territory specific rights and responsibilities to *Yarluwar-Ruwe* are represented as unsolicited violence towards unexpecting pastoralists (Faull 1981:17). For example, the *South Australian Register* reported on the 17th of August 1844:

> We understand that the outstations to the eastward are much annoyed by the natives [sic] and the utmost vigilance is unavailing to protect the flocks. It is easy to foresee that, unless some effectual protection is given to the settlers, the often recurring necessity for self-defence will create in them a feeling of hostility towards the natives [sic].
> (Anon. 1844:3)

Given the ‘trials’ pastoralists felt they had to endure to establish successful properties in *Yarluwar-Ruwe*, many believed they were entitled to the *Ruwe* they had stolen (Linn 1988:120). As Linn (1988:118) described:
There is no doubt that...major pastoralists of the district fought tooth and nail to retain the land they felt they had won from the wilderness. That they were successful in this defence is evidenced by the small number of men retaining ownerships of larger pastoral holdings between 1851 and 1885...

These pastoral properties included Poltalloch Station (est. 1839), Wellington Lodge (est. 1845) and Campbell House (est. c. 1851), which remain prominent pastoral stations within *Yarlurwar-Ruwe*. As suggested by Burke et al. (2017:154; also see Linn 1988:118), these homesteads could be interpreted as symbols of the persistence of early colonists against the supposed ‘hostilities’ they faced from *Yarlurwar-Ruwe* and Ngarrindjeri Old People.

Western concepts of ownership that resulted in the surveying, subdividing and selling of *Yarlurwar-Ruwe* and the eventual establishment of these pastoral properties, ignored the territory specific rights and responsibilities of the Ngarrindjeri Nation that were supposed to be instated by the *Letters Patent of 1836* (Berg 2010; Hemming and Rigney 2014; Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006:14; NLPA 2013:67; Rigney et al. 2008). The Ngarrindjeri Nation (2006:14) believes the provisions of the Letters Patent could have been used to continue their rights and responsibilities for *Yarlurwar-Ruwe* in-line with the philosophy of *Ruwe/Ruwar* and the concept of *Yannarumi*; unfortunately, this document was ignored. As a result, *krinkaris* who set out to establish the Province of South Australia in 1836 did not acquire *Yarlurwar-Ruwe* in an honest and fair manner from the Ngarrindjeri Nation (Berg 2010:xvi). As lawyer for the Ngarrindjeri Nation Shaun Berg (2010:xvii) argued, ‘there is no denying that the land enjoyed and used by Aboriginal people for thousands and thousands of years was appropriated into a new system of land tenure without their consent’. Despite *krinkari* appropriation of *Yarlurwar-Ruwe*, Ngarrindjeri Old People wishing to continue caring, sharing and respecting *Yarlurwar-Ruwe* in-line with their philosophy and informed by a ‘non-exclusive ethic of care’ that invites all to share in caring for *Yarlurwar-Ruwe* (MacGill 2014), encouraged *krinkaris* to share the ongoing management of *Yarlurwar-Ruwe*. As the late
Ngarrindjeri Elder Tom Trevorrow (in Hemming and Trevorrow 2005:243–244) explained:

The Elders and the people said there was enough land: we will share with these newcomers because sharing is one of our strict laws. But unfortunately this culture did not want to share, and terrible uncivilised acts of violence were carried out against the people.

In short, *Yarluwar-Ruwe* was stolen from the Ngarrindjeri Nation (Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006:14). The ‘stealing’ of sheep by Ngarrindjeri Old People seems minor in comparison.

Consequently, sheep as well as cattle were left to roam around Ngarrindjeri *Yarluwar-Ruwe*, with the South Australian Company running cattle around the eastern shores of Lake Albert from the early 1840s following the establishment of Gile’s Station—a sheep (and later cattle) station was located at Bonney’s Waterhole\(^5\) on the western margins of Waltowa Wetland (Linn 1988:33, 39; Paton 2010:186; Sims and Muller 2004:7). This waterhole was also used for watering the large numbers of livestock that travelled through *Yarluwar-Ruwe* following the creation of an overland route between Adelaide and the eastern states in 1844, which travelled around the eastern boundary of Waltowa Wetland and followed the coast along the *Kurangk* (Linn 1988:31; see Figure 2). Once a ferry was established in 1848 at Wellington, a constant passage of livestock travelled along the overland route, overgrazing native vegetation, stirring up the soils and causing huge sand drifts of formerly stabilised perennial grassed plains and sand hills. By 1851, there was a significant increase\(^6\) in the use of the overland route with traffic to the goldfields, further impacting *Yarluwar-Ruwe* (Linn 1988:68; Mincham in McCourt and Mincham 1987:7).

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\(^5\) Also referred to as Bonney's Wells or Giles' Wells, the waterhole was first recorded in 1844 by artist George French Angas (1844, 1847:plate 44; see also Anon. 1868:2; see also Figure 2; Linn 1988:33).

\(^6\) In the last quarter of 1851, 3688 passengers and 738 vehicles had crossed the ferry at Wellington. In February 1852 alone, 1234 passengers, 1266 horses and bullocks and 164 carriages had crossed, whilst between October and November 3000 passengers, 361 carriages and 3027 tonnes of goods crossed (Linn 1988:68).
In the 1860s the construction of a causeway between Waltowa Wetland and Lake Albert provided a more direct overland route, which in turn contributed to the establishment of the township of Meningie (Wilks 1936:1). For the most part, it appears cattle within this district were free to roam Yarluwar-Ruwe until the 1880s. Subsequently, a letter to the editor of the South Australian Chronicle in 1894 deplored the proposed leasing of Waltowa Wetland, stating:

> The fact of the Government declaring the ‘commonage’ of Waltowa Swamp open to applicant for lease in last week’s Gazette has raised considerable consternation in the neighbourhood. The whole township of Meningie will be greatly affected by the loss of the commonage.
> (Vox Populi 1894:22)

Accordingly, the un-leased land around Waltowa Wetland was supposed to benefit small land holders and widows, but larger landowners took advantage of the scheme and ran large numbers of their own stock that significantly depleted existing resources and habitats (Vox Populi 1894:22). Despite these objections, Waltowa Wetland was leased by April 1894 (South-Eastern Land Board 1894:3). By 1900 Tatiara Station had been established on Waltowa Wetland’s northern margins and the violent encounters that occurred some 50 years prior were now ‘under control’ and had—in one form—all but ceased.

**Cultural Memory and Material Traces at Tatiara Station**

Tatiara Station is today a cattle station that covers 8500 acres of Yarluwar-Ruwe; however, physical remnants of its history are scattered across the property, including a stable and/or shearing house with aperture features that members of the Ngarrindjeri Nation believe were used to discharge firearms at Ngarrindjeri Old People (Figures 3–5). Here, we discuss the evidence relating these apertures to frontier conflict and how Ngarrindjeri cultural memory has played a role in their association with early hostilities.
Research into the fortification of colonial buildings has advanced over the past several decades and includes the work of both architects and archaeologists (see Burke et al. 2017 for a review), contributing to a limited yet growing body of archaeological literature examining material traces related to frontier conflict (see Barker 2007; Burke et al. 2017; Grguric 2008; Litster and Wallis 2011). Much of the associated literature highlights that the function of many apparent ‘defensive’ features in colonial period buildings is marred by uncertainty, with the purpose being difficult to discern in the absence of archival records, oral history or other signs of use; however, exceptions exist, such as the rare reference to the use of a fortified structure in SA. Nalang Station owner Mr R.W.R. Hunt reminisced in 1946 how ‘there used to be a palisade at Nalang to keep off the wild blacks [sic], who periodically arrived to call away the domestic blacks [sic] assisting in the kitchen’ (Fry 1946:12). Whilst this account is undated, Nalang Station was established c. 1845 and is credited as one of the first stations near the present-day township of Bordertown located in the state’s lower south east.

The stable/shearing house building located on Tatiara Station includes three sets of apertures—two pairs located on the southern wall of the structure facing Waltowa Wetland and one pair located on an eastern wall, which are today found on the interior of the building due to the later addition of a wall on the eastern side (see Figures 3 and 4). These apertures measure 50 cm in height, 10 cm in width and are located at a height of 2 m above the ground. They probably served as ventilation, common in the English ‘Bank Barn’ design, where installation would mitigate heat accumulated from grain storage (Bell 1997; Grguric 2008:71); however, the height of the apertures, rough interior of the building and iron horse tie rings located on the southern wall below these features indicate this building functioned as a stable or a shearing shed (P. Bell pers. comm. 2018), which is consistent with historically known pastoral activities for the area.
Figure 3 Stable/shearing shed, (a) south wall and (b) east wall, 2018 (Photographs by Kelly Wiltshire).
Figure 4 (a) Exterior and (b) interior close up of apertures on south wall, 2018 (Photographs by Kelly Wiltshire).

More broadly, Grguric (2008) examined pastoral structures built in the 1840s and 1850s in SA, where he argued that similar apertures on one stone coach house located at O’Halloran Hill were used as defensive features, intended to discharge firearms, otherwise known as loopholes. Comparatively, these features appear superficially thinner than the Waltowa Wetland examples. The O’Halloran Hill examples are also located at a lower position on the building than those at Waltowa Wetland; however, the height of the Waltowa Wetland examples is consistent with known loophole features at Barrow Creek Telegraph Station in the Northern Territory. The Barrow Creek examples are smaller, square features with bevelled edges to increase the potential field of fire. Despite this, notorious Northern Territory police officer William Willshire (1891:21–3) believed the height of these features rendered them practically useless. On the other hand, the height of both the Waltowa Wetland and Barrow Creek examples may have provided a better vantage point to see anyone approaching these respective locations, with a prop or step required to use these features effectively. The position of the Waltowa Wetland examples, both
within the structure and in the landscape, may have also enabled surveillance of the movement of Ngarrindjeri Old People and their use of Waltowa Wetland (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Site plan of buildings at Tatiara Station in relation to Waltowa Wetland. Apertures found in the stable/shearing shed (Source: Karina Pelling and CartoGIS CAP ANU).
Whilst these apertures certainly had the potential to be used to discharge firearms, their location on one of the station's outbuildings and not on the main house suggests a non-defensive function (cf. Burke et al. 2017:159). Furthermore, given the building is constructed from locally sourced limestone, with a corrugated iron roof and a minimal use of bricks—features unpopular around the mid-19th century due to their cost—it is probable this building was constructed in the latter half of the 19th century (Bell 2001). The addition of cement features around windows and doorways also place the construction of these buildings to the late 19th century (P. Bell pers. comm. 2018). Whilst the construction of this building appears contemporary with the known date Tatiara Station was established, it falls outside the period when violent encounters were known to occur within the region. In fact, by the 1850s Linn (1988:37) suggests ‘even though stealing [of sheep] was rife...hostility between blacks and whites simmered’. In other words, the fear and anxieties underpinning early encounters between Ngarrindjeri Old People and pastoralists, which may have resulted in the fortification of this structure, had apparently subdued by the time it was constructed. This observation also seems to be supported by historical documents from the region, where accounts of conflict between Ngarrindjeri Old People and pastoralists disappear from the literature after 1850; however, the previously mentioned account by Ngarrindjeri Elder Margaret (Pinkie) Mack (in Berndt et al. 1993:293) describing Ngarrindjeri Old People being shot, killed and their bodies burnt in response to stealing a sheep from Tatiara Station—which was established c. 1900—challenges this understanding. In considering this account, we suggest two possible hypotheses; (1) It is possible Mack was referring to an event that occurred at the current location of Tatiara Station, but not necessarily the period following its establishment; and (2) Ngarrindjeri Old People were still enduring violent encounters with pastoralists when Tatiara Station was established.
Despite the uncertainties regarding the potential use of these apertures, Margaret (Pinkie) Mack’s account is but one example of cultural memory associated with these violent encounters; memories that have been passed down through the generations and shape the way the Ngarrindjeri Nation interpret these apertures. Given these features had the potential to discharge firearms coupled with Ngarrindjeri memories of frontier violence, interpretation of these features as evidence for frontier conflict has endured since this structure was recorded during archaeological investigations just under a decade ago (see Wiltshire 2010, 2017). In other words, these features have become a reference point that physically anchor cultural memories of frontier violence to Waltowa Wetland (Eyerman 2001; Hoelscher and Alderman 2004; Novak 2006; Trigg 2009). In doing so, evidence to suggest this building was not purposely fortified nor its features used to discharge firearms does not make their ability to provide such a reference point to these violent encounters any less meaningful. Similarly, Burke et al. (2017) describe how the story of fortification surrounding the Cambridge Downs homestead in north Queensland has been perpetuated in the present. In doing so, they contend:

The fact that there are stories about the homestead being fortified is perhaps of greater relevance to an understanding of frontier conflict than the physical structure itself [and] trying to determine whether or not such accounts are ‘true’ is...perhaps, in the end, not all that useful.

(Burke et al. 2017:166, 168)

Consequently, the interpretation of the Waltowa Wetland structure as fortified might not accurately inform us on its functional history, but rather shed light on how the complexity of frontier encounters between the Ngarrindjeri Nation and pastoralists plays out today. For example, Wiltshire (2017:120) described the following scene during her field work at Tatiara Station:
Barry is not like other station owners and his easy going nature puts me at ease...During one of his visits Barry asks if we are finding anything of interest, in which I replied: "Yes, we are finding a lot of really interesting artefacts". "I always thought there was stuff out here", Barry replies; "I just assumed [Ngarrindjeri] people didn’t know it was here or they weren’t interested". Later in the day I relay this conversation to Uncle Tom, who gives me a knowing grin and replies: "Well, if we had asked to take a look around, we would have probably been met with a gun..." And in that moment this long history of hostility comes to the surface, influencing Uncle Tom’s reaction to Barry’s seemingly innocent comment; a reaction that is imbued with caution. Previous hostilities experienced by Uncle Tom...form part of this long history of hostility and influence his ongoing interactions with most station owners.

Such contemporary engagements are informed by Ngarrindjeri cultural memory as well as personal experiences of violence and hostility; memories and experiences that intersect with the material traces at Waltowa Wetland. These observations are echoed by Natalie Harkin (2014:5), who in paraphrasing the work of Jackie Huggins, states ‘Indigenous narrative memory held in stories and life experience is an organic process and a collective activity; like a map of possibilities of existence upon which people can draw to make sense of their lives’. Thus, at Waltowa Wetland these intangible memories and experiences converge with the tangible, or as Trigg (2009) articulated, these features become a ‘testimony’ to this often-invisible history. In challenging these silences, the interpretation of these apertures as evidence for frontier conflict becomes a modern form of Ngarrindjeri resistance; resisting colonial narratives that dominate both the historical and physical spaces of Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar-Ruwe. In short, the interpretation of these features becomes less concerned with historical accuracy, instead focusing on what they represent to Ngarrindjeri today about early cultural encounters.
Conclusions

This paper explored early interaction between the Ngarrindjeri Nation and pastoralists at Waltowa Wetland. In an attempt to move beyond the colonial discourses and pastoral histories that dominate the historical and physical spaces of Yarluwar-Ruwe, we presented a detailed account of Ngarrindjeri management of Yarluwar-Ruwe in order to provide a wider philosophical and historical lens through which to examine early encounters at Waltowa Wetland. As such, the krinkari colonisation of Yarluwar-Ruwe that resulted in the historical mismanagement described above not only dispossessed the Ngarrindjeri Nation, but was also in stark contrast to the philosophy of Ruwe/Ruwar and the concept of Yannarumi that informs its ongoing management. These invisible systems of ownership and management provided a foundation for hostilities to grow on both sides, resulting in violent encounters.

With the exception of the Maria incident, previous attempts to describe frontier conflict between the Ngarrindjeri Nation and pastoralists in Yarluwar-Ruwe have taken a regional approach outlining a general pattern of anxiety, fear, violence, dispossession and resistance; however, we have reason to believe violent encounters were more complex and sustained. In challenging this, we explored frontier encounters with reference to Waltowa Wetland, where efforts to maintain control of the wetland's important resources set the scene for early hostilities between Ngarrindjeri Old People and pastoralists. Whilst we presented a place-based focus, including a consideration of the cultural memory attached to the wetland, a detailed history of early culture contact is marred by the fact that many of the accounts included in this paper relate to areas adjacent to Waltowa Wetland, not to the wetland itself nor the overland route that relied on its resources; not least because many historical accounts dismiss the importance of this area and simply refer to it as a ‘swamp’.
Therefore, we suggest that a comprehensive study of archival records, oral histories and material traces relating to the overland stock route be undertaken. Such research would complement other investigations of a similar nature occurring elsewhere in SA (see Burke et al. 2016 for Central Murray), contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Aboriginal–European relations in the early years of SA.

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