

Enough is enough: A history of the Pilbara mob, by Noel Olive. Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2007, 301pp., illustrations, endnotes, bibliography, index. ISBN: 1-978-9210-6445-6 (paperback).

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The subtitle of Noel Olive's polemic treatise, 'a history of the Pilbara mob', suggests the book will be another account of the 1946 Aboriginal pastoral workers' strike in the Pilbara region of North Western Australia. When else has there been a company of Aboriginal people known as 'the Pilbara mob'? Although the strike has a place in Olive's unashamedly 'black arm band' history of colonisation, 'the mob' of the subtitle is indicative of the author's familiarity with the region and its people, particularly the residents of the coastal town of Roebourne. However, rather than giving insights gained from Olive's personal involvement in recent Pilbara history, the text largely relies on an interpretation of secondary sources to give 'new focus to old texts' (p.14) and present a corrective history that claims to tell 'the Aboriginal side of the Pilbara story' (p.13).

Noel Olive first came to know the Aboriginal people of the Pilbara in 1989 during the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody when the author was a lawyer representing the Committee to Defend Black Rights. During this period and his later involvement following the recognition of native title rights, Olive gained a deep respect and sympathy for the plight of Aboriginal Australians in the Pilbara. Olive notes that in the short lifetime of seventeen-year-old John Pat, who died in police custody in Roebourne in 1983, 'the region's industrialisation had hit with the force of a social cyclone, devastating the already difficult lives of his people, and leaving many in total despair' (p.11).

In Chapter 1, 'Listen to these voices,' Olive uses the transcripts of interviews he has made between 2002 and 2006 to introduce 'the direct descendants of those who lived in the Pilbara in 1863, the year whitefellas arrived' (p.44). Typically for Olive, the interviews are a valuable primary source as a record of the Pilbara when pastoralism is said to have given purpose and meaning to Indigenous lives in the decades before the region became the powerhouse of Western Australia's booming economy. Paradoxically, the years of living on their land as an almost feudal labour force are seen by the survivors as 'the good old days' (p.35).

Chapter 2 begins Olive's main thesis, expanded over the following three chapters, that the North West of Western Australia was colonised using Aboriginal people as a slave labour force sanctified, institutionalised and codified by parliamentary lawmakers almost wholly drawn from the state's landowning class. The exploitation of the indigenous people was excused by a belief in racial superiority, supported by 'social Darwinism' and administered through 'draconian' laws designed more for control than the stated purpose of protection. Olive's convincing evidence is drawn from a wide range of historical and anthropological texts, with extensive references and chapter endnotes.

North of the 26th parallel of latitude in Western Australia, where regulations did not permit convict labour, indigenous people became the region's indentured labour force. Aboriginal labour was such a necessity that property buyers asked, 'How many acres, how many head of stock, how many blacks?' (p.60). Amongst the abuses Olive gives from many historical sources, Aborigines suffered the blackbirding of labour to supply the pearling fleets of Roebourne, capture and punishment of absconders, abduction of women and children, branding and flogging, curfews, , neck chaining of prisoners and the use of 'contracts' as a virtual certificate of ownership of indentured black labourers.

In Chapter 4, Olive lists a 'plethora of laws' and commissions of inquiry pertaining to West Australian Aboriginal people (p.110). According to Olive the *Aborigines Protection Act, 1905*, 'recognised the essence of slavery in the north and the socialisation of children to develop a slave mentality' (p.120). Under the Act, 'The complete dominance of one racial group was codified' (p.117). The chapter concludes with a fourteen-page section, 'Striking out' (pp.138-151), with a recounting of the pastoral workers' strike. The strike ended with the establishment of Aboriginal owned stations and an influx of unemployed Aborigines into the coastal towns as a new phase of exploitation began. The stories of retired stock workers like Ned Cheedy, transcribed by Olive, 'reveal a profound sense of loss and disruption' (p.154).

As Olive points out, 'large scale mining commenced in the Pilbara thirty years before the Mabo judgement' (p.176). The resultant Harding Dam and Burrup Peninsula disputes are covered in some detail in Chapter 5, supported by the available anthropological and archaeological references. As an influx of workers built the infrastructure for new mining towns and ports, Aboriginal people experienced a further loss of control of their traditional land and sites. Similarly, Chapter 6 is dramatically headed, 'Roebourne devastated'. With the construction of the nearby town of Karratha to service the mining industry, Roebourne became a neglected Aboriginal township, a process analysed at some length in other studies. The decline of Roebourne and the Aboriginal reaction is illustrated by Olive in an examination of the events of 1983.

Olive concludes with a self-indulgent chapter beginning, 'The reader will now have an appreciation of the long history of suffering that the Pilbara blackfellas have endured at the hands of the whitefellas' (p.226). There is an impassioned appeal for 'blackfella empowerment', particularly in Roebourne, although apparently not unconditionally. For example, in decrying the destruction of the Burrup Peninsula petroglyphs, Olive states: 'So whitefellas have found a way around native title. And some blackfellas are eating at that table' (p.247). In the final pages Olive discusses the remarkable 'return to country' by language groups in the central Pilbara –a movement that requires a book in itself. Three examples of cultural renewal briefly discussed are the work of Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre, the Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation and the Guamala Aboriginal Corporation in preserving and encouraging Aboriginal language and culture in the North West.

Noel Olive has used familiar texts to illustrate the horrors inflicted on Aboriginal people in the development of the Pilbara. His proven ability transcribing interviews with Pilbara identities adds relevance to the secondary texts. However, apart from the

John Pat case Olive is silent on his later involvement as an advocate for Pilbara Aboriginal groups. Although an eyewitness in the crucial years post-Mabo, Olive has little to say on the developing relationships between Pilbara Aborigines and mining companies, beginning with the Marandoo dispute and perhaps culminating in the landmark Yandi Land Use Agreement in 1996. As a result, many of Olive's co-history makers of this period are missing from the eighteen pages of endnotes, the comprehensive bibliography, the list of interviews and the five-page index.

According to Olive, 'The damage done by slavery and the slave-like relationships of colonisation still has a pervasive influence in our lives today' (p.226). In the Twenty-first Century as North Australia is being recolonised, the media righteously focuses on the 'social breakdown' of Aboriginal society. Alternatively, Olive's book documents how a history of perversity, hypocrisy, cruelty, lawlessness and trauma has affected the lives of 'the Pilbara mob', making the word, 'Sorry' a very inadequate response.