

2016

**Lingua Nullius: A Retrospect and Prospect
about Australia's First Languages**

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Ngadlu tampendi Kurna meyunna yerta mettanya womma tarndanyako. Kurna meyunna yertako taikurringa towilla. Parnako tappa purruna, bulto, yailtya kuma, ngadlu. Padnaidlu wadu, turlatina. Mankoriadlu. Ngadlu tampendi Ramindjeri, Ngarrindjeri, Anangu, Adnyamathanha, Narrunga, Barngarla. Meyunna Kuma Ia Yellara. Marni nao budni yaintya imbarendi Kurna yertangga, bilyonirna yertangga.

With respect to Kurna speakers here present and with the approval I have previously been given by Kurna elders to use this acknowledgment, I have wished to say:

We acknowledge the Kurna people and their spiritual relationship with the land as the traditional custodians of the Adelaide region. We acknowledge their living culture, heritage and beliefs. We also acknowledge the Ngarrindjeri, Ramindjeri, Anangu, Adnyamathanha, Narrunga and Barngarla people here today and welcome them to this meeting on Kurna land. May we walk together in harmony in a spirit of reconciliation.

It was January 26 in Adelaide this year – ‘It’s Australia Day, we speak English in Australia!’ So said some unknown woman to Elizabeth Close who, at this Adelaide ceremony, had been speaking to her young daughter in Pitjatjantjara.

Ironically, it was on that same day that, atop Sydney Harbor Bridge, Jessica Mauboy sang our national anthem in English and then, in what some of the press referred to as an Aboriginal dialect, and the SBS referred to as a ‘medley of local Sydney dialects’ but which was, in fact, and as reported by NITV, constructed from a range of Eora dialects.

Three weeks later, Northern Territory MP and government minister, Bess Nungarrayi Price, a speaker of five languages, was denied permission to speak in her first language, Warlpiri, in the chamber. The Speaker saying: ‘Should a member use a language other than English without the leave of the assembly it will be ruled disorderly and the member will be required to withdraw the words.’ Tellingly Bess Close said: ‘I feel that I cannot effectively represent my electorate without using my first language, Warlpiri.’ The Speaker for her part, writing about the issue and the obvious potential solution of the provision of interpreting services in instances such as this, stated: ‘there (is) a standing order, number 245 (which) applies to prohibit interpreters and translators on the floor of the assembly during proceedings.’

Coincidentally, it had been about the time of these two incidents that I had quite separately been speaking with Lowitja O'Donoghue about what I might choose for my topic for the Oration named in her honour. I said that I was keen to speak on the subject of Australia's first languages, the situation these languages had faced over the time since colonial settlement, and then look at both the challenges and opportunities ahead for those that are still being spoken or are capable of being revived – or awakened as Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann says. I was very appreciative that Lowitja was not only agreeable to my speaking on this subject but felt that it was an important one to raise.

At the outset, I must point out that, though my doctorate is in Sociolinguistics and focused on 'Language and Identity', I cannot pretend to have deep knowledge of all the socio-linguistic and linguistic complexities that apply to Australia's first languages. Furthermore I am aware that I am speaking tonight very much in the shadow of giants in that field, both Aboriginal and not – people such as De Kauwanu Lewis Yerloburka O'Brien, Dr Ngarrpadla Alitja Wallara Rigney, Jack Kanya Bucksin, Georgina Yambo Williams, Professor Lester Iribinna Rigney, Dr Rob Amery and Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann amongst many others. But I have timorously stepped into this space because of my own love of the subject of 'Language and Identity' and, in the face of languages living in environments where they are dominated by others, the universal questions and methodologies that may at least be considered to enable those languages not only to survive but to thrive.

In my doctoral thesis I drew a number of conclusions that were all based upon the study of the language of Asturianu (also known as Bable) spoken in the northern Spanish province known as the Principau d'Asturies. For the purpose of tonight's Oration, I will be referring to three broad conclusions. I am going to show three slides, but want to reassure those fearing a session of 'death by powerpoint' that they will soon be over and more detailed commentary about each of them will be in the expanded text of my Oration that will be uploaded on the Don Dunstan Foundation website later this week.

Firstly, at the level of policy-making, a generic approach, applied like a cookie-cutter policy framework to each language at risk, would work only occasionally and then only by happenstance. This is because policy in the area of language promotion needs to take into account a complex interaction of issues that revolve around the status and vitality of both the language spoken by a group and of the group itself. By status I refer both to extrinsic (status conferred) and intrinsic (group self-consciousness) in terms of both group and

language. In terms of vitality, this refers to the degree of dynamism as opposed to a more static state that is evident in both group and language. The graphic above attempts to show how policy approaches would need to differ. If low Group Status is the predominant problem, then a priority of policy development would need to push in the direction of B above. If Group Status was at a reasonable level, but the Language Status was not, then the policy development direction would need to be in direction D; and so forth.

In the case of Aboriginal communities in South Australia, the current situation, for some of our first languages, could be described as reasonably high Group Status for the Anangu Pitjatjantjara Yankunytjatjara, followed by Kurna and Ngarrendjeri through to lower Group Status for Barngala. On the Language Status front, there has been more extrinsic recognition over time of Pitjatjantjara than almost any other language in the state and, until recently, almost none for groups such as the Barngala. Turning to the dimension of the languages spoken, Language Vitality also varies between the various languages; and likewise vitality. Taking this approach, it can be seen that there are myriad permutations of the four elements (A, B, C and D) that would create a diversity of need too wide for a generic policy on language to adequately deal with.

Secondly, notwithstanding successful policy-making by the policy-makers, there is also the issue of implementation that arises from policy. Here my thesis proposed that successful implementation of policy necessitates an interactive process that engages both the macro and micro levels - that is to say both the governance institutions of the wider community (such as government and education departments), namely the macro; and the immediate community itself, namely the micro. The engagement point between these two is the meso level and would be represented by such entities as schools, churches, local police stations and courts, local health facilities and the like. These meso level entities become key to the degree of genuine interaction that may occur between the macro and the micro; their roles can be mediating or stymying. At its best, this approach would echo what is known in development circles as co-design with co-governance; an approach which, again citing development circles, is often best affected when using such methodologies as Appreciative Enquiry.

But a key finding in my thesis was that represented in this graphic. Here an attempt is made to map language use by an analysis of the domains where it is used and also the genres in which it is used. The domains start in the top left corner at the more local (family, local

community) moving towards the less personal (through larger community settings) and on to the impersonal (such as institutions like government) in the top right. Genres of use move from the top left where more simple genres are (family conversations, nursery stories, folk tales) down through more complex genres (literature, drama) towards the bottom left. In this genre spectrum there is also, in most instances, a move from active (e.g. conversation) toward passive (e.g. audience/viewer); though the exception of genres like the internet and the interactive components of radio (talk-back) are exceptions here. The premise here is that the further domains and genres have retreated back towards the top left hand corner, or that entirely new genres have opened up of which a language has no experience, the more difficult the task will be for promoting that language. In the case of my study of Asturianu, the red area indicated what was, at the time of my thesis, an area of reasonable engagement by that language in both domains and genres; the blue area represented areas of deficit. The relative size of the red and blue areas will differ according to each language under consideration.

An underlying premise here is described by the old adage: Languages don't die, they simply stop being spoken. And why might they no longer be spoken? The key issue is that individual speakers might have found less and less utility in using the language in question compared to the alternative dominant language. This may have happened because both the domain and genre fronts have retreated back towards the top left.

The solution to such shrinking back of domains and genres is to work intentionally in expanding the areas of each where individual speakers might come to find it worthwhile using their first language in more situations than previously; reducing their dependence on the dominant language in such situations.

So it will be through the lens of these three broad approaches from my thesis that I will be considering tonight's topic. In doing so, a consideration of the present-day situation of Australia's first languages is needed.

In October 2008, on the occasion of a special event to celebrate the International Year of Languages, I gave an address entitled 'Breaking free of the fear of Babel – a celebration of the linguistic diversity of humanity'. In this speech I spoke about the fragile state of Australia's first languages. In an attempt to have some comparative understanding of the situation I consulted the then most recent edition (15th) of *Ethnologue: Languages of the*

World edited by Raymond G Gordon. Such compendia are always risky to use, and Rob Amery has pointed out to me subsequently some of the limitations of the *Ethnologue* analysis, not the least of which being its failure, in that edition, to list Kaurna; not to mention the somewhat suspect nature of many of the statistics cited for the number of language speakers. Nevertheless, on the basis of a somewhat messy E&OE (Errors and Omissions Excepted) basis, the book is capable of providing indicative information. So let me tell you what it found. Perusing the entry for Australia, in particular with respect to the 231 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages listed, it found that eleven of them were being spoken by between one and ten thousand people (Alyawarr, Anindilyakwa, Arranta, Arrernte, Gunwinggu, Kala Lagaw Ya, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjatjantjara, Tiwi, Walmajarri and Warlpiri).

A further forty were being spoken by between 100 and 999, while eighty were being spoken by between 10 and 99 people. The largest individual group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, ninety two of them, were being spoken by less than ten people. However, there was a final, and itself a very large group, of eighty-eight languages that were listed as being either 'extinct' or 'nearly extinct'.

These are alarming figures; made much worse though by some comparative analysis with the rest of the world. The ninety two languages in Australia said to be spoken by less than ten people represented 45% of all such languages in the world. *Ethnologue* was reporting those figures in 2008 but, by its own citations, much of the data was from the 1980s or 1990s, so it was uncertain how much deterioration in the situation there might have been in the intervening decades - or recuperation; for I should note that Kaurna did not appear in the *Ethnologue* list at all, and Barngarla appeared as 'extinct'; but I will come back to the awakening of those two in a few moments.

For the record, again using *Ethnologue's* figures, it would seem that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, in addition to being 45% of all languages spoken by less than ten people, made up 23% of languages spoken in the world by between 10 and 99 people; and nearly 4% of those spoken by between 100 and 999 people. In that Olympic year of 2008 it seems Australia was winning Gold, Silver and Bronze medals in the race to language extinction. [Source Batchelor Institute]

What does the current situation look like using somewhat more rigorous statistics? Let me start with this graphic from Batchelor College showing the proportion of people who reportedly spoke an indigenous language as a percentage of population (divided geographically by statistical local area) in 2011. It gives a clear impression of where language loss has been greatest; a situation that has not improved since.

Australian Bureau of Statistics so far in this century have suggested some deterioration in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders reportedly using indigenous languages. For example, just looking at those aged over 45, the figure has fallen from 16% in 2001, to 13% in 2006, and then further to 11% in 2011. For other age groups the 2011 Census reported 10% of those under 15, 11% for 15-24 and 13% for those between 25 and 44. Two other statistics from the ABS to round out the picture – firstly in 2008 the ABS reported that 40% of people living in ATSI communities reported being able to speak the language of their community even if only a few words. While in 2011, the ABS reported that 16.6% answered that they did not speak English or did not speak it well.

Does this imply that the remainder in those communities were speaking English? The answer is: not necessarily. For example, while 10% of those under 15 were reported as speaking an indigenous language, 85% were reported as speaking English. So what about the missing 5%. I don't have information on that, other than the speculation that Kriol, Yumplatok and Aboriginal English may have filled the gap.

Whether those three modern Aboriginal languages did or did not explain the gap, what the 2011 Census did find was that Kriol had become the most spoken language in indigenous communities. Furthermore that Aboriginal English was reportedly spoken by 1037 at home, with thousands more speaking it presumably within the community. Of all languages considered in the survey questions, Aboriginal English in fact showed the largest increase.

So the statistical evidence has not been promising and could be interpreted to suggest that there may be an inevitability to ultimate demise of all of Australia's first languages.

Unfortunately, there are many who simply see such a prospect of mass language extinction as an indicator of social evolution, a Darwinian linguistic survival of the fittest. In reality, in sociolinguistic terms, language survival or extinction is not a case of survival of the fittest but survival of the most powerful. Aden Ridgeway, when he was still a senator, said:

'Language is power, let us have our power.'

By implication he was acknowledging that the capacity of Australia's first nations to have real equality of power and status within the Australian commonwealth would be severely hampered if there was not appropriate recognition of Australia's first languages.

The earliest days of colonial settlement showed differing power faces to the language communities they encountered. Here in South Australia, in 1841 the then Governor of South Australia, George Grey wrote that, upon the bringing of commerce to the new colony: 'The ruder languages disappear successively, and the tongue of England alone is heard around.' George Grey obviously hadn't read a report written just six months earlier by Matthew Moorhouse to the Colonial Secretary; Moorhouse wrote this about the 'runder languages':

Seven parts of speech are now clearly recognized ... the substantives, adjectives and pronouns admit of a regular declension, leaving the inflections of the verbs the chief field for future research. This division ... is not altogether unknown, for we are in possession of four moods – an indicative, subjunctive, imperative and infinitive: a present, imperfect, perfect and future tense of the indicative mood, and a perfect and future of the subjunctive.

Lewis O'Brien said the same, but more succinctly, when he noted: 'Our Kurna language is very specific and has many rules – we have no conjunctions – no 'and'- but more conjugations than Latin.' 'Ruder language' indeed!

Why should we consider it important to retain as much of Australia's linguistic inheritance as possible? Taking a step back, to the very purposes of language; language is the repository of a group's stored information about physical and social context, and of the general experience and perceptions of living. How else can the past inform the present? That may sound simple enough until we consider the mental process by which we do this. Douglas Hofstadter and Emmanuel Sander in their book *Surfaces and Essences* write:

No thought can be formed that isn't informed by the past; or, more precisely, we think only thanks to analogies that link our present to our past. [p.20] ... Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche had extremely different personalities, philosophies, and views about religion, but they were united in their unswaying belief in analogy. For Kant, analogy was the wellspring of all creativity, and Nietzsche gave a famous definition of truth as 'a mobile army of metaphors'. [p.21]

So simply ascribing sounds to an object or an event is not what happens in language formation – if such were the case, translation between languages would be much easier. The words and structures of language are the result of very involved processes giving the term 'linguistic richness' much greater meaning. And it was just such a complex linguistic richness that the first colonial settlers encountered in Australia rather than just a confusing array of languages; it was a rich and purposeful linguistic diversity across the continent's 500 nations. Each of those languages represented millennia of evolutionary experience.

The subsequent destruction, through neglect and even outright repression, of many of those languages saw also the death of a vast amount of knowledge about the country that those languages had contained in their lexicons and their analogical perspectives that had authored those lexicons. As has been noted in the Report 'Indigenous Kids and Schooling in the Northern Territory' (Penny Lee, Lyn Fasoli et. al):

The death of small languages is a tragedy for all human beings in a global sense. This is because ancient wisdom and artistic productions handed down from generation to generation in stories and songs and poetical dramas or dances die out. Old, specialized languages of small indigenous groups also have great scientific value. For instance, from a medical point of view, the names and uses of medicinal plants may be lost when old people who speak those languages die. These languages provide understandings about climate food sources, animal migration and reproduction patterns and other forms of information about the world around us.

The report goes on to make the point: 'When languages die, a central part of a group's identity changes forever and it may take generations for new core elements of identity to evolve.' What has been done to Australia's first languages since 1788 has been akin to burning the Great Library of Alexandria, in terms of knowledge of land, context and the world that has been lost as languages have died. The Library is still on fire, with much already destroyed, so the challenge to us as an Australian people is whether we let that great repository of knowledge continue to burn; or will we douse the fire to save what has not yet been lost, and scour the ashes to retrieve what may yet be salvaged?

Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann has suggested that this vast linguistic loss should open up a discussion on the concept of Native Tongue Title, including a debate as to why there should

not be compensation for the language loss that has occurred. He cites these ethical reasons for Native Tongue Title:

The loss of language is more severe than the loss of land

Language death = loss of cultural autonomy

Language death = loss of spiritual and intellectual sovereignty

Language death = loss of soul

Language is a repository of ideas, values and experience.

A contentious proposition perhaps but one that nevertheless raises important points that must be considered. In my strong opinion, the most appropriate compensation for this language loss is no more nor less than a significant investment of time, effort and resources in sustaining those languages that are still being spoken, and in awakening those that Ghil'ad refers to as 'Sleeping Beauties'.

Let me turn now to the issues involved in sustaining presently spoken languages and awakening the 'Sleeping Beauties'. What is needed is appropriate recognition of the first languages of this country. In saying that, there has to be a recognition that there can also be inappropriate recognition of such languages. Ignoring the reality of such languages – *Lingua Nullius* – is problematic enough; but there has also been a cost to sociolinguistic integrity by some of the supposed recognition of first languages that has happened since 1788.

How many Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander words do you know? Think for a moment. I am not sure what words are coming into your minds; but it is possible that you may be thinking such words as: *Kangaroo, Wallaby, Emu, Echidna, Boomerang, Didgeridoo, Dingo, Koala, Goana, Quandong, Yabby, Willy-willy, Yakka, Kadaitja, Wurley, Cooee, Woomera, Nulla nulla, Cassowary, Cockatoo* and Kylie. Before you think that Kylie Minogue gets herself into everything, I hasten to add that it is thought that the name Kylie comes from the Noongar word for a throwing stick.

But coming back to the words I have just listed, and you doubtless would have thought of more, there are some problems that arise from the commonality of such words. Firstly, a number of them were never Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in the first place. *Cockatoo*

and *Cassowary* come from Malay (*kakatua* and *kasuari*), while *Echidna* comes from the Greek for viper; and *Goana* is a simplification of iguana, a word originating in Latin America.

In a similar vein, *didgeridoo* is said to have been coined by early colonists out of a combination of its onomatopoeia-like quality and the Scotch Gaelic *dudaire dubh* (for black piper). But a more serious problem is that of the seventeen remaining words in the list above that are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander etymology, seven of them came from one language alone –

Dharug – that which was spoken in the area where Sydney now sits. In other words, the Aboriginal language that was first encountered by the first colonists has had a disproportionate impact on the number of words we, across the country, have taken into Australian English as being authentic first language words. For the record, those words are: *Cooee* (*guui*); *corroboree* (*garaabara*); *dingo* (*dingu*); *koala* (*gulawong*); *nulla-nulla* (*ngala ngala*); *wallaby* (*walaba*); and *woomera* (*wumara*).

The significance of the problem here is that other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island languages have not only had to face the powerful linguistic assault of English, they have also had to cope with the imposition on their own lexicons of alien words from other totally different first language lexicons. To get just a taste of the impact of this, imagine if Chinggis Khaan and his band of merry men had occupied all of Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, including the birthplace of English, and had applied some local words they may first have encountered as they crossed over into Hungary, for example. Subsequent generations of Mongol colonists living in Britain, may have felt they were using local indigenous words when they said *imádat* and *szertartás* (when describing our religious practices of worship and ritual) or may have called our spears *lándzsa*; all words that would in fact have been meaningless to the locals. Incidentally, in that earlier list of words, only one came from Kurna – *wurlie* (coming from *wadli*).

On a related matter of the problems of imposed words is that of foreign language descriptions of autochthonous practices. I think I was about seven or eight when I first heard of the concept of an untranslatable word. We had been watching a documentary at school on the Netherlands and its canals; at some point the narrator mentioned a Dutch word that he said was untranslatable into English. I am having trouble remembering the word, but know that it had something to do with canals and their management. Googling

suggests that the word may have been *gracht* – of which Wikipedia commented: Although the word *gracht* means ‘canal’ or ‘waterway’ in the general sense, there is no exact equivalent for the term in English, therefore it is best left untranslated.

I am sure you may be able to think of other such words – the Scottish word *canny* for example. What happens in such situations is that often the foreign word is simply brought into English. On other occasions a best fit is concocted from within the English lexicon. That has been the case with two words in Australian English – *Dreamtime* and *walkabout*. The website creativespirits.info has a particularly interesting entry about the word preferred to the word *Dreamtime* – namely *Dreaming*. The reason for the change from earlier practice is expressed on that site by Karl Telfer: ‘We are the oldest and the strongest people, we’re here all of the time, we’re constant through the Dreaming which is happening now, there’s no such thing as the Dreamtime.’

What Karl Telfer describes is a translation chasm between two cultures. The now predominant culture sought to compartmentalise a spirituality with a notion of archaism, of a time gone and now lost; when in fact the culture that generated this particular spirituality consciously chose to remove it from the realm of time. For the record, that same website contains a number of words from different Aboriginal languages for spirituality and beliefs. One listed from South Australia is from Pitjatantjara – *tjurkurrpa* (also written *jukurrpa* and *tjurgurba*)

The same website, on another page, says of the word *walkabout* that it is ‘a derogative term, used when someone doesn’t turn up or is late.’ Because of this, the site also states that: ‘Its use by non-Aboriginal people is considered inappropriate (and notes that) groups such as Reconciliation Queensland advise against its use when discussing Aboriginal culture.’

Nicole Tiedgen, Advocacy Manager of Tourism SA, has this to say about the real nature of the concept labelled *walkabout*: An Aboriginal person who is on ‘walkabout’ connects with their spiritual obligations by tracing the paths formed by their ancestors at the beginning of time. In the process important information is encrypted in songs and ceremony that have led to the concept of Songlines. These paths or songlines criss-cross Australia, connecting important waterholes, food sources and landmarks. By going ‘walkabout’ Aboriginal people enhance their cultural and spiritual connection with the land and their ancestors. They return with a sense of oneness within themselves and with the world in which they live.

Where we have historically chosen not to impose a seeming 'close-fit' English word for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander word, phrase or concept, the tendency has been to impose a word from only one of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages. A case in point is the word *corroboree*. Again referring to the creativespirits.info website, it notes the wide variety of words used by different languages – such as *inma* in Pitjatjantjara, *palti* in Kurna, *Ngikawalin* in Ngarrindjeri and *Gurribunguroo* in Narrunga.

Since we are now talking about matters related to faith, spirituality and ritual – and, again don't worry, this is not going to turn into a sermon, despite my relatively recently gained title – let me turn my attention to the churches. The churches have played a significant role in what has happened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. In South Australia the first recorded use of an Aboriginal language by a non-Aboriginal person took place on May 25th 1839 when Rev. Schurmann read the Ten Commandments to those Kurna assembled as part of the Queen's Birthday festivities.

The impact of churches on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have reflected the tension of the theological dialectic in the Bible between the Tower of Babel of the Old Testament and the Feast of Pentecost of the New Testament. Symptomatic of this division had been the long-standing mono-lingualism of the Western church which contrasted with the multilingualism of the Eastern church. While local vernaculars reigned in the Eastern church, Rome's fear of a repeat of the linguistic chaos that followed in the wake of the failure of the Tower of Babel as an infrastructure project led to the linguistic hegemony of Latin.

When it has been at its best, the Church in Australia has sought to echo the spirit of Pentecost. Acts 2:4: 'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.'

In 1969 the Bible Society completed a project of some decades with the printing of a New Testament in Pitjatjantjara; this is that Bible's version of this verse: 'Ka tjanala tjalngarangu Kurunpa Milmilnga, kaya tja: kutjupa-kutjupatjutangu wangkangi, Kuruntu nintinyangka.' There have been many Bible translation endeavours over the last couple of centuries. A notable one being the 1864 *Scriptural selections in Ngarrindjeri* which was the first part of the Bible published in any of Australia's first languages. Only one of the original three hundred copies printed has yet been found.

The result was that some early missionaries sought to nourish first languages in schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Much has been written about the excellent work in the 1940s done by the Lutheran missionaries, C.G. Teichelman and C.W. Schurmann; including the dictionary of Kurna words and phrases that they compiled, but also the teaching of Kurna that they included in the Adelaide school they established. And, in the past decade, there has been the excitement over letters written the late 1840s in Kurna by some of the students of that school to German supporters of the program.

But while such sociolinguistic enlightenment was occurring in a part of the colony of South Australia, it was matched by other more oppressive educational approaches. We are here tonight at Adelaide University, an historic South Australian institution that was given a much more enlightened start than was the case with other early Australian universities. In no small part, the first Anglican Bishop of Adelaide, Augustus Short, could claim credit for the distinctively progressive nature of this university. Yet it would be this very same man who would encourage an type of schooling to which Aboriginal: '... children could go where they would be away from tribal life.' Michael Whiting, in his book *Augustus Short and the Founding of the University of Adelaide*, notes that the aim of such schooling in the opinion of Bishop Short and his supporters was so that the children would: 'become self-sufficient and employable ... (and) that society would be enhanced by socialising Indigenous people into English collective values.'

In a letter written in 1848 to the Governor of Western Australia, Short wrote: 'In the process of civilisation the first effort must be to detach the young natives from connection with native customs and influences ...' Interestingly, such a process of intentional alienation from cultural roots was at odds with the aspirations of the British at the time of establishing the colony. The Order in Council signed by King William IV on 23 February 1836 contained this statement: '... nothing therein contained shall affect or be construed to affect the rights of any Aboriginal natives 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.'

That some of the early settlers understood that statements such as this implied more than mere land tenure, but the right to have social continuity, which would include language, is evidenced by a letter written on July 27th 1840 by Matthew Moorhouse, Protector of the

Aborigines, to the Colonial Secretary. He wrote in part: 'The language of the Aborigines has not been overlooked, nor its importance forgotten.'

Incidentally, of particular interest in Moorhouse's letter is a further statement indicative of his appreciation of the power of language to be a repository of knowledge that could easily be lost: 'A more extended knowledge of the language has introduced us to a more general acquaintance with the manners and customs of these people. We find – what the Europeans thought the Aborigines of Australasia did not possess – territorial rights, families owning and holding certain districts of land which pass from fathers to sons ... They go further than this: occasionally one family will barter their territory.'

Schools remain a very important part of the future sustainability of currently spoken languages and the revival of those that have 'fallen asleep'. But sometimes those schools have had checkered histories in terms of their support or otherwise of local languages. Raukkan Aboriginal School today proudly proclaims: Ngarni-yan Yunti Enani [Together we can do it].

Indeed the school's most recent Annual Report notes that today Ngarrindjeri is taught at the school and also that the home language of students 'is a form of Aboriginal English which contains some Ngarrindjeri vocabulary.' And we know that the Raukkan community, as I mentioned earlier, was the place where the first undertaking of a translation of portions of the Bible had been published (in 1864); yet later, by the Annual Report's own admission, there would be a long period when: 'The use of Ngarrindjeri language was forbidden.'

I had first visited the APY lands in 1980 when my wife and I responded to an invitation from the Principal of Fregon School for us to visit him and his wife. We flew to Ernabella where, whilst we waited for Neil to collect us for the drive back to Fregon, we spent an hour or so with a young woman who was collecting oral histories from the Ernabella community. It was the first direct contact I had with the issue of language maintenance in the APY lands. Over the few days we spent in the Lands on that visit, I was able to see first-hand the two-phase bilingual program in the school. The first phase had English as second to the local language in cross-curriculum teaching for the first years of primary; this was reversed in the later years of primary when English became the primary language.

The concept of bilingual education very much appealed to me and, when I would, just a few months later, be appointed Shadow Minister of Education, I considered ways in which I

could promote such a positive idea both in the Lands and elsewhere in education. At that time another type of bilingual education (Italian and English) was being piloted in two eastern suburban schools in Adelaide. At the time bilingual education was a concept with considerable cachet. However, it would ultimately cease in both locations for entirely different reasons. The Italian/English experiment of the eastern suburbs wound down for want of students from an L1 Italian setting; while the experiment in the APY clearly did not have, and still does not have, a want of students from an L1 setting, but was closed for other reasons.

Bilingual education is a concept whereby the curriculum is conveyed to students in two languages; the curriculum being more than just teaching of core language competency in either of the two languages, but the use of those languages for teaching of other disciplines - such as science, mathematics, social studies. Overall bilingual programs use dual languages not just to improve the capacity to learn non-language subjects, but also to enable students to complete their education with high levels of competency in both languages.

Were these two South Australian programs achieving their objectives? In the case of the Italian-English bilingual programs, the answer was broadly 'yes'. However, with respect to the Pitjatjantjara-English bilingual programs, it can only be noted that, following particularly vocal concerns by elders in the Kenmore Park community, those programs ceased in 1992.

It is my contention that they ceased for want of sufficient training of teachers running those programs. The reality was that, certainly for most of the 1980s these programs were being taught by teachers who could not speak Pitjatjantjara. For classroom learning to proceed, these teachers had to rely on Aboriginal Education Workers as the linguistic go-between with the students.

A course in Pitjatjantjara was introduced in about 1985 to give prospective teachers some conversational skill in the language. The materials for this course included cassette tapes. Many years later a CD version was introduced - *Wangka Kulintjaku* - that would enable teachers to do the subject as a self-instructional course. The provision of such courses was good; however, the fault, in my retrospective opinion, is that any teacher going to teach in the APY lands should have been required to undertake a three-month intensive course in the language before being posted to the Lands.

In 1984 another initiative was undertaken by what was then the SACAE (now UniSA) in the introduction of a two-year modified teacher training program known as ANTEP – Anangu Teacher Education Program. This program was open to Aboriginal Education Workers from the Lands and offered a two-year curriculum of teacher training that would then enable them to return to their communities as teachers in the schools. Additionally, those who were to successfully complete those two years would have the option to undertake a third year of training which would then qualify them as teachers in any school in the state. Over the intervening thirty plus years, fifty students graduated with a Diploma of Education (Anangu Education) and twenty five with a Bachelor of Education (Anangu Education). I understand, however, that this program that has provided significant local capacity-building in education may not continue beyond the end of this year. If this is the case, this would be doubly unfortunate not just for the denied opportunities to local people, particularly women, in the APY lands but also because the graduates of these courses should be considered as filling the necessary bilingual language-capacity need, the absence of which killed off bilingual education in the APY in 1992.

At this point, it would be worthwhile my making some comments on my involvement in the establishment of the Kurna Plains School. Dr Alitja Rigney has, in other fora, very graciously commented on the contribution she believes I made to assisting the rejuvenation of the Kurna language by my support for the establishment of that school. I thank her for those comments. It is certainly true that I strongly supported the establishment of the school back in 1985 in the face of significant opposition from elements of the local non-Aboriginal community. There was even the suggestion – put directly to me at the time that, were a No Confidence vote to be moved against me in the House of Assembly and, given the Government's minority status in that year, that I could lose my ministerial position.

What we now know as the Kurna Plains School was originally called the Elizabeth Urban Aboriginal School. In its report in December 1985 recommending the school's establishment, the Parliamentary Public Works Standing Committee noted three aims for the proposed school, these being:

To maintain and reinforce the feelings, knowledge and understanding of
Aboriginality, in order to develop pride, confidence and self-esteem as Aboriginal
people;

To provide students with the skills necessary for the interaction in their own community and the wider Australian community; and

To involve the Aboriginal community in the responsibility for education in order that a familiar and positive learning environment be provided for Aboriginal students.

The report then also noted that these three aims would be met by eleven means. Particularly relevant for tonight there were two that were related to language:

Teaching an Aboriginal language; and

Using Aboriginal English patterns in early literacy experiences, and while introducing the use of Standard English, never doing so in a way that devalues the first language.

During the Committee's hearings, I appeared before the PWSC to put the case for the school, and also to contest allegations made against me in particular as to my motives in promoting the school's establishment. In the course of that opposition, I had been accused of introducing Apartheid into our education system, and of wanting to limit exposure to Aboriginal studies in the education system by limiting the discipline to this school and other primarily Aboriginal schools. I gave a very long statement to the committee, too long to quote here; but perhaps I might quote this one statement: 'All I ask is for members of the community to give this their fullest consideration, a fair consideration, and look at the examples we have in South Australia where Aboriginal education is following various models, proving themselves successful for the students within them, and compatible with communities in which they are located.'

And there are many more initiatives happening in our schools promoting teaching of Aboriginal languages; but this all seems to be operating at the meso and micro levels with insufficient support from the macro.

What is clearly needed is a more coherent policy framework at the state and national levels that also provides proper resourcing for teacher training and material production. This resourced policy framework should seek to:

Introduce or strengthen bilingual programs in schools in majority population Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;

Provide in communities, where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander numbers are significant but not in the majority, compulsory second-language teaching provided to all students;

Provide in all other communities for the teaching of local or regional languages as separate subjects or as modules of study within other subjects.

All of this would be easier to achieve if, at the state and national levels, there were government policies regarding Australia's first languages.

Noel Pearson, back in 2012, promoted the idea that the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of indigenous Australians, should include a reference to language in the proposals for amending the Constitution. As a result, there was a draft Clause 127A put out for discussion. This draft clause read:

(1) The national language of the Commonwealth of Australia is English.

(2) The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are the original Australian languages, a part of our national heritage.

The proposal, as Pearson puts it: 'has largely disappeared from the national discourse about constitutional recognition'. It will therefore most probably not be included in the Recognise Referendum to be held next year. I can agree that there are sound reasons for this, but this should not stop the issue of legal recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being dealt with in other ways than by amendment to the Constitution. In other words to examine alternative ways of giving the status of officiality to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

English is not, by constitutional proclamation, the official language of Australia; rather its pre-eminent status has come about through a quasi-constitutionalism resulting from state practice since the first exercise of colonial governance on 26 January 1888. All federal, state and territory statute law and regulations are composed in English; all court judgements are composed in English. In Australia, English has not needed Constitutional sanction to shore up this pre-eminent status. So if English could not only survive and thrive without such sanction, one could well ask why would any other language need some form of officiality?

Ghil'ad Zuckermann has previously pointed out that New Zealand has two official languages. If you haven't heard him speak on the subject, I almost certainly know what you are now thinking. You are thinking that New Zealand's official languages must be English and Te Reo Maori. And you would only be half right. Te Reo Maori certainly; but the other official language is New Zealand Sign Language. English has no such status in New Zealand. Te Reo Maori gained legal official status in 1987, and NZSL in 2006. Both achieved such status through statute law, not through constitutional amendment.

The same could be done in this country. But to do so would require an acknowledgment of an element of primacy being given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. There are some in this country who might reject that. In commenting on the use of Warlpiri by Bess Price that I referred to at the beginning of my speech tonight, Bob Gosford, writing for crikey.com.au, had this to say:

... there are very real practical issues to do with the provision of an interpreter to those members of the NT Legislative Assembly who may ... choose to use a language other than English ... Two ... are of Dutch descent ... (while two others) are of Italian and Indian heritage (and) may wish to (use their first languages) from time to time.

In other words, he is presuming an absolute equality amongst all languages other than English in this country. But why should that be so? Why, in this one area, should it be inconceivable that Australia's first languages could have primacy over all others? Not only for the sake of an historical recognition that this land was not *Lingua Nullius* at first colonial settlement; but also because, Bess Price's point had been to be able to communicate the feelings of some of her constituents, Australian-born people, who did not have fluency or even proficiency in English. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are autoctonous; they exist nowhere else on the planet. If they are not to be protected here, then they will be protected nowhere else other than perhaps in the aspic-quality of museum files.

In fairness to Bob Gosford, while I take serious issue with his implied attitude re the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, I should acknowledge that in that same article he did go on to make a very important point that the linguistic killing fields are not in the Northern Territory parliamentary precinct but in the dozens of small territory townships where on every school day kids walk out of their houses where English is spoken

as a third, fourth or fifth language, and end up the road to spend the day in a monolingual classroom.

But to return to the point, in dealing with the merits or otherwise of official status being given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, amongst the issues worth considering is the status of such languages in the courts of law. Unlike some other countries that have Human Rights Charters that enshrine the right of a plaintiff to interpretation, Australia has relied on its being a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in particular, in terms of tonight's topic, regarding this particular defined right; I quote: 'The right to the free assistance of an interpreter if the person cannot understand or speak the language used in the Court.'

The history of the de facto existence of such a right, certainly before the Covenant, is mixed. In a very interesting paper (entitled *Ngayulu nyurranya putu kulini – The Legal Right to an Interpreter*) presented to the Language and Law Conference in Darwin in 2012, Russell Goldflam noted a judicial finding in Queensland in 1885 where four Aboriginal men were acquitted of a murder charge: '... because no interpreter could be found to enable them to hear and understand what they had been charged with.'

Goldflam's use of the phrase 'hear and understand' was more than casual as, earlier in his presentation he had noted how in both Pitjatantjara and Arrernte a single word conveyed the meaning of both 'hearing' and 'understanding' (*kulini* in the former and *aweme* in the latter). And he used this duality to make the point that:

The accused must both be able to hear and understand. [p.1] He further used his presentation to examine the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights acknowledged by Australia alongside his assertion that:

'In Australia law, the judge has a final discretion whether to allow an interpreter or not.' [p.3] Whilst he noted that such discretion must be properly exercised and would be highly susceptible to a successful appeal in the event of a failure to allow such interpretation, Goldflam highlighted the danger of ambiguity in such an uncertain situation. He cited a statement made in 1999 by the then Chief Minister of the Northern Territory that: 'Providing Aborigines with interpreters is like giving a wheelchair to someone who should be walking. [p.3]

The 1986 Report of the Australian Legal Rights Commission [Report 31: Recognition of Aboriginal Customary Laws: General Use of evidence and procedure] included two quotes that spoke to the 'hearing and understanding' dilemma as it particularly applied to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for whom English was not their particular first language. The Report quoted Justice Kriewaldt's comments about the situation that applied in the 1950s: ' ... in the Northern Territory the trial of an aborigine in most cases proceeds, and so far as I could gather, has always proceeded, as if the accused were not present. If he were physically absent no one would notice this fact. The accused, so far as I could judge, in most cases takes no interest in the proceedings. He certainly does not understand that portion of the evidence which is of the greatest importance in most cases, namely, the account a police constable gives of the confession made by the accused. No attempt is made to translate any of the evidence to him.'

And in another place, the Report cited a comment made in 1981 by a Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service lawyer: '... the new and impressive court building in Alice Springs [announces] the fact that interpreters can be obtained on request in about nine languages including two Chinese dialects. A notable omission is ... any reference whatsoever to any Aboriginal language. This is despite the fact that Aboriginal people comprise between 60% and 70% of all Defendants in the Summary Courts held at Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, as well as virtually all Defendants listed in the bush courts and as much as 90% of all matters listed in the Supreme Court Criminal Sittings.' [510]

Toponymy is a sometimes underrated aspect of language recognition and respect. Place names matter, if they didn't every place would simply be given a number. As it is, there is only one place in the whole of Australia whose place name is a number – 1770 which is in Queensland and, in case you're interested, its postcode is 4677. So if place names matter, so does the language that is used to name them.

I am pleased that it was my government, back in 1993, that accepted guidelines by which both Aboriginal names and English names could be given to a place. In 1999, those guidelines were incorporated into law under the Geographical Names Board legislation. Incidentally, that board was only itself incorporated in statute law in 1969. From its founding in 1916, when it was called the Nomenclature Committee – which had been set up for the ethnic cleansing of German place names from the South Australian map – the GNB operated under government authority.

Surprisingly, place naming can generate strong feelings. Back in October 2010, a contributor to Andrew Bolt's blog on Uluru posted this comment concerning another contributor named Jim who had defended the renaming of Ayer's Rock; he wrote: 'I still call it Ayers Rock, Jimbo, also The Grampians which is the white fellers name, even still call Footscray Rd, well, Footscray Rd, not that Birralung thingy that was foisted upon us ... Just because someone changes names, doesn't mean we all have to fall into line and like it, or even use these new names ...' Apart from his transparent bigotry, the correspondent put forward a deeply flawed proposition. Ayers Rock, The Grampians and Footscray Road were all changes to names; well maybe not Footscray Road, as that was a post-colonisation construction. The reality is that place names are, overwhelmingly, arbitrary, at least those that are in English in Australia. On the other hand, Aboriginal place names always had historically or, if given later, currently a connection to context. So Onkaparinga came from Ngangkippingara, meaning Women's River.

As an indicator of the arbitrariness of English language names, Colonel William Light chose, in 1836, to name the central square in his plan, the Great Square. A year later, on 23rd May 1837, the town elders chose to rename it after Princess Victoria. So it became Victoria Square – entirely arbitrary as Victoria hadn't done anything to merit the honour, and the space isn't even a square – it's a rectangle. Much less arbitrary, therefore, was the proclamation 165 years later to change the name officially to Tarndanyangga/Victoria Square. Tarndanyangga, place of Red Kangaroo Dreaming, having a connection pre-colonial settlement with the general area now covered by the CBD and Parklands. I should note, however, that there was at the time an alternative name proposed by Rob Amery and Georgina Yambo Williams, namely *Ngamatyi*.

Toponymy might be considered tokenistic by some, on the other hand it is emblematic; and efforts should be made to extend the dual naming, not just of geographical features, but also human constructs, such as streets and suburbs. That being said, there are two issues that should be noted. Firstly, the potential for loss of exclusivity of use; and secondly, the question of whether one or other should have primacy. The New Zealand Geographic Board/Nga Pou Taunaha Aotearoa has, in recent years, opted to give primacy to Maori names over English. Both these issues would need to be addressed in extending Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander toponymy.

In summary Language Policy needs to focus on supporting surviving original languages to thrive, for the benefit of our shared cultural inheritance. I have talked about ways that this can happen through education, through language officiality and through place naming. But I return to the third conclusion of my doctoral thesis – the question of the genres and domains where language use is occurring. To repeat the adage – ‘languages don’t die, they just stop being spoken’ – and they stop being spoken if speakers feel that the language at risk no longer meets their needs in an ever-growing range of genres and domains. Such is the power of the micro level to determine the ultimate success or failure of language policy and investment.

So what sorts of things can be done to expand language usage across domains and genres? What I now list are some examples from overseas experience.

A key possibility involves the languages used on computers. We know from other evidence that there has been a significant investment in computer infrastructure in schools and communities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander areas. But it is the case that everywhere those computers will be using English as their operating language. Yet, Windows 10 offers Cherokee (from North America), K’iche (from Central America) and Quechua (from South America) are amongst the range of operating languages on offer. Perhaps government or private sponsors could offer to support Windows offer some of Australia’s first languages as additions to the list.

On the internet-related topic, many minority languages around the world have found the World Wide Web to have been a boon to promoting information and networks in support of languages at risk. I first came across this in my doctoral studies with the site Asturies.com – but there are many others. I have been very pleased to see similar developments happening with Australia’s first languages and have noted in particular the Kurna Warra Pintyanthi website.

Besides the internet and computing in general, a key area of potential is broadcast media. Back in 1986, on behalf of the South Australian government, I gave evidence at hearings of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal into the proposition that there be a new TV channel footprint covering central Australia. There were two applicants for the licence – one from northern Queensland and the other based in Alice Springs – the Central Australia Media Alliance or Imparja. As a state government we had decided to support Imparja and offered a

\$1m guarantee as well as a commitment to purchase air time. Our hope was that the station would help in the delivery of education programs in remote areas, but that it would also offer an opportunity for a wider diversity of languages in broadcast use.

Finally, in the list of things that can be done to encourage a growth in genre usage, is the idea used by many languages at risk of supporting the translation of major works in other languages into the minority languages. Speakers of such languages will not always want to be limited to literature in their vernacular that has only come from their own communities; they would want literature from the global library as well.

Returning to electronic media for a moment, this idea of casting a net wider than traditionally thought about in language promotion has seen some interesting experiments. Galician television in Spain, in order to promote the audience of programs broadcast in Gallego, has over the years bought the rights to popular overseas programs and then dubbed them into Gallego – I recall they did this with the US soapie *Falcon Crest*. They also obtained the broadcast rights for certain sporting events which were then narrated in Gallego.

I started my oration this evening talking about an incident on Australia Day and a performance of our national anthem by Jessica Mauboy. Back in 1993, when I was Premier, I had raised the suggestion in Executive Council as to whether the Opening of Parliament that year could have an element conducted in an Aboriginal language. The formal Opening of Parliament is an occasion of pomp and ceremony all designed to reinforce the authority of a commonwealth of people brought together as an institution of state for the benefit of those very people. The then Governor, Dame Roma Mitchell, was sympathetic to the idea though, with her characteristic sound knowledge of constitutional and statute law, pointed out that such an event would have no legal standing in the opening proceedings, and would be akin to the fanfare that was to be played from the Strangers' Gallery of the Legislative Assembly as Assembly MPs paraded into the Chamber prior to the Governor's Address. With this semi-green light to proceed, I asked our Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Kym Mayes to investigate how best this might be effected. A few weeks later he reported back that the idea was proving more difficult to progress than initially anticipated for the very good reason of the multilingual nature of South Australia – which language or languages would be chosen being key, but not alone, amongst the questions raised. Sadly, as time was too short before the opening was to take place, and with many other affairs of the busyness of state to pre-

occupy Cabinet's mind, the idea was laid aside. It is one of my regrets but, as Ned Kelly would say: 'Such is life.'

However, the principle behind my idea was a recognition of the power of language symbols quite apart from genres and domains of usage or legal status. Time would come where Acknowledgement of Country would become commonplace, but the issue I sought was more integrative - namely a conscious acknowledgement of language equality in the very organs of state.

On ANZAC Day this year, I attended the Dawn Service held in Katherine in the Northern Territory. About one thousand people attended and I was moved to note that the bi-national nature of the ANZAC story was recognised by those present as both the Australian and New Zealand national anthems were sung. But at that point, the irony of the situation came into sharp focus as our national anthem was sung mono-lingually while New Zealand's 'God defend New Zealand/Manaakitia mai Aotearoa' was sung bilingually. There, in the Top End, with strong representation in the crowd attending the Dawn Service from the local Aboriginal communities, we listened to anthems in English and Maori ... and no other language.

Of course, the excuse the South Australian Cabinet accepted in 1993 played well again - it would not be possible to have a bilingual Australian anthem ... there are simply too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages - our anthem would rival *Aida* in length if all were to be recognised. The South African National Anthem, 'Nkosi Sikelel iAfrika', does follow a selective multi-lingual path with verses in five of the countries national languages (Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English) - but a national anthem with over one hundred verses? Not realistic.

However, I believe there are two solutions that the national parliament should consider. The first would be the authorising of official translations of our anthem into all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken in Australia today with the provision that these official translations could be sung in those geographic areas where each of those languages is autochthonous. Thus here in Adelaide, a Kurna version could be sung at the Dawn Service alongside the English version or at Australia Day ceremonies.

Thinking about this possibility, I thought about South Australia's own candidate for a national anthem that had topped the poll here in SA in the 1977 Referendum but came fourth nationally - Carolyn Carleton and Carl Linger's 'Song of Australia':

There is a land where summer skies
Are gleaming with a thousand dyes,
Blending in 'witching harmonies, in harmonies;
And grassy knoll, and forest height,
Are flushing in the rosy light,
And all above is azure bright - Australia!

Perhaps our South Australian legislature might consider proclaiming official translations of this would-be anthem as an encouragement to the national parliament.

But then another possibility occurred to me – two anthems. Our existing national anthem could be complemented by another one that would have its provenance from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inheritance. We have three official flags and, as we South Australians note with pride the Aboriginal flag (designed by Harold Thomas, a Luritja man) first flew in Australia on 12 July 1971 in Tarndanyangga-Victoria Square, and was proclaimed official On 14 July 1995 – the same date as the Torres Strait Islander flag.

A parallel national anthem, in multilingual versions, would give Australia a richer voice of unity. As I thought about this, I recalled a poem by Eva Johnson called *Visions*. Eva, of the Malak Malak people in the Daly River region was taken from her mother at the age of two. first to Croker Island Mission and then, at the age of ten, to an orphanage in Adelaide. The first and last verses of her poem had, for me, an anthemic ring about them; and so, I will finish by reciting them:

We cling to our hopes and dreams
Of another brand-new day
That mould our lives into sculptures
Of images wrapped in clay
There is hope in our tomorrows
Our love must show the way
Let our children's words be spoken
From the visions of yesterday.
We keep our own flag flying
In colours black, red and gold
To remember our living and dying
Our history that has never been told
Let the voice of our new generation
Break the barriers across this land
o And fight with pride and dignity
With the vision we hold in our hand.