

The Proper-bad Lie: Aboriginal Responses to Western Education at Moola Bulla, 1910–1955.

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Susan Page, Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews and Michelle Trudgett.

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Rhonda Gail Povey declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Centre for the Advancement of Indigenous Knowledges at the University of Technology Sydney.

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Abbreviations

AIATSIS Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

AIM Australian Inland Missions

CNA Commissioner of Native Affairs

CAIK Centre for Advancement of Indigenous Knowledges

CPA Chief Protector of Aborigines

KLC Kimberley Land Council

KLRC Kimberley Language Resource Centre

KSGAC Kimberley Stolen Generation Aboriginal Corporation

MOU Memorandum of Understanding

SLWA State Library of Western Australia

SROWA State Records Office of Western Australia

UAM United Aboriginal Missions

Abstract

Drawing on Cultural Interface as the theoretical framework, this thesis engages with the complexities and entanglements of Aboriginal children's experiences of Western education at Moola Bulla Native Cattle Station (Moola Bulla) in Western Australia, between 1910-55. Re-storying in this place-based project exposes the government failure to deliver Western education as promised to Aboriginal children in the East Kimberley region. By centring Aboriginal children's responses to the racialised regime at Moola Bulla, the research promotes a powerful narrative that acknowledges injustice whilst at the same time honouring Aboriginal agency. Reframing previous deficit misrepresentations of Indigeneity into strength-based narratives, the study articulates a resistance to colonial master narratives. Most important to the study is the honouring of those who once lived at Moola Bulla, many who are speaking back through the telling of their story. Additionally, the research centres the contributions Indigenous academics are making to the decolonisation of research.

Moving away from colonial, paternalistic and racist interpretations of history, the research is designed to decolonise the narrative of Aboriginal education in remote Western Australia, using the wide and deep angle lens of qualitative historical research in education, filtered by critical and Indigenous methodologies. This polyvocal study synthesises 11 interviews conducted with Elders, Aunties and Uncles with published Aboriginal oral histories and testimonials given in the *Bringing Them Home Report*. The study is also guided by principles of ethical Indigenist research, and as such carries a moral imperative.

This dissertation proposes that listening to Aboriginal responses to Western education from the past will better inform our engagement with the delivery of equitable educational opportunities for Aboriginal students in remote contexts in the future. Furthermore, the research will contribute to the wider academic community by addressing and encouraging accountability in Aboriginal education.