



Archived by Flinders University

This is an Accepted Manuscript version of the following article, accepted for publication in *Journal of Genocide Research*.

Burke, H., Barker, B., Wallis, L., Craig, S., & Combo, M. (2020). *Betwixt and Between: Trauma, Survival and the Aboriginal Troopers of the Queensland Native Mounted Police*. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 22(3), 317–333. It is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

This article was published by Taylor & Francis in *Journal of Genocide Research* on 2 March 2020, available online

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2020.1735147>

**Betwixt and Between: Trauma, Survival and the Aboriginal Troopers of the  
Queensland Native Mounted Police**

Bryce Barker

*University of Southern Queensland*

Heather Burke

*Flinders University*

Lynley Wallis

*Griffith University; University of Notre Dame Australia*

Sarah Craig

*Queensland Health*

Michelle Combo

*Queensland Health*

**Contact Details**

Bryce Barker (corresponding author)

School of Humanities and Communication,

University of Southern Queensland

Toowoomba QLD 4350

Australia

Email: [barker@usq.edu.au](mailto:barker@usq.edu.au)

Heather Burke

Archaeology,

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

GPO Box 2100

Adelaide SA 5001

Australia

Email: Heather.burke@flinders.edu.au

Lynley A. Wallis

Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research

Griffith University

170 Kessels Road

Nathan Qld 4111 Australia

Email: l.wallis@griffith.edu.au

Sarah Craig

Queensland Health

Metro South Addiction and Mental Health Services

Garden City Office Park, Building 23

Brisbane QLD 4000

Australia

Email: sarah.craig@health.qld.gov.au

Michelle Combo

Queensland Health

Inala Indigenous Health Service

7 Wirraway Parade,

Inala QLD 4077

Australia

Email: Michelle.Combo@health.qld.gov.au

### **Funding Details**

This research was funded through the Australian Research Council (DP 160100307 The Archaeology of the Queensland Native Mounted Police).

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### **Biographic Notes**

**Professor Bryce Barker** is an archaeologist in the School of Humanities and Communications at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba. He specialises in Australasian Indigenous archaeology. He is a current editor of the journal *Australian Archaeology* and is on the Editorial Board of *Queensland Archaeological Research*. His most recent publications include, “The Queensland Native Police and strategies for recruitment on the Queensland frontier,” *Journal of Australian Studies* (2018) and the “Archaeology of JSARN–124 site 3, central-western Arnhem Land: determining the age of the so-called “Genyornis” painting” in the *Archaeology of Rock Art in Western Arnhem Land, Australia* (2019).

ORCID 0000-0002-6008-6411

**Professor Heather Burke** is an Australian historical archaeologist in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences at Flinders University. She is a past co-editor of the

journal *Australian Archaeology* and has published widely including the books *Meaning and Ideology in Historical Archaeology* (1999) and the co-published *The Archaeologist's Field Handbook*, a standard manual for teaching archaeological field methods, which was revised and expanded for a second edition in 2017.

ORCID: 0000-0002-011410-9072

**Associate Professor Lynley Wallis** is an Australian archaeologist at Griffith University, as well as working as a cultural heritage consultant currently engaged as the Cultural Heritage Advisor to Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation. She is a past co-editor of the journal *Australian Archaeology* and is on the Editorial Board of *Queensland Archaeological Research*. Lynley has longstanding interests in the archaeology of northern Australia, palaeoenvironments and Aboriginal cultural heritage management, and a commitment to undertaking collaborative research partnerships with communities.

ORCID: 0000-0002-9324-8069

**Sarah Craig** is a Senior Psychologist, working as a Therapies and Allied Health Workforce Development Officer with the Metro South Addiction and Mental Health Services, Queensland Health and currently the Secretary of the Queensland branch of the Australian Association for Cognitive and Behavioural Therapy. Interests and experience are in adult mental health, working in the area of psychosis, anxiety and trauma working with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, mindfulness and compassion-based approaches.

**Michelle Combo** is currently working as a Senior Psychologist at Inala Indigenous Health and part-time Team Leader for Way Forward: An Indigenous Approach to Well-Being Project. She is Queensland Chair of the Australian Association for Cognitive and Behaviour Therapy and Vice Chair of the Board for Kummara Association in (Indigenous Family Care). Her research interests include Adult Mental Health, Indigenous Mental Health and Borderline Personality Disorder. She is a qualified Dialectical Behavioural Therapy therapist, Complex Trauma/Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Mindfulness/Acceptance and Commitment Therapy specialist.

### **Abstract**

Much has been written about the history of the Queensland Native Mounted Police, mostly focussing on its development, its white officers, how much the Colonial Government genuinely knew about the actions of the Force, and how many people were killed during the frontier wars. Far less attention has been given to the Aboriginal men of the force, the nature of their recruitment, and the long-term traumatic impacts on Aboriginal peoples' and communities' psyches rather than broadscale changes to Aboriginal culture per se. This article examines the historical and ongoing psychological impacts of dispossession and frontier violence on Aboriginal people. Specifically, we argue that massacres, frontier violence, displacement, and the ultimate dispossession of land and destruction of traditional cultural practices resulted in both individual and collective inter-generational trauma for Aboriginal peoples. We posit that, despite the Australian frontier wars taking place over a century ago, their impacts continue to reverberate today in a range of different ways, many of which are as yet only partially understood.

### **Keywords**

Trauma, Frontier Conflict, Queensland Native Mounted Police, Aboriginal Troopers,  
Australia

## Introduction

Operating between 1849 and 1904, the Government-sanctioned, paramilitary Native Mounted Police (NMP) Force of Queensland, Australia, was charged with “policing” the colonial frontier, which meant subjugating any resistance to colonial usurpation of Aboriginal peoples’ traditional lands. In total its workforce comprised more than 430 white officers in charge of more than 870 Aboriginal troopers operating out of more than 170 base locations (though at any one time only a portion of these were operational).<sup>1</sup> The Force was responsible for a host of devastating impacts on Aboriginal communities, including the killing of Aboriginal men, women, and children, the kidnapping of children and young adults, the sexual exploitation of women, physical displacement, and the disruption of traditional practices.<sup>2</sup>

Despite detailed studies of the NMP’s structure and development, as well as the backgrounds and careers of many of its white officers, there has been limited focus on the

---

<sup>1</sup> Heather Burke and Lynley A. Wallis 2019 Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police Database. DIO: 10.25957/5d9fb541294d5

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Bottoms, *Conspiracy of Silence: Queensland's Frontier Killing-Times* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2013); Libby Connors, *Warrior: A Legendary Leader's Dramatic Life and Violent Death on the Colonial Frontier*, (Allen and Unwin: Sydney, 2015); Libby Connors, “Uncovering the Shameful: Sexual Violence on an Australian colonial frontier,” in *Legacies of Violence: Rendering the Unspeakable Past in Modern Australia*, ed. R. Mason (New York: Berhahn Books, 2017), 33–52; Ray Evans and Robert Ørsted-Jensen “I Cannot Say the Numbers that Were Killed”: Assessing Violent Mortality on the Queensland Frontier. Unpublished paper delivered at ‘Conflict in History’, The Australian Historical Association 33rd Annual Conference, The University of Queensland, 7–11 July 2014; Ray Evans, Kay Saunders, and Kathryn Cronin, *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1975); Noel Loos, *Invasion and Resistance: Aboriginal-European Relations on the North Queensland Frontier 1861–1897*. (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1982); Robert Ørsted-Jensen, *Frontier History Revisited: Colonial Queensland and the ‘History War’*, (Cooparoo: Lux Mundi Publishing, 2011); Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1981); Richards, *The Secret War*; Shirleene Robinson, “Queensland Settlers and the Creation of the First ‘Stolen Generations’: The Unofficial Removal of Aboriginal Children in Queensland, 1842–1897”, *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 4, no. 1 (2002): 1–16.

Aboriginal people who were “recruited” into the force.<sup>3</sup> In a **recent** article, we addressed this specific topic, examining the methods and circumstances of recruitment and considered what may have led to the enlistment of Aboriginal men.<sup>4</sup> In the present article we go one step further and consider the hitherto largely undocumented psychological impacts of dispossession and frontier violence. Specifically, we argue that massacres, frontier violence, displacement and the ultimate dispossession of land, and destruction of traditional cultural practices resulted in widespread individual and collective trauma for Aboriginal peoples, not only for those who survived massacres on the frontier, but also for those men who were co-opted or otherwise incorporated into the NMP. Given the complex biological, psychological, social, and emotional health legacies of past trauma within contemporary populations that have been identified in recent studies, it is now recognised that trauma can have a long-term effect on successive generations at multiple scales (individual, family, and communal).<sup>5</sup> The most common term for this is “historical trauma”—the inter-generational legacies of “a collective trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation—ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, we argue that, despite the fact that the Australian frontier wars took place a century or more ago their

---

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Richards, “Frederick Wheeler and the Sandgate Native Police Camp,” *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 20, no. 3 (2007): 107–122; Tim Rowse, “The moral world of the Native Mounted Police,” *Law and History* 5, no. 1 (2018): 1–23.

<sup>4</sup> Heather Burke et al., “The Queensland Native Police and strategies of recruitment on the Queensland Frontier, 1849–1901,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 42, no. 3 (2018): 1–17.

<sup>5</sup> Cindy L. Ehlers et al., “Measuring Trauma in an American Indian Community Sample: Contributions of Substance Dependence, Affective Disorder, Conduct Disorder and PTSD,” *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 133 (2013): 180–7; Andie Kealohi Sato Conching, and Zaneta Thayer, “Biological Pathways for Historical Trauma to Affect Health: A Conceptual Model Focusing on Epigenetic Modifications,” *Social Science and Medicine* 230 (2019): 74–82; Les B. Whitbeck, Gary W. Adams, Dan R. Hoyt, and Xiaojin Chen, “Conceptualizing and Measuring Historical Trauma Among American Indian People,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 33, no. 3–4 (2004): 119–30.

<sup>6</sup> Teresa Evans-Campbell, “Historical Trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska Communities: A Multi-level Framework for Exploring Impacts on Individuals, Families and Communities,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23, no. 3 (2008): 316–38.

repercussions continue to resonate today in a variety of physical and psychological ways, many of which are as yet only partially understood.

### **Collective and Individual Trauma**

Studies from the mid-twentieth century onward in anthropology, psychiatry, neuroscience, medicine, and psychology have established that traumatic events, such as warfare, genocide, natural disasters, and individual loss, can have severe ongoing and long-term negative effects on the lives of individuals and societies.<sup>7</sup> Ericson described collective cultural trauma as a strike against the basic structures of social life that damages the relationships between people and wider society, negatively impacting on notions of communality.<sup>8</sup> Alexander et al. referred to cultural trauma as occurring when “members of a collectivity experience horrendous events that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”<sup>9</sup> The kind of trauma thought to result from colonization and the wider, highly racialized structures of colonialism that persist in postcolonial societies, is usually referred to as “historical trauma,” a concept that has become a mainstay of clinical approaches to contemporary Indigenous health and wellbeing.<sup>10</sup>

Historical trauma is argued to have three key characteristics:<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Judy Atkinson, *Trauma Trails: Recording Song Lines – the Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia* (Melbourne: Spinifex, 2002); Michael Halloran, “Cultural Maintenance and Trauma in Indigenous Australia,” *Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law* 11, no. 4 (2004): 1–31; Don M. Hartsough, “Traumatic Stress as an Area of Research,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 1, no. 2 (1988): 143–271.

<sup>11</sup> Kai Erikson, *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Buffalo Creek* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis Mehl-Madrona and Barbara Mainguy, “Culture is Medicine that Works,” in *Social Issues in Contemporary Native America: Reflections from Turtle Island*, ed. H.N Weaver (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014): 187–202.

<sup>11</sup> Evans-Campbell, “Historical Trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska Communities.”

- It is collective, which means that the losses connected with it, as well as any associated trauma responses, are widespread and felt at a community level.
- It is transgenerational, in that events from different periods are viewed as parts of a connected traumatic trajectory and therefore compound over time. Historical trauma is therefore not something that can be easily or neatly relegated to the past, and has the power to generate collective distress and mourning in the present. Critically, transgenerational trauma means that affected individuals were not themselves directly exposed.<sup>12</sup>
- The events are usually seen as being perpetrated by outsiders with deliberate destructive intent. For Indigenous people in particular, Evans-Campbell noted a range of emotional responses, including sadness, depression, anger and anxiety, but also a high level of cross-cultural distrust expressed via “general discomfort around White people, fear of White people, shame, loss of concentration, feelings of isolation, rage, feeling that more traumas will happen, and avoidance of places or people that are reminders of the losses.”<sup>13</sup>

Hartmann and Gone characterized Indigenous historical trauma as:<sup>14</sup>

- Colonial injury to Indigenous peoples by European settlers who “perpetrated” conquest, subjugation, and dispossession.
- The collective experience of these injuries as the consequences of subjugation, oppression, and marginalization have “snowballed” throughout ever-shifting historical sequences of adverse policies and practices by dominant settler societies; and,

---

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Dekel and Hadass Goldblatt, “Is there Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma? The Case of Combat Veterans’ Children,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 78, no. 3 (2008): 281–9; Edith Heard and Robert A. Martienssen, “Transgenerational Epigenetic Inheritance: Myths and Mechanisms,” *Cells* 157, no. 1 (2014): 95–109.

<sup>13</sup> Evans-Campbell, “Historical Trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska Communities.”

<sup>14</sup> William E. Hartmann, and Joseph P. Gone, “American Indian Historical Trauma: Community Perspectives from Two Great Plains Medicine Men,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 54 (2014): 274–88.

- Legacies of risk and vulnerability that are passed from ancestors to descendants in unremitting fashion until “healing” interrupts these deleterious processes.

Biologically, some epigenetic research suggests that the long-term consequences of trauma may be passed on to succeeding generations via experience-induced changes to human DNA.<sup>15</sup> Various empirical studies have pointed to the connections between historical trauma and ongoing health effects, including biological, emotional, and psycho-social problems. The precise biological mechanisms by which historical trauma can lead to epigenetic changes are beyond the scope of this article, but epigenetic modifications can affect the stress, immune, and cardiovascular systems.<sup>16</sup> Conching and Thayer argued for two pathways by which social experiences in one generation can shape biology in another.<sup>17</sup> In the first, epigenetic alterations resulting from exposure to trauma or stressors can shape physiological functioning and disease risk in individuals. In the second, these alterations can then be passed on to those individuals’ offspring, thus shaping disease risk in successive generations.

Other contemporary health effects of historical trauma on communities include psychological, psychiatric, and social symptoms, such as inadequate parenting, greater rates of alcohol and drug dependence, distress, depression, anxiety-related disorders, and other mental health issues, including PTSD-like symptoms.<sup>18</sup> While individuals may deal with trauma in different ways, studies have shown that trauma can interrupt an adult’s ability to be

---

<sup>15</sup> See: Ulrike Ehler, “Enduring Psychobiological Effects of Childhood Adversity,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 38, no. 9 (2013): 1850–7; Robin Holliday, “Epigenetics: A Historical Overview,” *Epigenetics* 1, no. 2 (2006): 76–80.

<sup>16</sup> See: Conching and Thayer., “Biological Pathways for Historical Trauma to Affect Health.”

<sup>17</sup> Conching and Thayer., “Biological Pathways for Historical Trauma to Affect Health.”

<sup>18</sup> Cindy L. Ehlers et al., “Measuring Historical Trauma in an American Indian Community Sample: Contributions of Substance Dependence, Affective Disorder, Conduct Disorder and PTSD,” *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 133 (2013): 180–7; Nathaniel Vincent Mohatt, Azure B. Thompson, Nghi D. Thai, and Jacob Kraemer Tebes, “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative: A Conceptual Review of How History Impacts Present-day Health,” *Social Science and Medicine* 106 (2014): 128–36; Whitbeck et al., “Conceptualizing and Measuring Historical Trauma Among American Indian People.”

attuned to the needs of their children, connect emotionally with their children, provide soothing and security, and teach that child to self-soothe.<sup>19</sup> Childhood development can also be deeply impacted by trauma as it disrupts healthy childhood attachment relationships. Attachment to a secure and stable nurturer is essential in childhood development for emotion regulation, development of identity, confidence, and appropriate help seeking, as well as informing stable relationships and good theory of mind.<sup>20</sup> The Adverse Childhood Experiences study shows the outcomes and ‘dose’ effects of multiple adverse life experiences and trauma, such as neglect, physical, or sexual abuse, observing family drug use, or family violence.<sup>21</sup> This study found that higher (i.e. more exposure to) or multiple doses (i.e. multiple adverse childhood experiences), equated to more negative determinants of health in adult life. These outcomes include increases in alcoholism, depression, drug use, and suicide attempts. Other effects included increases in obesity, as well as increased rates of smoking, ischemic heart disease, cancer, and chronic lung disease. In fact, this study showed that people with multiple adverse experiences were more vulnerable to multiple poor health outcomes, more challenges with relationships and difficulty in flourishing in their adult life.

Emotional responses are yet another manifestation of historical trauma. Atkinson has argued that, individually, traumatised people may carry with them a deep anger at what has been perpetrated, but may be powerless to express their anger at those they perceive to have violated their world and caused the death of their families—in effect, that their “inner compass and their outer maps for what is considered ‘proper behaviour’ are lost and ...when the physical boundaries of home or place are violated, the boundaries of a group’s moral space

---

<sup>19</sup> Niki Gomez-Perales, *Attachment-Focused Trauma Treatment for Children and Adolescents* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Gomez-Perales, *Attachment-Focused Trauma*.

<sup>21</sup> Vincent J. Felitti et al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (1998): 245–58. In this context the term dose relates specifically to an adverse event in childhood.

also collapse.”<sup>22</sup> Feelings of distress and helplessness may then be expressed through violence and other negative behaviours.<sup>23</sup>

### **Historical Trauma, Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police**

Seen in this light, the disheartening situation that many Aboriginal people must have found themselves in following the incursion of Europeans is especially relevant. Frontier conflict was ubiquitous, lasting for several generations and encompassing all parts of Australia. Estimates of the number of Aboriginal people killed as a result of this conflict are difficult to assess, particularly since no systematic records were kept and many such deaths went entirely unrecorded for fear of the consequences in the post-Myall Creek era from the late 1830s onward.<sup>24</sup> The most comprehensive attempt to calculate a reasonable figure is by Evans and Ørsted-Jensen. Using relatively conservative calculations based on a sample of historical accounts, they posited that over 40,000 Aboriginal people may have been killed by the NMP and settler-colonists in Queensland between 1859 and 1898.<sup>25</sup> In all likelihood, this figure is likely to have been higher since their model was based in part on a total of only 85 NMP camps, each with an average duration of seven years, and excluded the earliest and latest periods of the NMP’s operation.<sup>26</sup> Current research provides evidence of 174 camps across Queensland from 1850 to 1904 with an average duration of 8.5 years each, producing an escalated figure of 101,163; equal parts staggering and sobering.<sup>27</sup>

Even if the toll was far fewer killed in direct encounters with the NMP and others, the indirect toll was much greater, counted as it was in displacement of populations, dislocations

---

<sup>22</sup> Atkinson, *Trauma Trails: Recording Song Lines*.

<sup>23</sup> Erikson, *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Buffalo Creek*.

<sup>24</sup> Lydon and Ryan, *Remembering the Myall Creek Massacre*.

<sup>25</sup> Evans and Ørsted-Jensen, “I Cannot say the Numbers that were Killed: Assessing Violent Mortality on the Queensland Frontier”.

<sup>26</sup> Evans and Ørsted-Jensen, “I Cannot Say the Numbers that Were Killed,” 2–3

<sup>27</sup> Burke and Wallis, *Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police in Queensland Database*.

of families, reductions in resources and opportunities, and deaths from starvation and disease. The result was a raft of social and physical consequences for Aboriginal people. One frequently recorded observation was the visible demographic shifts that became apparent in local Aboriginal populations. For example, an 1880 account in the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated that:

On some parts of the Gilbert river, it is said that the destruction has been large; and further north the work of killing has been going on for some years. In places where the "boys" [i.e. the Native Mounted Police] have been, the slaughter has taken place mostly among the men. On some parts of the Mitchell river, the Palmer, McIvor, and other streams, I was told by different persons that the camps are now almost entirely composed of women and children. One informant, on whose statement I think I can rely, told me that on one occasion, when out exploring on the McIvor river, he and two companions had come upon a camp of natives, which consisted of eight women and three children, who all ran away screaming in terror when they saw the explorers. On the Barwon river, at the back of Cairns, and on the old track to the Hodgkinson diggings, I saw a camp in which the large numerical proportion of women was very striking. ... In the back country about the Endeavour river, and along the point of land down to Cape Bedford, there are very few men to be seen. Wherever the natives allow themselves to be seen, they are found to consist principally of women and children.<sup>28</sup>

These diminished groups were often forced into marginal refuge zones—those areas too rugged, thickly forested, environmentally-depauperate, or otherwise valueless to Europeans, as illustrated by an account in the *Brisbane Courier* in 1880:

---

<sup>28</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 August 1880.

The blacks since they have become friendly tell me that in the old days of "reprisals," carried out in the usual manner—i.e., shooting the men and destroying their nets, water bags, and implements—we used to starve numbers of the old men, women, and children to death; for, being hunted into the desert (spinifex country), they had neither means of carrying water nor of catching game (the former article is very scarce) and of course the weaker members of the tribe felt it most.<sup>29</sup>

Though offering greater physical safety, the large-scale movement of people into such parlous areas would have placed even greater demands on diminishing food supplies, intensifying social conflict and further contributing to the break-down of the traditional structures of normal life. The fear and anxiety that arose from this precarious situation had other, rippling psychological and emotional effects. Breslin cited studies into inter-cultural contact in Townsville that revealed an initial high degree of mental disturbance amongst Aboriginal groups, often leading to an increase in "inter-tribal" warfare and the initiation of new rituals and ceremonies, as a means of coping with the extreme disruption to traditional society.<sup>30</sup> It is highly likely that people may initially have turned to sorcery to help reorient themselves and make sense of what was happening, as well as to try and gain some degree of control over forces seemingly beyond their control. In keeping with this, Cole documented Aboriginal rock art paintings on Cape York Peninsula which she argued can be interpreted as signifying traditional attempts to meditate forces beyond people's physical and material control through ritual.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, at Somerset, also on Cape York Peninsula, there is rock art depicting a white man in a hat with belt and revolver flogging a crouching black figure,

---

<sup>29</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 14 July 1880.

<sup>30</sup> See: Breslin, *Exterminate with Pride*; Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*; Anne Allingham, *Taming the Wilderness: The First Decade of Pastoral Settlement in the Kennedy District* (Townsville: James Cook University, 1988).

<sup>31</sup> Cole, "Painting the Police" ; see also Ursula Frederick, "At the Centre of it All: Constructing Contact through Rock Art of Watarrka National Park, Central Australia," *Archaeology in Oceania* 34 (1999): 132–44, for a broader discussion of the role of sorcery paintings in the contact process more generally.

demonstrating at a minimum an early cross-cultural interaction and perhaps a desire to exert power over future such events.<sup>32</sup>

Other indications are the extreme levels of fear that appear to have characterized Aboriginal people's reactions to strange Europeans, making it not uncommon for white observers to note that Aboriginal people fled "in great terror as soon as they caught sight of us."<sup>33</sup> This terror was especially the case if the Europeans were thought to be from the NMP, one of the key forces for the violent dispersal of Aboriginal people in colonies such as Queensland. The geologist (and Catholic priest) Julian Tennison-Woods described a meeting with one Aboriginal woman near Port Douglas, who was eventually induced to explain, through a trooper interpreter, that "She was very much afraid of the black troopers. She called them "Murnian," which was the name she also applied to a rifle—a significant fact."<sup>34</sup> Frederick Wheeler, one of the most infamous of NMP officers, with a reputation for violence and bloodshed, experienced Aboriginal peoples' reactions from the other side, recounting them during an 1861 government inquiry:

9. When you go to a camp, do you call upon them in the Queen's name, in any way, to surrender? No, because directly they see you they run; you have to gallop to get on to them: if you were to call upon them to surrender, you would never be able to keep them in sight.

91. Do you find that the blacks have become much more civilized since the Native Police has been established at Sandgate than they were formally? That

---

<sup>32</sup> D.R. Moore, *Islanders and Aborigines at Cape York: An Ethnographic Reconstruction Based on the 1848–1850 'Rattlesnake' Journals of O.W. Brierly and Information Obtained from Barbara Thompson* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1979).

<sup>33</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 August 1880.

<sup>34</sup> *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 28 January 1882, 144.

is a question I am not prepared to answer, I know so little of the blacks. They run before me—I never see them.<sup>35</sup>

While the effects of frontier trauma on local Aboriginal populations may be fairly readily recognised, there is another element to be explored in the context of the NMP. We would argue that the lesser known victims of frontier trauma are the Aboriginal troopers of the NMP themselves. While undoubtedly the instruments of inflicting trauma on others, many of these men would also have been victims of prior trauma themselves before being co-opted into the NMP and used to perpetuate the cycle.<sup>36</sup> Depending on the nature of their superior officer, troopers could be subject to violent beatings as a form of “discipline,” the threat of extrajudicial execution for infractions such as desertion, and threats of violence from local Aboriginal populations should they be released from their service or desert successfully.

Our recent review of recruitment practices identified four key and closely related ways in which young Aboriginal men were brought into service with the NMP:<sup>37</sup>

1. Forcible recruitment, through kidnapping or capture, which was buttressed by practices of physical separation from kin and country, threats of extra-judicial execution and other summary punishment;
2. Inducing young, disaffected and displaced men to join the NMP through offers of wages, rations, clothing, women and guns;
3. Chain recruitment of younger recruits by older troopers, which was closely linked to the offering of inducements and an alternative pathway to survival; and,

---

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Wheeler to the Select Committee, 15 May 1861, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Burke et al., “The Queensland Native Police.”; For other accounts of recruiting practices, see also: Marie Hansen Fels, *Good Men and True: The Aboriginal Police of the Port Philip District 1837–1853* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988); Amanda Nettelbeck: ““On the Side of Law and Order”: Indigenous Aides to the Mounted Police on the Settler Frontiers of Australia and Canada,” *Journal of Colonial History* 15, no.2 (2014).

<sup>37</sup> Burke et al., “The Queensland Native Police.”

4. The exploitation of children who had been severed from their families and customary contexts by massacre, kidnapping, disease, and displacement, and reared within white systems.

These tactics were employed to various degrees over the lifetime of the NMP. The men in the earliest iteration of the Force under Frederick Walker (1848–54) were recruited from pastoral stations on the Murrumbidgee and Edwards Rivers area of NSW and Victoria, and were known to Walker long before the NMP was formed. James McLaurin, a pastoralist in the NSW/Victorian border country, knew Walker and claimed that his removal of the young men from the area had been a deliberate strategy to shift their attentions away from stock killing:

... they [Aboriginal people on the Murray River] continued troublesome for 2 or 3 years, they were very bad until Walker took away most of the young fellows 20 or 25 as policemen to go to the north which weakened the tribes very much—he took the ringleaders ... The blacks killed cattle up till 1848; ... after ... the loss of the young blacks, Walker took away; they were never so bad.<sup>38</sup>

Forcible recruitment appears to have been the most common tactic employed in the years following Walker. This ranged from simply taking men, such as when Thomas Coward, a sub-inspector between 1864 and 1879, noted that, “Vic, one of my troopers ... was the first boy who was captured and put in the native police at Burketown, Albert River, Gulf of Carpentaria, in 1868”,<sup>39</sup> to offering men under arrest for capital crimes a remission of their sentence in exchange for enlistment. This latter system became officially endorsed by the Queensland Executive Council in 1878.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> James McLaurin, *Memories of Early Australia*, SLNSW-MAVFM4136, 1888, textual record.

<sup>39</sup> *Adelaide Observer*, 4 November 1893, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Richards, *The Secret War*.

The description of some recruits as “volunteering” must also be considered, given that there are several references to men apparently offering their services in this fashion. John O’Connell Bligh, for instance, advised Commandant Edric Morisset in 1861 that he had taken “a very good Recruit who volunteered at Nulalbin, he belongs to the Moreton Bay District, and will I think work well with the men we now have from the same part of the Colony.”<sup>41</sup> It is likely, however, that such offers were still predicated on a disconnection from former ways of life, as well as the possible desire to escape particular conditions on individual pastoral properties or under specific individuals. Thus Alfred Brown of Gin Gin could complain to Morisset that Charles Phibbs deserved censure, even though he had refused to enlist Brown’s “most useful blackboy”. Morisset, for his part, noted in reply that:

In obtaining recruits for this Force, it is inevitable but some settlers may feel aggrieved when their Blackboys leave them to enlist, but no doubt the certainty of better pay and clothing than they receive from the settlers cannot be resisted by the Blackboys, and the consequence is that no inducements are required on the part of the Recruiting officer and when they offer their services, he cannot, I think, do otherwise than accept them. ... I cannot coincide with your opinion that it is necessary for a Recruiting officer to refer to the owner of a station before enlisting Recruits as in some cases there are few, if any, Blackboys whom the settlers would not object to parting with, and consequently none could be obtained for the protection of the Frontier Squatters whose lives and property are in daily jeopardy.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> John O’Connell Bligh to Edric Morisset, 31 May 1861, in letter 61/1492, OSA846746, mfilm, Z5601.

<sup>42</sup> Edric Morisset to Alfred H. Brown, 28 May 1859, in letter book NP 1857–1859, QSA282454, mfilm, 2437.

As one correspondent commented to the *Telegraph*, however, volunteering is not the same as voluntary: “It is quite true that, as a rule, the police come at last to be proud of their position, but hugging their chains does not make them free.”<sup>43</sup>

Given that the vast majority of troopers were young—often very young—men, their psychological and emotional dislocation from their families was a key factor in “successful” recruitment.<sup>44</sup> This was effected both by missionaries and settlers, a few of whom adopted orphaned or kidnapped children into their families, but the majority of whom acquired them for service as unpaid domestic and pastoral labour.<sup>45</sup> Given that the NMP were often the organization responsible for both the kidnaping and the orphaning, they were also the ones who were in the most direct position to benefit from this source of colonized labour. The creation of longstanding connections with settler families through these channels disrupted traditional lifestyles and may have facilitated at least some degree of allegiance to European systems and values that was then exploited by the NMP. John Bungaree, who entered the NMP at the age of 23, expressed the liminal status of such men when he confided to his officer that, “I wish I had never been taken out of the bush, and educated as I have been, for I cannot be a white man, they will never look on me as one of themselves; and I cannot be a blackfellow, I am disgusted with their way of living.”<sup>46</sup>

Seen in this light, Aboriginal participation in frontier violence through recruitment to the NMP, even when recorded as “voluntary,” becomes more understandable when viewed through the lens of the over-arching, ongoing, collective and individual trauma that individual

---

<sup>43</sup> *Telegraph*, 12 February 1874, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Our research suggests an average age for recruits of 25 years.

<sup>45</sup> Shirleene Robinson, “The Unregulated Employment of Aboriginal Children in Queensland, 1842–1902,” *Labour History* 82 (2002): 1–15

<sup>46</sup> William Ridley, “Considerations on the Means to be Adopted for Civilizing the Aborigines of Australia, Suggested by a Three-years Mission Among that People, and Information Subsequently Gathered from Different Quarters,” Appendix C, Select Committee into the Qld Native Police (Brisbane: Government Printer, 1861): 166

troopers and their communities experienced as they were forced to remake their worlds. We would posit that trauma was induced for the troopers by both the dislocated context from which they were drawn (and often forcibly taken) and therefore their own traumatic family and community histories, as well as by the tasks they had to complete as members of the NMP. While we will never know the precise nature or scale of the psychological toll taken on troopers or officers, there are some grounds for arguing that various coping mechanisms may have been adopted by NMP personnel to deal with the consequences of their actions. Self-medication through alcohol was one potential solution for officers, sometimes combined with attempts at suicide.<sup>47</sup> Many transitioned out of the NMP as soon as they were able due to the stresses induced by the life they had to lead.<sup>48</sup>

Troopers coped in other ways. While some were returned to their county, such as the 12 men who left Port Curtis in 1857 with some support from their officer, John Murray, many more simply deserted, often soon after joining.<sup>49</sup> Excluding those instances for which no actual number is supplied, there were at least 281 desertions over the lifetime of the NMP, some of entire detachments and others of individual troopers, many of whom deserted multiple times.<sup>50</sup> “Alick,” a trooper who served from at least 1870 until 1880, was described by Sub-Inspector Robert Johnstone as “a confirmed deserter,” having fled variously from camps on the Suttor River (exact date unknown, but c1870), Dalrymple (October 1871), Cashmere (September 1872), Waterview (November 1872), Bellenden (1873), Thornborough

---

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Richards, “‘A Question of Necessity’: The Native Police in Queensland” (PhD diss., Griffith University, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> Richards, “A Question of Necessity”, 320; John O’Connell Bligh to Colonial Secretary, 26 May 1862, In letter 62/2123, QSA846762, Mfilm Z5607.

<sup>49</sup> John Murray to John Wickham, 22 April 1857, Letters addressed to the Government Resident by the Colonial Secretary on the Native Police, QSA17616, Mfilm 1494; Richards “‘A Question of Necessity”, 201–204.

<sup>50</sup> Burke and Wallis, *Frontier Conflict and the Native Mounted Police in Queensland Database*.

(November 1874), and Upper Laura (1876).<sup>51</sup> He was also subsequently involved in one of the few overt revolts by troopers against a superior officer, when five troopers from the Upper Laura NMP camp attempted to murder their commanding officer, Sub-Inspector Brabazon Stafford, in 1880.<sup>52</sup>

Richards has very forcefully argued that the fate of troopers both during and after the lifespan of the NMP was complicated and often tragic, suggested by the frequency of their desertion and the fact that they likely faced high rates of recrimination once they left, including the threat of attack and murder by the local people whose country they found themselves in.<sup>53</sup> In the context of the Victorian Native Police, the situation of one ex-trooper suggests that there may have also been residual psychological effects that lingered long after deployment in the Force:

There was a blackfellow engaged in camp who had once been in the native police who, after every debauch, used to wake up from his first sleep with every symptom of terror. To the question, "Hallo, Billy ! what's the matter?" He would reply slowly, pressing his hand to his head, "Blackfellow me been kill altogether come up."<sup>54</sup>

We would argue that the potential trauma dose experienced by the NMP was high, as, in addition to the regular marginalised treatment of Aboriginal Australians and prior violent experiences of settlement they and their families would have experienced, there was added the likely enforced recruitment practiced by the NMP, oftentimes harsh treatment by their

---

<sup>51</sup> Burke and Wallis, *Frontier Conflict and then NMP in Queensland Database*; Robert Johnstone to Commissioner of Police 30 November 1880, In letter 81/296, QSA847037; Minutes of Evidence taken before a Board of Enquiry into charges against Alexander Douglas 1880, In letter 81/296, QSA847037.

<sup>52</sup> Statement of Brabazon Stafford, 30 June 1880, Colonial Secretary In letter 80/3846, QSA847027.

<sup>53</sup> Richards, *The Secret War*; do you have article titles? Authors? *Queensland Figaro and Punch*, 13 October 1888, 6; *Queenslander* 12 December 1879, 741.

<sup>54</sup> *Leader*, 24 May 1879, 1.

superior officers, and the outcomes of their own violent actions committed while they were troopers.

The long-term and ongoing effects of collective cultural trauma can be seen today in the descendants of troopers, even though they themselves have no first-hand relationship with the events of the nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> A descendant of Aboriginal trooper Jack Noble, who served in the NMP for over 20 years from the 1870s to the early 1900s, for example, articulated the consequences of Jack's time in the NMP for subsequent generations of his family. According to her Jack became a harsh disciplinarian to his own children, not because he viewed that as normal practice, but because his knowledge of the NMP's activities made him worry for the futures of his own children. In wanting to make them tough enough to survive should the police ever come for them, Jack's behaviour created multi-generation distrust, if not fear, of the police as an institution:

Jack ... would mistreat young George [Jack's son] and ... Alberta [Jack's wife], so that little George would be tough enough to defend himself and his family against the native police if they were ever brought back .....[and] that behaviour to Jack also came to the rest of the family ... we all have this hatred of police, and it's a real irrational hatred ... but it all comes from Jack and the way that they [Jack's descendants] were all brought up to hate coppers—if you see coppers you run, because they're going to shoot you dead, no questions asked, 'cause that's the way Jack brought George up, and then George brought *his* lot up.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> A.C.G.M. Robben and M.M Suarez, eds., *Cultures Under Siege: Collective Violence and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> K. Elwood, interview, 26 May 2017.

## Historical Trauma, Present Circumstances and the Future

Beyond biological, psychological, or psychiatric studies, what contributions can other disciplines, such as archaeology, and specifically historical archaeology, contribute to the study of historical trauma? Paul Shackel argued that “archaeology and other historical materials [can create] the foundation for further inquiry into understanding the long-term effect of structural violence on a community.”<sup>57</sup> Combining archaeological data from food remains, medicine containers, and accoutrements with historical information from cook books and recent health surveys, Shackel highlighted the potential for excavated and archival materials to shed light on differential access to nutritional resources and the health disparities that may have resulted. The material remains uncovered from excavations of NMP camps, such as Boralga and Boulia, are currently undergoing analysis to explore these very issues. An alternative approach is suggested by Mohatt et al.’s “public narrative” framework for explaining how historical trauma links to contemporary health outcomes. Their research links historical trauma with memory to view it as a constructed narrative of past events that has both personal (individual) and public (group) representations in the present:

Trauma narratives represent an interplay between personal stories and culture and, therefore, are cultural constructions of trauma ... cultural narratives of trauma may be especially relevant to health, perhaps more so than the actual occurrence of an event, because they frame the psychosocial, political-economic, and social-ecological context within which that event is experienced.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Paul A. Shackel, “Transgenerational Impact of Structural Violence: Epigenetics and the Legacy of Anthracite Coal,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 22, no. 4 (2018): 878.

<sup>58</sup> Mohatt et al., “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative.”

As a psychological process, historical trauma therefore operates independently of the actual event itself and relies on two interconnected levels of narrative: an internal logic of cause and effect that links past trauma with present symptoms, and memory as a larger scale constructed representation of the event.<sup>59</sup> This model has a number of advantages for exploring historical trauma, especially in relation to the practices of archaeology and history:

Viewing trauma as narrative–representations that contain both personal and public components–directs our focus to the development and impact of present-day representations and their connection to the historic past ... understanding historical trauma as a public narrative thus reframes the discussion of historical trauma from a search for historical explanation towards recognition of the contemporary experience of historical trauma and the ways in which current public narratives impact health.<sup>60</sup>

This model thus posits a series of recursive relationships between public narratives of historical trauma, the way those narratives frame contemporary reminders of that trauma for particular groups, the ascription of salience to those narratives through various measures of relevance and meaningfulness, and ensuing health effects at both individual and community levels (Figure 1). Mohatt et al.’s contemporary reminders are a key part of creating salience, and, while not always physical, can include physical “public symbols” or the cultural artefacts and sites around which memory interacts.

Although they alluded to it in their conclusion, Mohatt et al. did not explicitly integrate a concept of the future into their model. We would slightly reconceptualize it to include the imagined future as a bridge between how individuals and communities in the present interact

---

<sup>59</sup> Mohatt et al., “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative,” 129.

<sup>60</sup> Mohatt et al., “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative,” 129–30.

with elements of the past and the way that public narratives of the past are (re)constructed (Figure 2). We refer here specifically to collective future thought, or “the act of imagining an event that has yet to transpire on behalf of, or by, a group.”<sup>61</sup> Collective future thought interacts with these same phenomena by orienting interaction towards “that which has yet to transpire, attempting to either procure or preempt an imagined scenario or event. This may involve efforts to either secure or counteract the continuity of a past beyond the present.”<sup>62</sup> Seen in this light, historical trauma does not just influence the present but also the future.

The construction of historical narratives and their degree of salience must ultimately shape the kind of collective future that can be imagined. Narrative can thus not only provide a framework for understanding the connections between past trauma and present health by investigating how historical trauma is represented in contemporary individual, family and community oral histories, but also explore the consequences of connections of disconnections between such narratives and other, socially endorsed forms of history (e.g. orthodox “official history”), especially where each is used to imagine a different collective future. As Delrez pointed out, there is:

... an interesting possibility that what is traumatic about history is not only the phenomenology of the past—the actual bloodshed—but also historiography itself—the accounts which get written, inasmuch as they continue to exert coercion and repression.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Piotr M. Szpunar and Karl K. Szpunar, “Collective Future Thought: Concept, Function and Implications for Collective Memory Studies,” *Memory Studies* 9, no. 4 (2016): 376–389.

<sup>62</sup> Szpunar and Szpunar, “Collective Future Thought,” 381.

<sup>63</sup> Marc Delrez, “Fearful Symmetries: Trauma and ‘Settler Envy’ in Contemporary Australian Culture,” *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*, 42 (2010): 51–65.

Within this model, it does not matter that contemporary notions of trauma will almost certainly differ across social-cultural groups and time periods.<sup>64</sup> What is or is not traumatic, and the reaction to it, is highly culturally and chronologically specific because the meaning attributed to it, and therefore the response derived from it, are what effects the trauma, not the event itself.<sup>65</sup> Notions of what might be traumatic must be considered alongside “what may have been considered the range of usual human experience in that time and place.”<sup>66</sup> What matters with a narrative model, however, is enquiry into how present-day historical trauma narratives impact health and how they interact with contemporary material reminders. Moreover, such enquiry does not require a deficit model of description:

... not all individuals who are exposed to trauma and stressors develop adverse outcomes. As such, there is an important need for studies to incorporate and understand the factors that may buffer the development of adverse outcomes in response to trauma or stressor exposure. Such strength based approaches are important not only for the development of interventions, but can also reduce stigma and be a positive mechanism for knowledge translation among populations.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

Given what we know historically about the destruction of Aboriginal society in Australia through the nineteenth century, there can be little doubt that the survivors of frontier conflict were traumatised, both individually and collectively, by their experiences. It

---

<sup>64</sup> Aaron R. Denham, “Rethinking Historical Trauma: Narratives of Resilience,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 45, no. 3 (2008): 391–414; Kirmayer et al., “Rethinking Historical Trauma.”

<sup>65</sup> B.J. Liddell and L. Jobson. “The Impact of Cultural Differences in Self-Representation on the Neural Substrates of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 7, no. 1 (2016): 1–13; Denham, “Rethinking Historical Trauma”; Kirmayer et al., “Rethinking Historical Trauma.”

<sup>66</sup> Joseph P. Gone, “Reconsidering American Indian Historical Trauma: Lessons from an Early Gros Ventre War Narrative,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014): 387–406.

<sup>67</sup> Conching and Thayer., “Biological Pathways for Historical Trauma to Affect Health.”

can be argued, in fact, that the events were so shocking and profound that Aboriginal people were driven to the very edges of their own existence—pushed to the very limits of physical and/or psychological destruction, such that:

... the bonds that tether a person to the everyday world become stretched, distorted, and even torn; sometimes irreparably so. Such a state of ontological estrangement is so overwhelming that people have to “remake” their worlds.<sup>68</sup>

In considering frontier conflict as historical trauma, affected Aboriginal people experienced immediate impacts, such as witnessing the murders of family members, separation from family, separation from culture and spiritual practice, forced removal from country, and starvation. In addition, there have been persistent long term and perhaps less direct violent impacts from colonialism. These include, but are not necessarily limited to the suppression of culture and language, forced assimilation, a lack of contemporary recognition or acknowledgement, education and health disadvantages, and the adoption of a perspective of Aboriginal primitivism as a contrast to European superiority that has determined politics, policy, and ongoing paternalism.<sup>69</sup> It is this persistent trauma, without relief, that results in challenges to sustaining psychological, physical and emotional security, and stability, even in contemporary society several generations after the initial trauma was experienced.<sup>70</sup>

It is important to recognize that trauma is a complex and challenging concept. A focus on historical trauma to understand ongoing Indigenous issues with domestic or other interpersonal violence, poor health, neglect, and other lifetime traumatic events, is deeply enmeshed in late modern language and current preoccupations with decolonizing

---

<sup>68</sup> Rebecca Lester, “Back from the Edge of Existence: A Critical Anthropology of Trauma,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 50 (2013): 753–62.

<sup>69</sup> Laurence J. Kirmayer, Joseph P. Gone, and Joshua Moses, “Rethinking Historical Trauma,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014): 299–319.

<sup>70</sup> Shane Merritt, “First Nations Australians: Surviving Through Adversities and Malignant Grief,” *Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement* 14 (2011): 74–7.

approaches.<sup>71</sup> A large part of this shift is the rising visibility of subversive narratives that run counter to the dominant (often default) narrative and the normative (and obdurate) cultural frameworks that are erected on and through it. In settler colonial contexts historical trauma is closely connected to the considerable moral complexities of “settler envy”, a structure of feeling that seeks to reconstitute a sense of moral integrity and belonging to the nation through appropriating elements of Indigeneity, whether tradition, continuity of occupation, or some other means to authenticity.<sup>72</sup> For Delrez this creates anxiety on a national scale and both he and LaCapra caution us to avoid the secondary trap of “trauma envy,” or the appropriation of others’ suffering as a way of assuming moral authority.<sup>73</sup> Maxwell, commenting on the moral economy of victimhood, argued that:

In the context of the Australian predicament, it seems evident that trauma has come to be invested with such a capacity to produce empowerment that it elicits a desire to have suffered from it — if not because of the event of invasion itself, then as an aspect of the discursive aftermath it has produced, notably in the years of the Reconciliation.<sup>74</sup>

In this context, considering the troopers of the NMP as themselves victims of trauma creates further layers of ambiguity. Rowse and Waterton have alluded to the moral complexities of considering the NMP in the context of the frontier wars<sup>75</sup> In complicating the politics of Australia’s war heritage by being both perpetrators and victims, the troopers of the

---

<sup>71</sup> Delrez, “Fearful Symmetries.”

<sup>72</sup> Delrez, “Fearful Symmetries,” 57; Damien Riggs, “Repressing a Privileged Location: Exploring the Uncanniness of White Belonging.” *Analysis* 12 (2003): 83–98; Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs “On the Border of the Unsayable: The Apology in Postcolonizing Australia,” *Interventions. International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2000): 229–247.

<sup>73</sup> Delrez, “Fearful Symmetries,” 567; Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (1999): 696–727.

<sup>74</sup> Krista Maxwell, “Historicizing Historical Trauma Theory: Troubling the Trans-generational Transmission Paradigm,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014): 407–35.

<sup>75</sup> Tim Rowse and Emma Waterton, “The ‘Difficult Heritage’ of the Native Mounted Police,” *Memory Studies* (2018): 1–5.

NMP threaten to “unsettle a positive political identity for Indigenous Australians ... and have a negative bearing on the negotiation of reconciliation.”<sup>76</sup> Although LaCapra largely refused to countenance the idea of perpetrator trauma in the context of the Holocaust, he cautiously raised the possibility that:

... perpetrator trauma ... must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through ... in what Primo Levi called the gray zone ... of trying to make accomplices of victims, for example, the Jewish councils of kapos in the camps.<sup>77</sup>

The core of moral discourse is always the debate between good and evil, but this is confounded by any acknowledgement of perpetrator trauma, since it suggests a history of complex contexts and entanglements without clear anchors for guilt or innocence. If this is confronting for the anticolonial “project,” then it is because it challenges the convenience of a progressivist formula that sequences, first, “colonial subordination/abjection, then anticolonial awakening/struggle, [and] finally revolutionary denouement/freedom.”<sup>78</sup> Situating troopers as both perpetrators and victims produces a less predictable set of outcomes, and highlights another, albeit contentious, dimension along which Indigenous agency may be made visible.

Public discourse around the frontier has shifted markedly in the past 40 years to encompass moral judgements about trauma rather than triumph. This shift sits within what Giesen refers to as the “space of possible pasts,” a terrain that is contested, divided, and shifting, but nonetheless limited by two ultimate horizons—past traumas on the one hand, and past

---

<sup>76</sup> Rowse and Waterton, “The ‘Difficult Heritage’ of the Native Mounted Police,” 12.

<sup>77</sup> LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” 723.

<sup>78</sup> María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, “No Country for Old Mexicans. The Collision of Empires on the Texas Frontier.” *Interventions. International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 67–84.

triumphs on the other: “Like birth and death, which set the frame for the continuity and unity of the individual existence, referring to a past as a collective triumph or a collective trauma transcends the contingent relationships between individual persons and forges them into a collective identity.”<sup>79</sup> Both are built on platforms of moral justification, although the first tends to reject “difficult heritage”, while the second embraces it.<sup>80</sup>

Although caution must be exercised in terms of universalizing an assumption that all Indigenous people were automatically traumatized regardless of the contingencies of time and place and the diversity of Indigenous experiences, reactions and responses, the real question is how should we, as a community, deal with claims to trauma?<sup>81</sup> The current politics of apology and the ongoing debate over whether or not the frontier “really” constituted a war obscure any concerted or concerned attempts to deal with the subject, and apology might not be the best way to build resilience or healing.<sup>82</sup> In dealing with historical trauma, Maxwell has argued that “We must move beyond the confines of medicalized categories if we are to have any hope of producing serious scholarly analyses which contribute to the dismantling of enduring colonial structures, discourses, and social relations.”<sup>83</sup> For Mohatt et al. a narrative approach provides one such pathway, marshalling as it does both individual and collective stories against the background of contemporary cultural representations and contexts.<sup>84</sup> In adopting such an approach historians, archaeologists and other professional custodians of the past may be able to move towards a more generous and

---

<sup>79</sup> Bernhard Giesen, “The Trauma of Perpetrators. The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. J. C. Alexander, E. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. J. Smelser and P. Sztompka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 112–54.

<sup>80</sup> Rowse and Waterton, “The ‘Difficult Heritage’ of the Native Mounted Police,” 2.

<sup>81</sup> See: Gone, “Reconsidering American Indian Historical Trauma”; Maxwell, “Historicizing Historical Trauma Theory.”

<sup>82</sup> See: LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss”; Mohatt et al., “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative.”

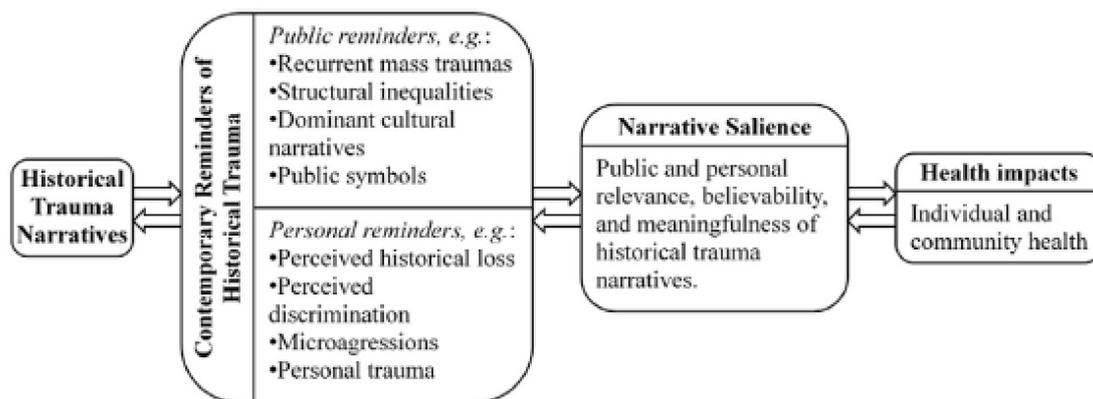
<sup>83</sup> Maxwell, “Historicizing Historical Trauma Theory,” 427.

<sup>84</sup> Mohatt et al., “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative.”

representative dialogue, as difficult, confronting and messy as that may be: “The only historiography making a difference in the present and future may well be one that conjoins critically tested memory and comparably tested document-and-text-based knowledge in furthering collective projects seeking truth, compassion, and justice.”<sup>85</sup>

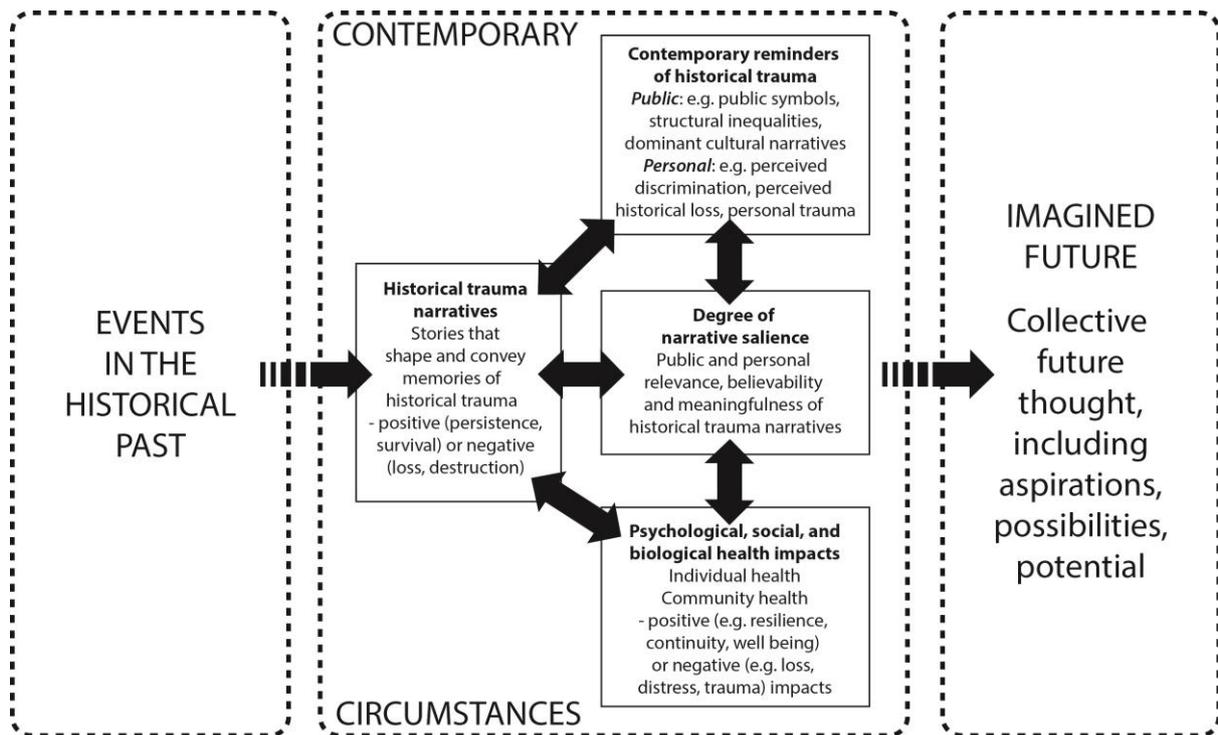
### Acknowledgements

This research was funded through the Australian Research Council (DP160100307, The Archaeology of the Queensland Native Mounted Police). We would like to thank the Aboriginal people who have worked with us and shared their stories of frontier conflict, especially the descendants of troopers and officers who have spoken to us about their families. We also thank the anonymous reviewers whose feedback assisted us in revising the article.



**Figure 1: Mohatt et al.’s (2014) narrative model for the impact of historical trauma on health.**

<sup>85</sup> Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?,” *History and Theory* 55 (2016), 400.



'Public narratives of historical trauma interact with contemporary reminders of these stories. The reminders serve to make the public narrative more or less salient to particular individuals, families, groups, and communities. The degree of narrative salience, in turn, influences the interpretation of a historical trauma response that manifests as a health impact.' (Mohatt et al. 2014:133)

**Figure 2: Connecting the past, present and future to better understand the narrative model in relation to historical trauma.**<sup>84</sup>