

Daisy Bates: Dubious Leadership

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Abstract: This chapter uses the example of Daisy Bates to investigate some of the complexities of women's leadership and the particular problems that arise when looking at the leadership achievements of white women in settler colonial societies. Daisy Bates has been both lauded and reviled for her contributions to early Australian ethnology and attempts to provide welfare to the Indigenous peoples of Western and South Australia. This chapter explores what strategies were involved for a white woman in the first half of the twentieth century to not just 'seize the initiative' but to actively seek out a position of authority. It looks, too, at whether these strategies could be successful and the implications of women's leadership when it leads in dubious directions.

Keywords: Daisy Bates, Australian Aborigines, settler colonialism, feminist history

In 1904, Daisy Bates, an Irish-born woman in her forties who had previously been a governess in Queensland and a 'lady journalist' in London, began to collect material for her 'compilation of a history and vocabulary' of the Western Australian Aborigines.¹ She was doing so with the support of the Registrar General of Western Australia, Henry Prinsep, who also appointed her Honorary Protector of the Aborigines, and with the expectation the material would be published in book form by about 1912. Bates visited Aboriginal communities and missions throughout the state and collected a vast amount of material, but successive changes of state government between 1905 and 1914 saw support for the project removed. A book did not eventuate until the 1980s, more than thirty years after Bates' death, when anthropologist Isabel White took up the manuscript, edited the material and ensured its publication.² In 1914, Bates lost her position as honorary protector of the Aborigines. Despite these setbacks to her plans, she continued to live among Aborigines in Western Australia and South Australia, and present herself as an expert in the field of Aboriginal knowledge and Australian ethnography. But was she a leader in this field? This chapter looks at Bates' claims to such a title, which were based largely on the proximity to which she lived to Aboriginal communities, promoted in (and reinforced by) her popular writings. It explores the complex problems her life and achievements bring to

thinking about women and leadership, particularly to ideas of leadership outside an organisation or recognised movement.

An unreliable story

The stories of Daisy Bates' life – the versions she created herself and those that have emerged since her death – are now fairly widely known. There's no doubt they are intriguing, not to say dramatic, salacious and enigmatic, with multiple strands that at times weave in and out of Australian national mythology. In the version of her life that Bates herself broadcast, with the help of her biographer Elizabeth Salter and the novelist Ernestine Hill, she was born Daisy O'Dwyer in 1863 to a wealthy, Protestant Irish family.³ She was orphaned at the age of five, but brought up by a loving grandmother, and taught to be 'a little lady'. After her grandmother's death, Bates was adopted by an aristocratic English family who treated her as one their own. She was, it seemed, destined to live out the life of an accomplished upper-class English woman until a tubercular illness led to the recommendation that she emigrate to Australia. After travelling in first class comfort, she arrived in Queensland in late 1884, but soon travelled to New South Wales. Here, in a spirited quest for independence, rather than financial need, she became a governess. Soon after, in February 1885, she married Jack Bates, a drover.

A more accurate though less aristocratic version of her life is that she was born Margaret Dwyer in 1859 to a poor Irish Catholic family. Although she was, as she claimed, orphaned young, she spent her childhood in an orphanage, learning there the skills necessary to be a governess. It was with the intention of working as a governess (and possibly of marrying well) that she travelled to Queensland, as a free emigrant, and certainly not first class, in 1883. In 1884, eleven months before marrying Jack Bates, she married Edwin Murrant, the man now better known to be 'Breaker Morant'. Breaker Morant earned a place in Australian mythology nearly twenty later when he was court-martialled and executed during the Boer War for his part in the death of some prisoners of war.⁴ His marriage to Daisy had lasted less than a month before Murrant was charged with theft and jailed. Daisy did not live with him again, but the marriage was never officially dissolved, thus making her a bigamist when she married Jack Bates – and soon a multiple bigamist, as she appears to have married Ernest Baglehole, whom she had met on the voyage from Britain to Australia, about four months later.⁵ But it was Jack Bates whose name she took, and with whom she had a son, Arnold, in 1886.

She was now formally Mrs Daisy Bates, the name by which she would be publicly known. It is at this point the differing life stories merge to an extent, although there were a number of events to come that Bates would hide, disguise or downplay. The Bates family travelled, droving through New South

Wales and Tasmania for several years. In 1894, Daisy Bates left Jack and Arnold, and returned to London – in her account, out of desire to see that city again and with the intention of being away for only a year.⁶ But because of the economic depression and financial collapse in the Australian colonies, she was forced to remain there for five years, during which time she worked as an assistant to W.T. Stead, the journalist and editor of the *Review of Reviews*, a position that enabled her to claim the profession of journalist. In 1899, she returned to Australia, joining her husband and son who were by this time living in the Kimberley, in the north of Western Australia. Before leaving London, *The Times* newspaper had prominently reported allegations that the mistreatment of Aborigines by white settlers in Western Australia was widespread. Although Bates had shown no interest in the Indigenous people of Australia before this, she approached the editor of the paper and offered to report on the ‘truth’ of the situation from a first hand position in the colony itself.⁷ This assignment was largely self-funded, but she saw it as her main employment on her return to Australia, and it would lead to her life’s work. Soon, she had again left Jack and Arnold Bates, this time to spend an itinerant life investigating the lives of Aborigines around Western Australia.

By the early 1900s, the violent confrontations that had occurred between white settlers and Aborigines as the settlers moved further inland – appropriating vast tracts of land, dispossessing Indigenous people and interfering with their food sources as they did so – had largely ceased, except in the far north of Western Australia.⁸ Legislation to control the remaining Aborigines, generally under the guise of ‘protection’, was enacted from the 1880s. The overwhelming result of the Western Australian Aboriginal Protection acts of 1886 and 1905 was the removal of Aborigines from their traditional land and their incarceration in missions and reserves.⁹ These events shaped what Bates was able to observe about Aboriginal life and how she presented her findings. She was writing about the survivors of the initial conflict, a minority who, increasingly, had had their contact with land and culture broken. She was writing, too, within the ideological understandings of the doomed race theory – convinced that it was inevitable, and natural, that the Indigenous people should die out, ‘swift passing from a world in which they were an anachronism’, in the face of white civilisation.¹⁰

In her reports for *The Times* and articles she published in Perth newspapers, Bates exonerated the white settlers from any crimes of violence, finding the pioneers of Western Australia ‘noble men and women, and nearly all of them ... above reproach and more than kindly in their treatment of the aboriginal’.¹¹ It was a white wash. But while investigating the claims she became intrigued by Indigenous customs and fascinated by the emerging profession of anthropology. In 1904, she approached the government with the proposition that she undertake the large-scale study of local Indigenous

languages and customs. She was employed to do this. The pay was low, but government backing gave her a defined position and a degree of authority. She spent most of the next forty-five years living in the desert, often in tents pitched near Aboriginal communities, with and without government support, while her theories and beliefs about Aboriginal people moved in and out of favour. She did spend the years 1935 to 1941 in Adelaide, sometimes employed by the Adelaide *Advertiser* writing the 'My Natives and I' columns that became her book, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, but then returned to the desert. In 1946 she went back to Adelaide, where she lived until her death in 1951 aged ninety-one. This was the original 'legendary' Daisy Bates – the upright white woman who devoted her life to Aboriginal people, who lived alone in a tent in the desert, who appeared immaculately dressed, always, in heavy, dark Edwardian clothing and carrying an umbrella. This figure is instantly recognisable, admired if not revered by Australians, notable as a 'character' and for giving many in this country at that time their main knowledge of the Indigenous population.

The more recent revelations about Bates' life, the evidence of bigamy, hints of early sex scandals in Ireland and suggestions that it was to undergo VD treatment that she left Australia for Britain in the 1890s, have added further layers to the legend. But it is unclear that they have added extra information about what she actually did to achieve the status. It is not my intention in this chapter to explore the veracity of the multiple stories about Daisy Bates' life, or to conduct posthumous psychoanalysis upon her, but it is worth noting that Bates was not averse to playing with the truth when it came to her own background, and she was vigilant in presenting her life and achievements in a way she perceived put her in the best possible light. Self-invention and reinvention was a big part of her life. Some of this can be seen as a means to maintain and promote the appearance of a suitably respectable woman, necessary if she was to gain financial support for her work while living a life greatly at odds with the expectations of conventional, respectable womanhood – both before her work with Aborigines and after. But what was this work? What were her achievements and was leadership, in any of its varied formulations, among them?

While Bates' self-presentation (and self-preservation) can be used to illustrate strategies women have followed to gain authority, or a public identity, in a society based on excluding women from such roles, it also offers a number of ways of looking at women and leadership, and at exploring whether women's leadership is necessarily to be acclaimed. There are three ways that Bates can be seen as a 'leader', or at least three ways her paths of self-promotion involved positioning herself as one, and none is straightforward. One is through her contribution to the emerging anthropological profession in the earlier part of the twentieth century; second

is her construction of herself in her writings as a respected ‘leader’ of the Indigenous people among whom she lived; and the third is the extent to which she influenced how Indigenous Australian people – and white Australian people and governments – were perceived both in Australia and internationally. In the rest of this chapter I explore these three forms of leadership, the extent to which they are valid and the problems they present.

In the field: Daisy Bates and emerging anthropology

We have seen how Bates’ initial interest in and reporting on Aboriginal lives in Western Australia arose within a fundamentally colonialist framework and through journalistic aims – the desire to report on the situation from first-hand knowledge and to prove white settlers innocent of wrongdoing against the Indigenous people. During the course of investigating her newspaper articles, she read all she could about Australian Aborigines and anthropological studies of other societies. She became familiar with the work of male investigators of Australian Indigenous knowledge, particularly that focused on Western Australia, and when she took up the commission to write the study of Western Australian peoples, she was influenced in her methods by this reading.¹² But she found no methods worked as well as living among the Aborigines and questioning them about their lives and stories. In 1910, Bates joined an expedition into the north-west of the state led by British anthropologist, A.R. Brown (later Radcliffe-Brown), although the two fell out after a couple of months and Bates left the expedition to do her own fieldwork. She corresponded with several established male anthropologists including Spencer and Gillen, A.W. Howitt and John Mathew and was treated as a colleague by them. But was she a leader in the field?

The main form of authority that Bates recognised and claimed for herself was not that of science, but that of the government; as an employee of the state, she was a proud representative and supporter of King and Empire. Symbols of this authority, including the Companion of the British Empire (CBE) awarded to her in the 1934 New Year’s honours list and the umbrella that had been touched by the Duke of Gloucester when he visited South Australia that same year, were of the utmost importance to her, as were her meetings with members of parliament and the aristocracy. She aligned herself with the official policies of the time, until these moved towards assimilation over ‘breeding out’, and when she was critical of white people it was of their ignorance, not of their intentions. It was criticism that served to highlight her own knowledge and understanding of the situation.

The rhetoric of empire figures strongly in her writing, and she had complete faith in the powers of imperialism. She wrote:

Anthropology can be given its due place, though in the breakdown of all their old tribal laws through contact with civilisation it is scarcely necessary. What they need most is the governance and fatherhood of the Empire makers, men of the sterling British type that brought India and Africa into our Commonwealth of Nations – a Havelock, a Raffles, a Lugard, a Nicholson, a Lawrence of Arabia.¹³

As an extension of these beliefs, Bates was fully committed to the idea that Australian Aborigines were a dying race. She also argued strongly for the separation of children of mixed descent from their communities, arguing that ‘true’ Aborigines ‘detested’ the ‘half-castes [that] came among them, a being neither black nor white’. She reserved her own greatest opprobrium for those of mixed European and Indigenous descent, seeing them as an impediment to the ‘natural’ fading out of the Aboriginal population in the wake of white civilisation. She supported their removal from ‘full-blood’ communities, not for the reasons that would become commonplace with the widespread child removal policies that created the Stolen Generations – that there was a chance a person of mixed European and Aboriginal descent could be integrated into white society or at least be able to perform domestic duties for white people – but because she believed they were a blight on both sides, ‘neither black nor white’ and wanted by no one.

Isobel White, ultimate editor of Bates’ work on ‘the native tribes’ and author of a chapter about Bates in *First in their Field*, a study of female anthropologists in Australia, is most positive in her assessment of Bates.¹⁴ White acknowledges that Bates was uneducated in scientific research, untrained in fieldwork and unable to gain full respect from what was in the process of becoming an established masculine occupation of anthropology. She also explores the breakdown of Bates’ professional relationship with Radcliffe-Brown and her communications with other practicing anthropologists. White recognises that there were shortcomings to Bates’ work, including some basic misunderstandings of the geographic origins of Australia’s Indigenous peoples, but is ultimately full of praise for Bates, particularly her fieldwork. By living among the people she was writing about, observing, befriending and questioning, by claiming to report only the truth of what she’d been told, Bates was, White argues, pioneering a form of ‘participant observation’ well before it became an accepted fieldwork practice. Where other women who had written about and published on the customs of Australian Aborigines, such as Ethel Hassell and Katie Langloh Parker, had done so on the basis of material collected from the Aborigines living and working on the stations the women (with their husbands) owned, and male anthropologists at this time tended to make their observations from homesteads, missions and police outposts, living with the people being observed would not become a common anthropological method for another ten years or so.¹⁵ White credits Bates with being one of the first to employ the

method, and praises the accuracy of her listening and recording. ‘Old Aborigines told her of their childhood and youth and of the old customs, so that she has given us at least a partial picture of the society and culture of much of Western Australia’.¹⁶ During this early period, which White is careful to distinguish from the works Bates produced later when aged in her seventies and eighties, Bates gathered much information that would otherwise have been lost, and the shortcomings of her methods and approaches were no more striking than those of male researchers of the time – and none of these would be taken seriously in the context of contemporary anthropological theories.

There can be little doubt that Daisy Bates aspired to leadership in this area. She lobbied for government support – especially financial – for her work, and actively sought out informants and information. She published in a couple of learned journals and communicated with colleagues as an equal, and she publicly accused Radcliffe-Brown of plagiarising her work – a clear sign she had no doubts about its scientific value. She was interested in the possibilities of her situation to forge a place not just as the first woman to undertake significant anthropological work in the area but as a leader in the field in general. And the way she went about this was very much by adopting the masculine leadership mode of heroic individualism. As Amanda Sinclair discusses in her chapter in this volume, this is one of the early and most persistent formulations of leadership: ‘they think that a performance of leadership is a heroic one: a performance of tough, out front decisiveness or “greatness”’.¹⁷ Many of the traits Sinclair identifies as typifying the style of leadership associated with military discipline can also be found in Bates: self-reliance, discipline, stoicism, competitiveness and assertiveness. But, as Sinclair also points out, women emulating male behaviours rarely succeed in being accepted as leaders. In the corporate world that Sinclair is mainly referring to, this is because they are harshly judged as ‘trying too hard to be one of the boys’.¹⁸ For Daisy Bates, in the bush and in the desert in the first half of the twentieth century, the possibility of this actual judgement wasn’t so much of an issue, but the disapprobation attracted by a woman behaving too much like a man certainly was. She was clearly aware that she needed to balance her unconventional living arrangements and employment with the strong claims to respectable womanhood represented by her dress, her invented back-story and her professed desire to nurture and soothe the way of the dying race.

It is arguable that Bates failed to achieve recognition from within the profession, let alone lasting fame for her contributions to it, because of her gender. She strove to lead the way in the emerging science of anthropology through gathering information about the Western Australian Indigenous populations, but was ultimately unsuccessful, with her work in the field unpublished and uncirculated until well after her death. If the desired outcome

of leadership is power, influence and authority, Bates' fieldwork certainly didn't take her there. But before we start to laud Daisy Bates as an unsung pioneer, whose work and achievements were first impeded and then hidden by gender bias, and bemoan the extent to which she was excluded from the acceptance of the scientific fraternity that she sought, it is worth examining the other ways that she can be seen as a leader. Where she did become successful was through the extreme popularity of her 'unacademic' work, to which I will return later. And while this work was ostensibly about Aborigines, it was really a work of mythology: Bates mythologising herself and her role with what she perceived as a 'dying race'. And part of that mythologising was presenting herself as a revered leader of the Indigenous people she lived with, something from which she also claimed the authority to speak on their behalf.

'Queen of the Desert'

The idea of Daisy Bates as an incarnation of a white queen, a leader of the Indigenous people among whom she lived and travelled, would have been laughable to the people she supposedly led. It is an idea she spawned herself, but it has been taken up and perpetuated from the 1930s till now. Her own conceptualisation of her role as an insider to Aboriginal society was as 'Kabbarli', the name given to her by the Aborigines forcibly housed on Bernier and Dorres islands. In language, the name means 'grandmother' or 'grandmotherly person', a general name of respect given to an older woman (although it has also been suggested it may have connotations of 'batty old woman'). In *The Passing of the Aborigines*, Bates bestows on it far greater significance, a title of not only respect, but also awe and authority. This view is certainly perpetuated by Ernestine Hill in *Kabbarli*, Hill's memoir of Bates, and iterated in the book titles of biographers who have followed, although with some demotion along the way: Elizabeth Salter, *Daisy Bates: Great White Queen of the Never Never*; Susanna de Vries, *Desert Queen: The Many Lives and Loves of Daisy Bates*; Bob Reece, *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert*. Daisy Bates as a great white queen may be ridiculous, but it is revealing to look at the original appeal of the idea and why it continues to have currency.

The trope of the white queen has proved useful in colonial societies, giving an elevated status to women who may otherwise be difficult to accommodate in a suitably feminine role.¹⁹ The white queen is a symbolic leader, a figurehead: a leader who needs do little other than appear. It was an idea that gave women like Bates the opportunity to style themselves as royalty, of a sort, and shift ambition for leadership from the heroic to a more transformational or charismatic style – leadership where they don't have to *do*

so much as *be*. When Sinclair discusses this form of leadership, it is, like heroic leadership, characterised as masculine. As Bates presents her self-construction as such a leader, however, it can be seen as the ideal form for a woman to aspire to, especially in this period – and especially when the leadership is of those widely believed to be inferior. Here, Bates was not vying for leadership with white men, or seeking authority within masculine science. Her leadership was of the displaced Aboriginal people living along the transcontinental railway, the dying race. It was leadership that supported rather than threatened state authority. In the popular white imagination, it offered a convenient way of seeing and categorising Bates. It accommodated her eccentricities of dress, behaviour and belief – and her individualism – making these admirable rather than bewildering. But her leadership – or even practical support – of the Indigenous people is equally dubious. In this later part of Bates' life, her acts of welfare towards the Indigenous people revolved around providing some nursing assistance, distributing the occasional blankets or items of clothing – welcome, perhaps, but inadequate given the extent of the problem.

I did what I could among them with little errands of mercy; distributing rations and blankets from my own government store when boats were delayed; bringing sweets and dainties for young and old, extra blankets in the rain, and where I could a word of love and understanding.²⁰

These were piecemeal acts of charity, rather than recognition of the impact of colonialism and the systemic racial violence and inequity that had brought about the need for it. The food and blankets were not offered in the context of clearly held beliefs or with any organised backing or program of relief. Bates was praised for spending her own, rather than government, money on her efforts for the Aborigines, but any question of the overall effectiveness of her actions as a solution to Indigenous needs was avoided.

The patronising introduction written by Alan Moorehead for the 1966 edition of *The Passing of the Aborigines*, lists the things that Daisy Bates wasn't: she wasn't a missionary, as she did not try to convert or teach Australian Aborigines anything; she was not a doctor or nurse; she was not an anthropologist, although she 'illuminated' Australian Aborigines for non-Aboriginal Australians, 'she knew them better than anyone else who has ever lived; and she made them interesting not only to herself but to us as well.'²¹ His conclusion, weak as it is, is that she was an eccentric yet lovable, perhaps saintly, woman, who wrote a book about Aborigines that a lot of people, not otherwise particularly interested in these people, read; and that she improved lives – of her readers, as well as the people she was writing about. It is a vague assessment that indicates how hard Bates was to pigeonhole – and how keen people were to praise her, for something. Moorehead renders her benign, not threatening the social order, not overstepping gender expectations. He

does not claim her as a queen, but he does grant her transformational qualities, a sense that it was her presence, rather than her actions or her writing, that did most good. But it was the original publication of this book, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, that gave Bates the strongest basis for any claims of leadership. It is certainly the work for which she was best known in her lifetime.

Chronicler of a ‘dying race’

The Passing of the Aborigines was published in 1938. It was based on a series of columns called ‘My Natives and I’ (a reiteration of the queen theme in its echo of ‘my subjects’) which had appeared in the Adelaide *Advertiser* in the mid 1930s and was prepared for publication with the assistance of the journalist and novelist Ernestine Hill.²² The book became a huge bestseller, in Great Britain as well as Australia.²³ Its popularity enabled Bates to perpetuate the already established image of herself as a courageous and compassionate, if somewhat eccentric woman who had selflessly devoted her life to the welfare of the Aboriginal people.²⁴

It is a deeply flawed and inconsistently written book, partly because of its origins as newspaper columns and possibly partly because they were ghostwritten by Hill (or so Hill claims).²⁵ But it is not just inconsistency of voice that is evident within the book. There is also uncertainty about what authority is being claimed for Bates’ role as a worker with Aborigines. First invoked is the idea of devoted service, as embodied by the white queen or Florence Nightingale-type figure discussed above. Arthur Mee, in the laudatory introduction to the first edition of the book, implies that Bates is close to sainthood: ‘She has given her life and her heart to this dying race ... There is in her life something of the spirit of service that moved Florence Nightingale’.²⁶ Bates herself promotes this representation in the passage quoted above, with her ‘little errands of mercy’ and ‘word[s] of love and understanding’.

In pushing this theme – and there are many examples throughout the book – Bates is positioning herself in the tradition of female reformers and philanthropists, who were a recognisable leading social force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She was sacrificing her life for the good of others, helping those unable to help themselves. But although she presented herself in these terms, she proposed very little in the way of actual reform to improve the appalling conditions under which many Aborigines were living. Unlike other women of this period, including the mission teacher Mary Bennett and Perth activist Bessie Rischbieth, who were active in feminist groups and used their position to advocate basic human rights for Aborigines, Bates was neither associated with a movement, nor concerned

with improving the living standards, health or civil rights of Indigenous people.²⁷

But this is far from a work of serious ethnographic study. Bates provides some information about Aboriginal customs and culture, but they are not conveyed with a sense of objectivity, scientific rigour or, indeed, respect. For example, after providing details of some initiation rites, she continues:

those weird rituals of the initiations of the Australian aborigine, unchanged through thousands of years, the novitiate of youth to manhood – a sacrament of sex, a communion of blood, and a Black Mass of witchcraft and savagery, yet instinct with a pure poetry of symbolism that goes back to the blind beginnings of all religions, and throbs with the beating pulse of the primeval.²⁸

The tenor of this quote, with the rituals sensationalised and appropriated for universal rather than specific meaning, and the emphasis on the primitive nature of both the people and their culture, is typical of Bates' expression, and essential for her overall message. Throughout, Bates advances the view that it is inevitable the Aborigines will die out, for what place could such a primitive people have in the modern, civilised world? 'I could understand now the reason of their swift passing from a world in which they were an anachronism and of their withering from contact with the white man's civilization, which can find no place for the primitive.'²⁹ Bates was clearly not the first to promote, publicise and justify this view; it was the cornerstone of Aboriginal policy and control in Australia for many years. Through the popularity of this book, however, she did ensure the view was disseminated even further, and more deeply entrenched in the minds of readers who accepted her authority. This occurred even though the book is more a work of self-mythology than a study of Aboriginal people. Bates' self-representation is central, and, as we have seen, far from reliably truthful.

The Passing of the Aborigines shows Bates to be insensitive, sensationalist and self-obsessed. It reveals her concern with making money, her adherence to the conventions of journalism rather than academic knowledge or consideration of the people she was collecting information from. The need of newspaper columns to feed off sensationalist material can be seen as influencing much that appeared in her work: particularly in the reports of cannibalism and infanticide, the expression of her intense hatred of 'half-castes' and the over-sentimentalised nostalgic aura surrounding her reports of the 'dying of the race'. While many other women considered in this volume came to leadership accidentally, taking advantage of an opportunity they found themselves in to exert influence and instigate change, Daisy Bates actively sought a position of influence. When she could not do this through scientific or governmental circles, she created one for herself through *The Passing of the Aborigines*. She seized an initiative, but it is one that leaves a dubious trace.

Conclusion

In 1934 feminist activist Mary Bennett wrote of Daisy Bates that she was ‘not regarded with any interest at all except by people of bad repute when they want a “character” provided. This is why the Federal Government put her name forward for an honour ... she is one of the worst enemies that our poor natives have.’³⁰ But few agreed with Bennett’s assessment. Of the women who worked with or wrote about Aborigines in the first half of the twentieth century, Daisy Bates is the one who is still known about, referred to and cited in a wide range of contexts. For example, in the 1990s another dubious leader, Pauline Hanson, used the authority of Bates to back her own claims that Indigenous people were at heart savage man-eaters and baby-killers. In this way, Bates exerted and continues to exert leadership in the Australian imagination. She was that rare individual for her times, a woman who was a public figure and still an immediately identifiable character, even if identifying her contribution to Australian culture and society remains difficult. Although the validity of her work was questioned even during her lifetime, and even more so since her death, she has remained a visible figure of Australian history. Over the years since her death there have been at least two fictional reconstructions of her life published, a number of children’s books have been written about her (including one by Indigenous authors Edna Tantjingu and Eileen Wani Wingfield titled *Down the Hole, Up the Tree, Across the Sandhills, Running from the State and Daisy Bates*), an opera, a shelved feature film (that was to have starred Katherine Hepburn), a feature film that saw the light and an ABC TV documentary. In the past five years alone there have been two biographical studies on Bates, as well as the re-release of *The Passing of the Aborigines*.³¹ Yet a great deal of this lasting renown is based on her eccentricity and notoriety – and her capacity to invent and reinvent herself. It is a credit to her ability to self-publicise rather than a response to anything of lasting value she did.

The chief value Isobel White sees in Bates’ anthropological work is that she recorded information that otherwise would be lost to posterity. This is without doubt a significant achievement and something the descendants of those who gave her the information can also welcome. But that Bates’ work holds this value is only a reflection of the scarcity of the material sources available for Indigenous people after their oral tradition has been broken and their connections to the land and its stories destroyed. Bates’ collected material is valuable because it is the best that can be found. One of the legacies of colonial dispossession, in which Bates was involved, is the loss of history.

To view the power structures of colonial society as purely patriarchal, in which white women were unwitting victims, fails to recognise the personal advantages that were available to women who made what use they could of

the colonial situation. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson makes abundantly clear, all white women benefit from colonisation.³² In finding a life's work, a market for it and lasting if controversial renown, Bates, like other white women of her era and since, was using the inequities of colonialism to her own ends. She was able to recognise some of the advantages a presence in the Australian colonies brought with it, writing of her anthropological research:

I admit that it was scarcely a sacrifice. Apart from the joy of the work for its own sake, apart from the enlightenments, the surprises, the clues, and the fresh beginnings that were the stimuli of every day, the paths to never-ending high-roads and byways in a scientific study that was practically virgin country, 'the freshness, the freedom, the fairness', meant much more to me now than the life of cities.³³

Bates benefited from appropriating Indigenous knowledge and using her position 'on the spot' to authorise her statements and writings; she could feel the excitement of discovery, be at the forefront of furthering knowledge, on the frontier of science, even though a woman. Unlike many of the women identified as leaders in this volume, she did not come to leadership by accident, did not see an opportunity to lead for change and seize it. Instead, she actively sought a role and position, and if she did not fully achieve her ambitions, she certainly succeeded in influencing opinion.

Exploring ways of reading Daisy Bates as a 'leader' – in either early anthropology or in Aboriginal welfare – provides an opportunity to air some of the problematic elements of identifying and celebrating 'women leaders'. That is, we need to recognise that not all women were great, that not all women's achievements can be celebrated unquestioningly, and that for women to be leaders is not necessarily to mean their leadership has admirable social results. And this does not mean unfairly judging women of the past in the light of current concerns or within a context of what we would have *liked* them to do. Rather, it involves being conscious, in this case, of how racialised power structures of colonialism could operate to white women's advantage, giving them the opportunity to be leaders by taking ownership of knowledge belonging to people even more powerless than white women in the society of their times.

The intricacies of the settler colonial situation need to be considered when looking at any aspect of Australian history, including white women's leadership roles in the twentieth century. When these issues are considered the question that arises is not only an echo of that which reverberated through much feminist history of the 1970s and '80s, 'where were the [white] women leaders?', but also 'what do we do with them when we find them?' What do we do with women like Daisy Bates who based their achievements on the exploitation of Aboriginal knowledge? Peter Read has written that it is the responsibility of historians to take into account both the big truths and little

truths.³⁴ He was referring in particular to the truths of Aboriginal history, but his argument has, I believe, particular resonance for Australian feminist history and the challenges that face it. The interaction of gender and race are complex and manifest themselves in a myriad of ways, including in the ways women find to lead. Highlighting the complexities of these stories might seem to militate against the perceived role of identifying women leaders, but in the end can only add to its richness and variety.

¹ Daisy Bates to John Mathew, 7 September 1905, Box 1122, MS 9290, State Library Victoria, Melbourne.

² Daisy Bates, *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, ed. Isobel White (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1988). See also Ann Standish, *Australia through Women's Eyes* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008), where some of the material in this chapter appears in a different form.

³ Elizabeth Salter, *Daisy Bates: Great White Queen of the Never Never* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971); Ernestine Hill, *Kabbarli: A Personal Memoir of Daisy Bates* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973). See also Susannah de Vries, *Desert Queen: The Many Lives and Loves of Daisy Bates* (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2008) and Bob Reece, *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert* (Canberra: National Library of Australia and Bob Reece, 2007).

⁴ Over the years after his death, Morant came to represent the archetypal Australian male hero: a bushman, a horseman, a soldier, who wrote ballads and who stood up to the British military command. This image was reinforced by the 1980 feature film, *Breaker Morant*, directed by Bruce Beresford. See also the novel by Kit Denton, *The Breaker* (Sydney: Times House in Association with the Australian, 1983 [1973]). For a factual account see Margaret Carnegie and Frank Shields, *In Search of Breaker Morant: Balladist and Bushveldt Carbineer* (Melbourne: H.H. Stephenson, 1979).

⁵ Isobel White, 'Daisy Bates: Legend and Reality' in *First in their Field: Women and Australian Anthropology*, ed. Julie Marcus (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 48; Isobel White, 'Introduction' to Bates, *The Native Tribes of Western Australia*, 3. On Bates' marriage to Ernest Baglehole see Reece, *Daisy Bates*.

⁶ Hill, *Kabbarli*, 20.

⁷ Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent Among the Natives of Australia* (London: Murray, 1938), 1. All references are to this edition, unless otherwise noted.

⁸ See Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987) and *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1982).

⁹ For details of legislation in Western Australia see Anna Haebich, *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia* (Perth: University of New South Wales Press, 1988) and *Broken Circles* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000).

¹⁰ For the doomed race theory in Australia, see Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997) and Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001). On the same theories internationally during this period, see Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, 65.

¹² Works included George Grey, *A Vocabulary of the Dialects of South Western Australia* (London: T. & W. Boone, 1840); George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1841) and Bishop Rosendo Salvado, *Memorie storiche dell’Australia : particolarmente della missione Benedettina di Nuova Norcia e degli usi costumi degli Australiani*, Rome, 1851. See also, as examples of Bates’ near contemporary male colleagues, A.W. Howitt and L. Fison, *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (1879), *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (1904); W. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (1899); John Mathew, *Eaglehawk and Crow: A Study of the Australian Aborigines Including an Inquiry into their Origin and a Survey of Australian Languages* (London: David Nutt; Melbourne: Melville, Mullen and Slade, 1899).

¹³ Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, 238.

¹⁴ White, ‘Daisy Bates: Legend and Reality’.

¹⁵ For example, Ethel Hassell, *My Dusky Friends* (Fremantle: C.W. Hassell, 1975); Katie Langloh Parker, *The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia* (London: Archibald Constable, 1905); see also Julie Evans, ‘Katie Langloh Parker and the Beginnings of Ethnography in Australia’, *Founders, Firsts and Feminists: Women Leaders in Twentieth Century Australia*, ed. Fiona Davis, Nell Musgrove and Judith Smart (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2011), Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw and Ann Standish, ‘Caring for Country: Yuwalaray Women and Attachments to Land on an Australian Colonial Frontier’, *Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 4 (2003): 15–37, and Patricia Grimshaw and Julie Evans, ‘Colonial Women on Intercultural Frontiers: Rosa Campbell Praed, Mary Bundock and Katie Langloh Parker’, *Australian Historical Studies* 27, no. 106 (April 1996): 79–95. See also Standish, *Australia through Women’s Eyes*.

¹⁶ White, ‘Daisy Bates’, 60.

¹⁷ Amanda Sinclair, ‘Not Just “Adding Women in”: Women Re-making Leadership’, in this collection, *Seizing the Initiative: Australian Women Leaders in Politics, Workplaces and Communities*, ed. Rosemary Francis, Pat Grimshaw and Ann Standish (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2012), 15–34.

¹⁸ Amanda Sinclair, *Trials at the Top: Chief Executives Talk about Men, Women and the Executive Culture* (Melbourne: Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, 1994).

¹⁹ The idea of the white woman claiming a monarchical role among non-white people was not unique to Bates or to the Australian situation. See for example Christine

Cheater, 'From Sydney Schoolgirl to African Queen Mother: Tracing the Career of Phyllis Kaberry' in Marcus (ed.), *First in Their Field*, 137–51 and Tracy Jean Boisseau, 'White Queens at the Chicago World's Fair, 1893: New Womanhood in the Service of Class, Race and Nation', *Gender and History* 12, no. 1, April 2000 and *White Queen: May French-Sheldon and the Imperial Origins of American Feminist Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

²⁰ Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, 104.

²¹ Alan Moorehead, 'Foreword' to Daisy Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent Among the Natives of Australia* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1966), ix.

²² The extent of Hill's involvement in the writing of this book has been the subject of some debate. Hill herself claimed to have virtually ghost written the volume, see Hill, *Kabbarli*; for more on Hill, see Meaghan Morris, 'I Don't Really Like Biography', *Australian Feminist Studies* no. 16 (1992).

²³ See Bob Reece's introduction to Daisy Bates, *My Natives and I: Incorporating The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent among the Natives of Australia*, ed. P. J. Bridge (Carlisle, WA: Hesperian Press, 2004).

²⁴ For discussion of Bates' self-mythologising, see Ann Standish, "'Devoted Service to a Dying Race'?" Daisy Bates and *The Passing of the Aborigines*' in *Citizenship, Women and Social Justice: International Historical Perspectives*, ed. Joy Damousi and Katherine Ellinghaus (Melbourne: History Department, University of Melbourne, 1999), 52–60 and Standish, *Australia Through Women's Eyes*, chapter 6.

²⁵ Hill, *Kabbarli*, 105. See also Sue Taffe, 'Behind the Mulga Curtain and beyond the Grave: Mary Montgomerie Bennett's Leadership in Aboriginal Affairs, 1930–1961', in this collection, *Seizing the Initiative: Australian Women Leaders in Politics, Workplaces and Communities*, ed. Rosemary Francis, Pat Grimshaw and Ann Standish (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2012), 106–27, for a further glimpse of Ernestine Hill's intervention in Western Australian Indigenous affairs.

²⁶ Arthur Mee 'Introduction' to Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, xi.

²⁷ On Bennett, Rischbieth and other women involved in Aboriginal rights activism, see Fiona Paisley, *Loving Protection: Australian Feminism and Aboriginal Women's Rights, 1919–39* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000); Marilyn Lake, 'Feminism and the Gendered Politics of Anti-racism, Australia, 1927–1957: From Maternal Protectionism to Leftist Assimilationism', *Australian Historical Studies* 29, no. 110 (April 1998); Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999). See also Taffe.

²⁸ Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, 48.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁰ Qtd in Paisley, 142. Mary Bennett wrote this in a letter to Travers Buxton, of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, 10 February 1934, MSS British Empire, S22, G382 Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford.

³¹ See for example, Julia Blackburn, *Daisy Bates in the Desert* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994); the children's books, Anne Bartlett, *Daisy Bates: Keeper of Totems* (Melbourne: Reed, 1997) and Edna Tantjingu and Eileen Wani Wingfield, *Down the Hole, Up the Tree, Across the Sandhills, Running from the State and Daisy Bates*

(Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2000); the film, *Kabbarli*, dir. Andrew Taylor, Resonance Films, 2002; Michael Cathcart, 'Daisy Bates', *Rewind*, ABC TV, 31 October 2004; de Vries; Reece; Bates, *My Natives and I*.

³² Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000), xxv.

³³ Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines*, 115.

³⁴ Peter Read, 'Clio or Janus: Historians and the Stolen Generations', *Australian Historical Studies*, 33, no. 118 (April 2002): 54–60.