

Archaeology and Aboriginal Protest: The Influence of Rhys Jones's Tasmanian Work on Australian Historiography

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In 1977 archaeologist Rhys Jones asked a question that sparked a controversy: if Europeans had never reached Tasmania, had the Aborigines been nonetheless 'doomed to a slow strangulation of the mind'? Some contemporaries accused Jones of reiterating nineteenth-century 'Social Darwinism', a charge Lyndall Ryan has recently renewed as 'scientific racism'. In contrast, this article argues that Jones, a left-wing Welshman, intended to make a poetic comparison between the possible effects of isolation and a history of genocide. The assumption that genocide had ended in Tasmanian Aboriginal extinction potentially undermined Australia's earliest and most radical emergent indigenous movement. The controversy that followed was pivotal to Australian Aboriginal and academic relations, and has shaped fundamentally how Tasmanian, and Australian, history is written.

IN 1961 AUSTRALIAN ARCHAEOLOGIST JOHN MULVANEY reviewed the accomplishments of his discipline and proposed a new direction: it was time to determine the depth of the continent's human occupation and 'fill' a temporal map that was 'for the most part profoundly empty'.¹ The following thirty or more years became Australian archaeology's 'decades of discovery'.² The known occupation of Aboriginal Australia increased sixfold: from less than nine thousand years in 1961 to a proposed sixty thousand in 1990.³ The young, Welsh-born archaeologist Rhys Jones was integral to these discoveries: he was part of the team that, in 1969, excavated 'Mungo Woman' from the dry Willandra Lakes district of New South Wales, the oldest cremation rite in the world.⁴ In 1982 Jones found evidence in Tasmania of 'the southernmost ... humans ... during the height of the last Ice Age', confirmed to be thirty-five thousand years old.⁵ From the late

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¹ John Mulvaney, 'The Stone Age of Australia', in *Prehistory and Heritage: The Writings of John Mulvaney*, ed. Janine Mummery (Canberra: Australian National University, 1990), 16–54, first published in *The Prehistoric Society* 4 (1961): 56–107; John Mulvaney and Johan Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999), 15.

² Tim Murray, *Archaeology of Aboriginal Australia: A Reader* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998), 1.

³ Rhys Jones, 'Dating the Human Colonization of Australia: Radiocarbon and Luminescence Revolutions', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 99 (1999): 37–65, 41, 48–9.

⁴ Kirsty Douglas, *Pictures of Time Beneath: Science, Heritage and the Uses of the Deep Past* (Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2010), 153; Claudio Tuniz, Richard Gillespie and Cheryl Jones, *The Bone Readers: Atoms, Genes and the Politics of Australia's Deep Past* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2009), 41–4.

⁵ Rhys Jones and Vincent Megaw, 'Confessions of a Wild Colonial Boy', *Australian Archaeology* 50 (2000): 12–26, 21; Rhys Jones, 'Tasmanian Archaeology: Establishing the Sequences', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 423–46, 432–3.

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1980s Jones co-pioneered the use of thermoluminescence (TL) dating, which resulted in a potential date of sixty thousand years for the Malakunanja II rock shelter in Kakadu, in northern Australia.⁶

Jones communicated these scientific discoveries with far more than dry reporting. His 1969 paper 'Fire-Stick Farming' coined an internationally recognised term, although the full extent of its meaning has only been more fully realised in Bill Gammage's *The Biggest Estate on Earth*.⁷ This capacity to translate sophisticated research into evocative ideas was born from a forthright, even larrikin character. Jones called himself a 'cowboy archaeologist'. His rugged manners and dress were renowned, but the moniker also recalls Jones as a frontiersman on the boundaries of time, extending the depth of Aboriginal occupancy and the science of his discipline.⁸ Jones reached beyond the limits of the academy to translate to a wide audience the universal significance of Aboriginal deep time. Nicholas Jose found inspiration in Jones to create, in his novel, *The Custodians*, the central character of Ralph Kincaid. A man of 'shrewd common touch', Kincaid enlightens a Canberra bureaucrat that Australian archaeological 'treasure' is not 'gold or silver, but time itself'.⁹ If Jones was a well-known Australian figure by the late 1970s, it was due not only to accomplishment and charisma, but to an ability to stir controversy.

The depth of Aboriginal antiquity in Australia was, as Tom Griffiths observes, one of two revelations for mid-twentieth-century white Australians: the other was 'that [Aboriginal people] had survived the European invasion'.¹⁰ From the 1970s, Aboriginal people became visible even where they had been assumed long absent, determined to gain formal rights to their land, culture and identity. Archaeological discoveries offered powerful knowledge to underpin these claims, but they also raised questions about who researched the Aboriginal past and how.¹¹ If Australia's deep time revolution converged with an emergent Aboriginal activism, Tasmania offered the starkest sense of resurrection. From the long-supposed myth of extinction it became, in the early 1970s, home to the first and 'the most hardline' Aboriginal movement in Australia.¹² Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples made some of the earliest calls for repatriation of the

⁶ Richard G. Roberts, Rhys Jones and Michael A. Smith, 'Stratigraphy and Statistics at Malakunanja II: Reply to Hiscock, Peter: How Old Are the Artefacts in Malakunanja II?', *Archaeology in Oceania* 25, no. 3 (1990): 125–9; Rhys Jones, 'Dating the Human Colonization', 37–65, 48–9; Richard G. Roberts, 'The Celtic Chronologist: Rhys Jones and the Dating of the Human Colonisation of Australia', in *Histories of Old Ages: Essays in Honour of Rhys Jones*, eds Atholl Anderson, Ian Lilley and Sue O'Connor (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001), 89–94.

⁷ Rhys Jones, 'Fire-Stick Farming', *Australian Natural History* 16, no. 7 (1969): 224–8; Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2011), 3, 11; John Mulvaney, 'Peopled Landscapes: From Prehistoric Tasmania to Contemporary Arnhem Land', in *Histories of Old Ages*, eds Anderson *et al.*, 19–22, 20; Tim Flannery, 'Brief Life of Clarity and Compassion: Rhys Maengwn Jones', *Australian Archaeology* 53 (2001): 39–40.

⁸ Roberts, 'The Celtic Chronologist', 91–2.

⁹ Nicholas Jose, *The Custodians* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1997), 354; Douglas, 158.

¹⁰ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94, 100.

¹² Tuniz *et al.*, 8.

60 colonial-era collections of their ancestors' remains and for rights to their land. They were the only Australian Indigenous people required, as they did so, to counter the idea that they did not exist.¹³

65 When Rhys Jones began his research in Tasmania in 1963, extinction was a scientific fact, but one cited rarely without melancholy. Jones, too, found Tasmania's colonial history poignant. It was a subject he researched with meticulous care, and his contribution to the field was significant. Jones's interpretation of the journals from the 1830s of the government-appointed Aboriginal Conciliator, George Augustus Robinson, remains largely unsurpassed.¹⁴ But his dramatic historical reflections, couched in poetic language, overshadowed that achievement. In 1977 Jones elaborated upon the hypothesis 70 first set out in his doctoral dissertation, that the Tasmanian Aborigines' long-assumed 'simple' culture may have been the result of an isolation-induced regression. He then asked an allegorical question: even if Abel Tasman had never arrived, had the Tasmanian Aborigines nonetheless been 'doomed to a slow strangulation of the mind'?¹⁵ This idea ignited a controversy in which the Aboriginal community and fellow academics accused Jones of reiterating a nineteenth-century 'dying race' theory, or 'Social Darwinism'.¹⁶ Lyndall Ryan has renewed this charge recently as 'scientific racism'.¹⁷

80 The poetry and politics of Jones's Tasmanian archaeology reveals complex relationships between an emergent Aboriginal radical activism and academic interpretations of the deep and recent Tasmanian pasts. It marks a pivotal moment in a larger history of anthropological, archaeological and historical ideas; it reaches back to the events and theories of the nineteenth century, while its controversy and contribution continue to reverberate into the present. Jones's work has shaped fundamentally how Tasmanian, and indeed Australian, history is written. But Jones had in fact always sought to engage with contemporary history. His principal inspiration was to reveal humanity's shared deep past and to undermine racial intolerance. To explore the antecedents and repercussions of Jones's archaeological work in Tasmania is to reveal an interdisciplinary conversation that, while infamous for its discord, was forged no less by 90 agreement, and it should be celebrated and continued in that spirit.

¹³ Lyndall Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines: A History Since 1803* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2012), 313–30.

¹⁴ Rhys Jones, 'Appendix: Tasmanian Tribes', in Norman B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia: Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits, and Proper Names* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 319–54.

¹⁵ Rhys Jones, 'Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanian Aborigines' (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1971), 1–17, 28–32, 618–20, 628; Rhys Jones, 'The Tasmanian Paradox', in *Stone Tools as Cultural Markers*, ed. R. V. S. Wright (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977), 189–204, 202–3.

¹⁶ Michael Mansell, 'The Last Tasmanian', in *Racism in Tasmania* (Sydney: National Union of Students pamphlet, 1978), also published as Michael Mansell, 'Black Tasmanians Now', *Arena* 51 (1978): 5–8; Rosalind F. Langford, 'Our Heritage—Your Playground', *Australian Archaeology* 16 (1983): 1–6, 5; Anne Bickford, 'Superb Documentary or Racist Fantasy?', *Filmnews* (January 1979): 14; Sandra Bowdler, 'Fish and Culture, a Tasmanian Polemic', *Mankind* 12, no. 4 (1980): 334–40, 335.

¹⁷ Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, xix.

'Rocky Cape and the problem of the Tasmanians'

Rhys Maengwyn Jones was born in Bangor, north Wales, in 1941. A bright schoolboy with an interest in prehistory, he was awarded the Trevelyan scholarship in 1959 at Emmanuel College, Cambridge where he studied natural sciences, anthropology and archaeology.¹⁸ His archaeology teachers, foremost Grahame Clark and Eric Higgs, were unusual in their interest in the prehistory of regions beyond Africa and Europe. They encouraged their students to take up research posts across the world, and to use the new radiocarbon dating technique.¹⁹ '[P]robably nowhere else did this new technique have so much immediate impact', reflected Jones, as in 'Australia and its neighbouring regions'.²⁰ If Mulvaney was the 'father' of contemporary Australian archaeology, Jones thought of Clark as its 'foster father'.²¹ The 'Cambridge connection', or less flatteringly, the 'Cambridge mafia', made many of the discoveries that contributed to Australian archaeology's 'golden years' of the 1960s.²²

In 1963, the twenty-two-year-old Jones arrived in Sydney, and took up a teaching post and PhD candidature in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney.²³ After 'brief formal application' to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, the grant awarded to Jones 'exceeded his request', as John Mulvaney put it: 'an entire State was given as his research oyster'.²⁴ Tasmania had long been a 'touchstone' for Australian archaeology and had been of immense interest to metropolitan scholars of earlier generations.²⁵ Indeed, that relatively small, isolated population had inspired some of the most decisive and difficult questions in the history of anthropology and archaeology.

When Sir John Lubbock invented the term 'Palaeolithic' (or 'Old Stone Age') in 1865, he chose the Tasmanian Aborigine, or in his lexicon, the 'Van Diemener', as the modern representative of that most primitive cultural epoch.²⁶ In the same year Edward Burnett Tylor, the 'father' of anthropology, asserted that the 'natives of Van Diemen's Land ... are among the lowest tribes known to Ethnology'.²⁷ It was, as geologist W. J. Sollas later admitted, 'a willful anachronism': the Tasmanians could illuminate European history, but have

¹⁸ Betty Meehan, 'The Early Life of a New Chum', in *Histories of Old Ages*, eds Anderson *et al.*, 1–15, 5–6.

¹⁹ Mulvaney and Kamminga, 14.

²⁰ Jones, 'Dating the Human Colonization', 40.

²¹ Jones and Megaw, 15.

²² Griffiths, 92; Tom Griffiths and Tim Bonyhady, eds, *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 6; Mulvaney and Kamminga, 15; Jones, 'Dating the Human Colonization', 41.

²³ Meehan, 8–9.

²⁴ Mulvaney, 'Peopled Landscapes', 19.

²⁵ Jim Allen, 'Antiquity', in Murray, *Archaeology*, 9–12, 10.

²⁶ John Lubbock, *Pre-historic Times, as Illustrated by Ancient Remains, and the Manners and Customs of Modern Savages* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), 336–7.

²⁷ Edward Burnett Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the development of civilization*, ed. Paul Bohannon (first published 1878; republished from the 3rd edn, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 195.

125 none of their own.²⁸ Tylor compounded this paradox with his notion of stasis, that societies were primitive because they were awaiting evolution.²⁹ This challenged the notions of degeneration or human speciation that had earlier been used to explain primitivism and thus complicated older debates between polygenists and monogenists.³⁰

130 These emergent anthropological theories were formed upon an assumption that the Tasmanians were a race distinct from mainland Australian Aborigines.³¹ Their material artefacts were supposedly more primitive and their physiognomy unique. Thus when other southeastern Australian colonies noted the passing of the last 'full-bloods' of various 'tribes', Truganini was named the last of her 'race'. Physical anthropologists held a ghastly (and well-documented) competition for the Tasmanians' human remains.³² Local collectors also scoured middens and quarries for examples of stone work, much of which was sent to men like Tylor. Thousands of Tasmanian Aboriginal stone implements were acquired by mostly British museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³³

140 While metropolitan scholars maintained Tasmania as a 'wilful anachronism', by the late nineteenth century, Australian archaeologists began to look to the island as the key to unlocking the questions of Aboriginal antiquity and origins. If the Tasmanians were a separate race, scholars faced a seemingly unsolvable 'problem': how had they got to their island, and from where? Sea journeys from the Melanesian region were perhaps the most widely accepted origin.³⁴ Alfred Howitt, however, argued that the Tasmanian Aborigines had migrated by foot before rising seas in the Pleistocene (around twelve thousand years ago) separated Tasmania from the mainland.³⁵ T. W. Edgeworth David agreed that the absence of the dingo pointed to a Pleistocene link with Australia.³⁶ The debate turned increasing attention to Rocky Cape, on Tasmania's northwest corner, as offering evidence. Stone tool collectors had known the site for

28 William J. Sollas, *Ancient Hunters and Their Modern Representatives* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), 70; Jones, 'Tasmanian Archaeology', 426.

29 E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1871), 1.

30 Helen MacDonald, *Human Remains: Episodes in Human Dissection* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 124.

31 Thomas H. Huxley, 'On the Geographical Distribution of the Chief Modifications of Mankind', *The Journal of the Ethnographical Society of London* 2, no. 4 (1870): 404–12; Joseph Barnard Davis, *On the Osteology and Peculiarities of the Tasmanians* (Haarlem: De Erven Loosjes, 1874), 18.

32 MacDonald; Stefan Petrow, 'The Last Man: The Mutilation of William Lanne in 1869 and Its Aftermath', *Aboriginal History* 21 (1997): 90–112; John J. Cove, *What the Bones Say: Tasmanian Aborigines, Science and Domination* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995).

33 Rebe Taylor, 'A Journey of 13,033 Stones: The Westlake Collection and Papers', *Collections Journal* 8, no. 1 (2012): 7–38.

34 Frederic Wood Jones, *Tasmania's Vanished Race* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1935), 11.

35 Griffiths, 62–3; Alfred Howitt, 'On the Origin of the Aborigines of Tasmania and Australia', *Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science* 7 (1898): 723–58.

36 T. W. Edgeworth David, 'Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man in the Commonwealth, with Special Reference to the Tasmanian Aborigines', *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* (1923): 109–50.

150 decades; some had taken shovels and made amateur attempts to determine a
chronological sequence.³⁷

155 By 1961, Mulvaney agreed Rocky Cape was potentially significant, but it
required 'systematic excavation'.³⁸ This is what Jones set out to achieve in
December 1963, when he began a major dig in northwestern Tasmania with a
team of fellow students.³⁹ Within months his team received word that
Mulvaney's Kenniff Cave dig had confirmed a date of 14,500 years. The
'Pleistocene barrier' had at long last been broken.⁴⁰ That was 'crucial',
remembers Jones: 'there were humans in Australia older than ... Bass Strait'.⁴¹
160 If Jones did not yet have a confirmed Pleistocene date for northern Tasmania,
the 'problem' of the Tasmanians had at least been solved by logical deduction. As
team member Jim Allen remembers: 'That night, as we gazed northwards over
Bass Strait, we knew ... people had walked, dry-shod, to Tasmania ... more than
8,000 years ago'.⁴²

'Slow strangulation?'

165 Throughout the 1960s, the temporal map of Australia that Mulvaney had
identified as 'empty', began to be filled, and at an exciting pace. Excavations
across the country began to yield Pleistocene dates of Aboriginal occupancy;
some were even older than Kenniff Cave: up to 25,000–30,000 years. But
Jones's excavations, which continued throughout the 1960s, did not go beyond
170 around eight thousand years. It was not until 1974 that Sandra Bowdler
demonstrated a Pleistocene occupation on Hunter Island, north Tasmania.⁴³
Jones admitted to archaeologist Mike Smith in 1991 that he had felt like he had
'failed', and nearly did not submit his PhD.⁴⁴ But his 1971 dissertation, 'Rocky
Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians', made a significant impact in his field.
175 The title is a clear reference to the well-known debate over the Tasmanians'
origins, but as Jones solved that question more by logical deduction than actual
dating, it was not for that 'problem' that his thesis became renowned. It was for
a new 'problem' he set out in his dissertation: the effects of isolation on
Tasmanian Aboriginal culture.⁴⁵

³⁷ Robert Pulleine, 'The Tasmanians and Their Stone-Culture', *Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science* 19 (1928): 294–314; Jones, 'Rocky Cape', 36–52; Norman B. Tindale, 'Relationship of the Extinct Kangaroo Island Culture with Cultures of Australia, Tasmania and Malaya', *Records of the South Australian Museum* VI (1937–1941): 39–59.

³⁸ Mulvaney, 'The Stone Age of Australia', 48.

³⁹ Rhys Jones and M. A. Smith, 'Rhys Jones interviewed by Mike Smith' [sound recording], 1991, National Library of Australia, Bib ID 628228, TRC 2677, RJ: 1: 1/2.

⁴⁰ Jones, 'Dating the Human Colonization', 41.

⁴¹ 'Rhys Jones interviewed by Mike Smith', RJ: 2: 1/1.

⁴² Rhys Jones and Betty Meehan, 'A Crucible of Australian Prehistory: The 1965 ANZAAS Conference', in *Australian Archaeologist: Collected Papers in Honour of Jim Allen*, eds Atholl Anderson and Tim Murray (Canberra: Coombs Academic Publishing, 2000), 40–61, 40.

⁴³ Jones, 'Tasmanian Archaeology', 426, 428.

⁴⁴ 'Rhys Jones interviewed by Mike Smith', RJ: 2: 2/5.

⁴⁵ Jones, 'Rocky Cape', v, 627–8.

180 The Rocky Cape excavations had revealed thousands of fish bones. At first Jones thought the finds countered the oft-repeated ethnological observation that the contemporary Tasmanian Aborigines never ate scale-fish. Then he sequenced his findings: after 3,500 BP, Jones identified only one fish bone.⁴⁶ He concluded that the Tasmanians had, in just a few generations, stopped eating scale-fish.⁴⁷ Finding no clear environmental reasons (the fish were still bountiful), and noting that bone awls too had disappeared in the sequence, Jones asked if this was a society 'becoming simplified ... and losing some of its "useful arts"'.⁴⁸ While his discipline agreed that Jones had meticulous evidence for the cessation of deposited scale-fish bones in middens, they disagreed profoundly with his reasoning, preferring explanations in the realm of cultural adaptation over regression. It became one of Australian archaeology's longest and most-cited debates.⁴⁹ Jared Diamond and Tim Flannery, however, have since suggested an isolation-induced regression in Tasmania. Notably neither made direct reference to Jones's work, nor have they received the same critical response that he did. This is perhaps because they did not make a figurative connection, as Jones had, between a millennia-long regression and a modern history of colonial devastation.⁵⁰

190 Jones researched the recent past as thoroughly as he examined his excavations. He was amongst the first scholars to read George Augustus Robinson's journals when they came to light in the early 1960s. This primary source transformed Tasmania's historiographical landscape, offering detailed linguistic and cultural information hitherto assumed lost and unknowable.⁵¹ Jones was the first to map the journals into language groups, resulting in his substantial 'Appendix' in Norman Tindale's 1974 *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*.⁵² This work formed the basis of Lyndall Ryan's representation of Tasmanian language groups in her 1981 book *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, as well as the 1994 *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia's* 'Tasmanian Regions' map.⁵³ In her 2012

⁴⁶ Rhys Jones, 'Why Did the Tasmanians Stop Eating Fish?', in *Explorations in Ethnoarchaeology*, ed. R. A. Gould (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 11–47, 26–7.

⁴⁷ Harry Lourandos, 'Dispersal of Activities—the East Tasmanian Aboriginal Sites', *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* 102 (1968): 41–6; Sandra Bowdler, *Hunter Hill, Hunter Island: Archaeological Investigations of a Prehistoric Tasmanian Site* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1984).

⁴⁸ Jones, 'Rocky Cape', 603, 620.

⁴⁹ David Horton, 'Tasmanian Adaptation', *Mankind* 12, no. 1 (1979): 28–34; J. Peter White with James F. O'Connell, *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1982), 170.

⁵⁰ Jared Diamond, 'Ten Thousand Years of Solitude', *Discover* 14, no. 3 (1993): 48–57; Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters* (Sydney: Reed New Holland, 1994), 264–70.

⁵¹ Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls, eds, *Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission* (Hobart: Quintus, 2008); N. J. B. Plomley, *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson, 1829–1832* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966; 2nd edn, Hobart and Launceston: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and Quintus Publishing, 2008).

⁵² Jones, 'Appendix: Tasmanian Tribes'.

⁵³ Rebe Taylor, 'Reliable Mr Robinson and the Controversial Dr Jones', in *Reading Robinson*, eds Johnston and Rolls, 111–28, 112.

book, *Tasmanian Aborigines: A History Since 1803*, Ryan describes Jones's 1974 work as a 'groundbreaking portrait', and again uses it to inform her account of pre-contact Aboriginal clan organisation.⁵⁴

If the Tasmanian Aborigines' extinction was a fact when Jones began his research, it was not one he considered the result of any natural deficiency. Jones took his cues principally from Clive Turnbull's 1948 *Black War*, which in turn was influenced by the nineteenth-century historian, James Bonwick.⁵⁵ Both writers concluded unequivocally that the cause of the Tasmanian Aborigines' extinction was the policies and actions of the British administration. Ann Curthoys reasons that Turnbull would probably have used the term genocide had he known of it: in the years it took to publish *Black War*, Raphael Lemkin had coined the term, citing Tasmania as one of the clearest historical cases.⁵⁶ Jones felt that in following Bonwick and Turnbull, he need only summarise that Tasmania's 'sorry tale' was one 'of psychopathic sadism, of punitive man hunts, of sexual mutilation'. To this he added a cautionary note: 'lest we strike too strong a moral pose, Buchewald [*sic*] and My Lai remind us that things are much the same nowadays'.⁵⁷

Jones's anti-colonialism was inspired by the political radicalism of the 1960s, but it was also informed by his cultural heritage. Jones's first language was Welsh, and he continued to publish academic papers in that language throughout his career.⁵⁸ Jones told me that being Welsh gave him an indigeneity, and an empathy with other colonised peoples. "[D]iscoverers" were almost always "met on the beaches", Jones reflected in 1985, '[i]t is time we tried to look at an Australian landscape through Aboriginal eyes'.⁵⁹ Jones's perspective was also heavily influenced by his research in mainland Australia. Following excavations in Lake Mungo, Jones accompanied his partner Betty Meehan on fieldwork with the Gidjingarli of Arnhem Land during 1972–1973. They learned the language, and formed close and lasting relationships with the community.⁶⁰

Going north, Jones told me, changed how he saw Tasmania; he was struck by contrasts. Meehan calculated that over one month scale-fish comprised 62 per cent of the Gidjingarli's meat. In a 1978 paper, Jones quotes Frank Gurrmanamana's response to the idea that the Tasmanians did not eat fish:

⁵⁴ Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, 13–14.

⁵⁵ Clive Turnbull, *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines* (Melbourne: F. W. Chesire, 1948); James Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians: or, The Black War in Van Diemen's Land* (London: Sampson, Low, Son and Marston, 1870).

⁵⁶ Ann Curthoys, 'Genocide in Tasmania: The History of an Idea', in *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 229–52, 235, 239–40.

⁵⁷ Jones, 'Rocky Cape', 2, 8–9.

⁵⁸ Meehan, 3, 13.

⁵⁹ Rhys Jones, 'Ordering the Landscape', in *Seeing the First Australians*, eds I. Donaldson and T. Donaldson (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 181–209, 185. In many ways Mulvaney had long aimed to meet this ambition, as outlined by Deborah Bird Rose, 'Rupture and the Ethics of Care in Colonized Space', in *Prehistory to Politics*, eds Griffiths and Bonyhady, 190–240.

⁶⁰ Jones and Megaw, 24.

‘silly bugger, eh?’⁶¹ As Jones reworked parts of his dissertation for publication, the Tasmanian Aborigines became even simpler: they lost not only bone tools and fishing skills, but even the ability to make fire.⁶² Isolation was now perilous, the rising seas at the end of the Pleistocene a ‘trauma’:

245 Like a blow above the heart it took a long time to take effect, but slowly but surely there was a simplification ... a squeezing of intellectuality. The world’s longest isolation, the world’s simplest technology ... Even if Abel Tasman had not sailed the winds of the Roaring Forties in 1642, were they in fact doomed—doomed to a slow strangulation of the mind?⁶³

250 It is beautiful prose. Tasmania is indeed heart-shaped, and to imagine its pulse fading is an effective, if dramatic idea. Jones intended the chapter, he told me, to read ‘like a novel’. But colleague Carmel Schrire reflected that, ‘the pairing of “intellectuality” and “squeezing” raised a red flag’.⁶⁴ The oft-quoted final sentence indeed gave Jones much grief.⁶⁵ ‘I shouldn’t have written the bloody thing’, he said to me in 1999.⁶⁶

‘The Last Tasmanian’

260 It is doubtful that the closing words to a chapter in an edited academic book would have been so controversial if they had not resonated in Tom Haydon’s 1978 film, *The Last Tasmanian*. Jones starred in the film, as narrator and explorer. He is captured making stone tools, building a bark shelter and sinking slowly on a bark canoe off Hunter Island to demonstrate its limited efficacy.⁶⁷ He speaks of rising seas as a ‘catastrophe’ that ‘sealed’ the Tasmanians’ ‘doom’.⁶⁸

265 The educative prehistory of the film flows into a dramatic history of colonisation. As the camera sweeps over the beautiful Tasmanian landscape, Leo McKern’s masterful voice informs us that it is a land bereft of its original peoples. This is how Jones imagined Tasmania as he looked down from Australia’s far north: a *judenrein*—a land of post-Holocaust emptiness. Jones stands in deep valleys and speaks of the wars waged there and describes how the Aborigines were ‘suddenly ... wiped out ... a terrible thing’.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Jones, ‘Why Did the Tasmanians’, 41.

⁶² Jones, ‘The Tasmanian Paradox’, 197.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 202–3.

⁶⁴ Carmel Schrire, ‘Betrayal as a Universal Element in the Sundering of Bass Strait’, in *Histories of Old Ages*, eds Anderson *et al.*, 25–33, 28.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁶ I had a series of conversations with Rhys Jones at the Australian National University between early 1999 and 2000—the first year of my PhD—in which he reflected on the reactions to his Tasmanian work. These are recorded mostly in notebooks, and some typed notes, created between 1999 and 2000 and held by the author.

⁶⁷ Jim Allen, ‘“The Last Tasmanian”—A Personal View’, in *Histories of Old Ages*, eds Anderson *et al.*, 45–7.

⁶⁸ Tom Haydon (dir.), *The Last Tasmanian* (Sydney: Artis Film Productions, 1978).

⁶⁹ Schrire, 27.

The film was part of a broader intellectual attempt to break what in 1968 W. E. H. Stanner condemned as a 'Great Australian Silence' over the nation's history of frontier violence.⁷⁰ In 1980 Bernard Smith called on Australians to heed 'The Spectre of Truganini'.⁷¹ He followed David Boyd's 1959 Melbourne exhibition of seventeen portraits of Truganini, and Bill Reed's 1970 three-part play 'Truganini'.⁷² They were attempting to explore a national, collective history of culpability by returning to a colonial legend that, as Reynolds observes, had never been suppressed. Tasmanian writers, including Bonwick, had 'a long tradition of writing about the ... Aborigines' tragic fate'. Truganini's death had allowed white Tasmanians 'to indulge in sentimental regret'.⁷³ Stanner's condemnation, Reynolds reflects, 'did not apply all that well to Tasmania'.⁷⁴

By the 1980s Truganini had been transformed from local legend to what Andrys Onsman described as an 'icon of new consciousness'.⁷⁵ In this popular context, and also within the growing area of international genocide studies, there emerged 'some slippage', in Ann Curthoys' term, between the ideas of extinction and genocide: 'everyone "knew" that Tasmania was a clear case of colonial extinction; therefore it seemed to follow that it must be a case of genocide'.⁷⁶ In the context of *The Last Tasmanian*, this slippage was straightforward surrogacy.⁷⁷ Its by-line was: 'the story of the swiftest and most destructive genocide on record'.⁷⁸ For many Australians it was the first time they had encountered a history of colonial violence, and the emotional cues were assured by its association with a history they probably knew far better: 'Our own awful holocaust', declared *The Sun*. 'Sheer bloody murder!' exclaimed the *TV Times*.⁷⁹ With the emphasis on presenting a horrific history of colonisation, Jones's archaeological thesis of regression seemed only to foreshadow the Tasmanian Aborigines' subsequent extinction.⁸⁰ The events of twelve thousand years were reduced to a mere seventy. Some viewers remember concluding: 'so Rhys Jones said they were going to die out anyway'.⁸¹

⁷⁰ W. E. H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming: Black and White Australians—an Anthropologist's View*, The 1968 Boyer Lectures (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1968).

⁷¹ Bernard Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini*, The 1980 Boyer Lectures (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1980).

⁷² Lyndall Ryan, 'The Struggle for Trukanini 1830–1997', 1997 Peter Eldershaw Memorial Lecture, *Tasmanian Historical Research Association Papers and Proceedings* 44, no. 3 (1997): 153–73, 161–5; B. Reed, *Truganini: 3 Workshop Plays* (Melbourne: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1977).

⁷³ Henry Reynolds, 'Preface', in G. Calder, *Levée, Line and Martial Law* (Hobart: Fullers Bookshop, 2010), vi–viii, vi–vii; Henry Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1995), 3.

⁷⁴ Stanner; Reynolds, 'Preface', vii.

⁷⁵ Andrys Onsman, 'Truganini's Funeral', *Island* 96 (Autumn 2004): 39–52, 45.

⁷⁶ Curthoys, 240–1.

⁷⁷ Rebe Taylor, 'Genocide, Extinction and Aboriginal Self-Determination in Tasmanian Historiography', *History Compass* 11, no. 6 (2013): 405–18, 410.

⁷⁸ Ronin Films, 'The Last Tasmanian Study Guide', www.roninfilms.com.au/get/files/987.pdf (accessed 27 April 2013).

⁷⁹ Gary Tippet, 'Our Own Awful Holocaust', *The Sun*, 3 October 1978; 'Genocide: How Capitalism Annihilated the Entire Race of the Tasmanian Aborigines', *Workers News*, 6 July 1978; 'Sheer Bloody Murder!', *TV Times*, 30 September 1978.

⁸⁰ Gill Leahy, 'One Man's Meat is Another People's Poisson', *Filmnews* (June 1979): 19–22, 22.

⁸¹ Personal conversation between Rebe Taylor and Margaret Jolly at the ANU, 1999.

Tasmanian Aboriginal people staged protests at cinemas showing *The Last Tasmanian* in Hobart, Melbourne and Sydney. Banners were pasted over the film's posters declaring it: 'RACIST! This film denies Tasmanian Aborigines their LAND RIGHTS'.⁸² Several Tasmanian Aboriginal people had willingly participated in Haydon's film but, as the director of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) Michael Mansell observed, just about the only time they speak in the film is to deny their identity.⁸³ One woman tells the camera: 'I'm not an Aboriginal ... Just compare the Aborigines that were here with the descendants living today—there's a hell of a difference'. To use the name 'Aboriginal' was a significant change for those who had used terms like 'Islander', but the reluctance was not indicative of a lack of cultural identity. Ryan described the Bass Strait Community as 'part-Aborigine' in 1977, but her article, 'The Struggle for Recognition', reveals a history of self-determination.⁸⁴

Jones told me that the film's title should have had a question mark, in order to unsettle the certainty of extinction, but the question of survival was not clearly raised.⁸⁵ Haydon manipulated the contemporary Aboriginal voices in his film not to absolve white guilt but to shock; a story of survival would have dulled the impact. But in so doing Haydon undermined his project. Here the word 'genocide' could come to mean its opposite—a euphemistic colonial apology. Consequentially the ire was directed primarily at Jones; he was the proclaimed expert who spoke of the Tasmanians' 'doom', a word hauntingly reminiscent of the 'doomed race theories' that had conveniently explained the Aborigines' disappearance not so many decades earlier.⁸⁶ TAC representative Ros Langford told the audience of the 1982 Australian Archaeology conference in Hobart:

We all know the severing of William Lanne's [*sic*] skull, and ... the digging up of Truganini ... all done in the name of science. And that is not in the past. It has continued ... I speak of course of Dr Rhys Jones and his association with the film-maker Tom Haydon.⁸⁷

The first time I met Jones was in early 1998 in the Australian National University's beer garden. When he learned I had just begun a PhD in Tasmanian Aboriginal history he told me: 'I am ... hated by [the Tasmanian Aboriginal people] ... Do you know what I was known as? I am the FWC!' Someone at our table tried to unpick the acronym: 'Fucking white ...?' 'Cunt!' Jones chimed in.⁸⁸ It was less the expletives that shocked me, than the extent of discord they

⁸² Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 2nd edn (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 254.

⁸³ Mansell, 'The Last Tasmanian', 2.

⁸⁴ Lyndall Ryan, 'The Struggle for Recognition: Part-Aborigines in Bass Strait in the Nineteenth Century', *Aboriginal History* 1, no. 1 (1977): 27–52.

⁸⁵ Tom O'Regan, 'Documentary in Controversy: The Last Tasmanian', in *Culture & Communication Reading Room* (an archive of the former Centre for Research in Culture and Communication, Murdoch University). www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/film/Tasmanian.html (accessed 27 April 2013); first published in *An Australian Film Reader*, ed. A. Moran (Sydney: Currency Press, 1995), 127–43.

⁸⁶ Macgregor, 50–1.

⁸⁷ Langford, 5.

⁸⁸ Rebe Taylor, transcript of conversation with Rhys Jones and others, 13 March 1998, in possession of the author.

revealed between a foremost Australian archaeologist and the Aboriginal community whose past he had researched for more than thirty years. If Jones had merely plumbed time he would perhaps never have offended so deeply. His abilities to write and perform—even before a camera—and to turn complex and dry ideas into simple and poetic images were expensive traits. So too, conversely, was his sense of historical empathy. Schrire asks: ‘Who better to convey the drama [of the Tasmanian story] than this witty, elegant, even elegiac Welshman?’⁸⁹ One might ask mischievously: ‘who worse?’

Four years after *The Last Tasmanian* was screened, Jones helped to realise the Pleistocene occupation of Tasmania’s southeastern region. The Franklin River was subsequently not dammed, and a founding environmental campaign succeeded.⁹⁰ But still Jones was unable to gain the now-obligatory Aboriginal permission to carry out archaeological research. By 1990, Jones had stopped working in Tasmania, despite having ‘a lot of unfinished work there’.⁹¹

Jones’s sense of frustration with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community was still raw in 1999 when Jones said to me imploringly: ‘I gave them their history!’ These words, spoken in a pique of anger, were at once shockingly arrogant and starkly true. As Mulvaney reflects, the Tasmanian Aborigines’ ‘invective was directed against the person who did more than any other non-indigenous person to demonstrate the antiquity, cultural significance and humanity of their ancestors’.⁹² But as debates extended from fights for recognition to questions of control over heritage sites, Jones remained the emblematic ‘FWC’. As such, Jones did not ‘give’ Tasmanian Aboriginal people a history, he denied them a presence, and a future. As one Elder said to me in 1999: ‘No man has damaged our struggle for existence more than Rhys Jones’.⁹³

‘The Tasmanian Aborigines have survived’

The Tasmanian Aboriginal critique of Jones had a direct influence within his academy. The archaeologist Anne Bickford wrote in 1979 that *The Last Tasmanian* ‘reflects 19th century racist ideology’ and demonstrated ‘the manipulation of blacks by whites’.⁹⁴ In 1980, Bowdler stated that the theoretical basis of Jones’s Tasmanian prehistory ‘derives from nineteenth century social Darwinism, and twentieth century biogeography: it is the Whig ecologist’s view of prehistory’.⁹⁵ Lyndall Ryan wrote in her 1981 book *The Aboriginal*

⁸⁹ Schrire, 28.

⁹⁰ Jones and Megaw, 21; Jones, ‘Tasmanian Archaeology’, 430–3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 441; Meehan, 12.

⁹² Mulvaney, ‘Peopled Landscapes’, 21.

⁹³ In the first year of my PhD research, I had lengthy conversations with Tasmanian Aboriginal elders and academics in Launceston and in Hobart which included reflecting on the work in Tasmania by Rhys Jones. These are recorded in detail in notebooks created in 1999–2000 and held by the author.

⁹⁴ Bickford, 14.

⁹⁵ Bowdler, ‘Fish and Culture’, 335.

365 *Tasmanians* (reprinted in 1996) that since the death of Truganini in 1876 there
 had been ‘many attempts’ to ‘categorize the “extinct” Aborigines as the missing
 link between ape and man’. By the early twentieth century it was ‘widely held’
 that they were too primitive to survive settlement. Ryan stated that this idea had
 more recently been ‘enlarged’ to suppose that Tasmanian Aborigines had
 370 suffered a ‘slow strangulation’ and ‘would have died out anyway’. Ryan
 expanded her argument, this time with explicit reference to Jones, in her 1985
 paper, ‘Extinction Theorists and Tasmanian Aborigines: Apologists for an
 Extermination Policy’.⁹⁶

375 These criticisms came from close quarters: Bickford had been a member of
 the archaeological team Jones took to northern Tasmania in the summer of
 1964–1965; Bowdler was Jones’s doctoral student in the 1970s; and Ryan
 explained to me that she was inspired by Jones to take up her research in
 Tasmanian Aboriginal colonial history in the 1960s.⁹⁷ Through the 1970s,
 however, these scholars witnessed, first hand, the struggle of Tasmanian
 Aboriginal people to be recognised as having survived. They shared with that
 380 community a sense of dismay when *The Last Tasmanian* reiterated the myth of
 extinction. Ryan joined Mansell in a robust public debate with Jones and
 Haydon on the ABC television forum ‘Monday Conference’.⁹⁸ Bickford made
 the banners that were pasted over the posters of *The Last Tasmanian* because she
 believed that unless they were called ‘Aborigines’ they could not win land
 385 rights.⁹⁹

There was also a feminist aspect to these critiques, a response to the
 ‘machismo’ that Laurajane Smith and Hilary du Cros consider characterised
 much of Australian archaeology from the 1960s. Holocene research was
 regarded as the softer, female domain; Pleistocene archaeology was the stuff of
 390 rugged men, of the ‘cowboys’.¹⁰⁰ Jones compounded this impression with a
 theory that appeared to invoke a masculine Eurocentricism of the 1860s. The
 idea of Jones as ‘social Darwinist’ was cast in the crucible of late 1970s radical
 race and gender politics.

395 Extinction had been an ingrained scholarly fact for nearly a century when
 Jones began his research. But if Ryan and others began to see the inaccuracy of
 this idea in the mid-1970s, it is valid to ask why Jones did not as well.¹⁰¹ I have
 asked, in earlier papers, why Jones discounted as unreliable most anthropological
 sources dating from the mid-nineteenth to late twentieth century,
 including testimonies by Indigenous Tasmanians which stated that they could

⁹⁶ Ryan, introduction to the first edition, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 2; Lyndall Ryan, ‘Extinction Theorists and Tasmanian Aborigines: Apologists for an Extermination Policy’, in *The Future of Former Foragers in Australia and Southern Africa*, eds Carmel Schrire and Robert Gordon (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival Inc., 1985), 47–54.

⁹⁷ Meehan, 13; Email to Rebe Taylor from Lyndall Ryan, 21 June 2006, in possession of the author; Jones, ‘Rocky Cape’, 14.

⁹⁸ ‘Monday Conference’, ABC Television, 4 September 1979; O’Regan.

⁹⁹ Telephone conversation between Rebe Taylor and Anne Bickford, 31 October 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Tuniz *et al.*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Ryan, ‘Extinction Theorists’, 51.

400 make fire, and continued to eat scale-fish. The sheer quantity of this disregard is academically problematic, and for Tasmanian Aboriginal people it is erroneous and offensive. For them there is no clear disconnection between pre- and post-settlement history: they are the living proof of that continuity.¹⁰²

405 Tasmania's history was too devastating for Jones to recognise this continuity. 'Instead of distinguishing extermination from extinction', as Ryan put it, 'Jones compounded it'.¹⁰³ Despite clear overlaps in their historical conclusions that the British mistreated the Tasmanian Aborigines, Ryan presented Jones as he appeared in *The Last Tasmanian* in stark opposition to her own *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*: a history of extinction and colonial apology as opposed to one of Aboriginal survival and settler culpability. It was this emphasis, and the controversy that inspired it, that helped ensure the wider recognition by the academy of Ryan's ground-breaking acknowledgement in 1981: 'the Tasmanian Aborigines have survived'.¹⁰⁴ Jones's archaeological ideas, as they were interpreted in Haydon's film, came to represent all that Ryan's thesis sought to overhaul. They were central to the significant historiographical shift she instigated, and to the subsequent realisation that it is not enough for white academics to expose, or lament, frontier violence; they must respect that Aboriginal people have a continuing right to interpret their own cultures and histories.

420 'History wars and scientific racism'

Ryan joined the current controversy when she described Jones's regression thesis as expiating colonial guilt in the early 1980s. It was in response to a very new and different controversy that she reiterated that accusation three decades later. In 2002 Keith Windschuttle turned a handful of mistakenly tangled footnotes in Ryan's 1981 book into an accusation of fabricating historical evidence to support invented massacres.¹⁰⁵ As Ryan points out, however, her footnotes were never the real 'tinder' that generated the 'heat' of the 'history wars'. It was that she, like Reynolds (the other key central target in these 'wars'), had written histories 'deeply influenced' by the Tasmanian Aboriginal campaign for the recognition of their survival. By the 1990s the State government returned to Tasmanian Aborigines some parcels of land, and became the first Australian government to apologise for former assimilation policies. Thus, concludes Ryan, the history wars were 'a conservative response' to the end of

¹⁰² Rebe Taylor, 'The Polemics of Eating Fish in Tasmania: The Historical Evidence Revisited', *Aboriginal History* 31 (2007): 1–26; Rebe Taylor, 'The Polemics of Making Fire in Tasmania: The Historical Evidence Revisited', *Aboriginal History* 32 (2008): 1–26.

¹⁰³ Ryan, 'Extinction Theorists', 51.

¹⁰⁴ Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 257.

¹⁰⁵ Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002), 13–14; Lyndall Ryan, 'Who Is the Fabricator?', in *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, ed. Robert Manne (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003), 230–57.

the myth of extinction; 'to the overturning of the doctrine of scientific racism'.¹⁰⁶

435 Ryan's use of the term 'scientific racism' follows Rutledge M. Dennis and is, she argues, more accurate than the formerly used 'Social Darwinism'. Dennis defined 'scientific racism' in 1995 as the use of science 'as a justification to propose, project, and enact racist social policies'. This definition is founded in Black North American history and traces the scientific justifications of slavery to
440 contemporary intelligence tests.¹⁰⁷ In the Tasmanian context, Ryan explains, 'scientific racism' began with Joseph Milligan, who estimated in 1859 there had been a mere two thousand Aboriginal people at the time of Tasmania's colonisation. With the exception of the occasional historian who 'raised the question of settler responsibility' (including Bonwick and Turnbull), following Milligan there began a widely accepted belief they had always been a 'doomed race'. Scholarly proponents included craniologist Barnard Davis in 1874, Tasmanian historian James Erskine Calder in 1875, Tylor in 1894, Jones in 1977, and N. J. B. Plomley in 1993. Each of these scholars had,

450 in their own way declared that the Tasmanians were either too 'primitive' in their technical abilities ... or were too few in number ... or were too susceptible to ... exotic diseases, to survive settler colonisation and had simply 'faded away'.¹⁰⁸

Most of the scholars on Ryan's list wear the label 'scientific racism' uncomfortably, but none more so than Jones. He is better listed among those who 'raised the question of settler responsibility'; his references to Buchenwald and My Lai make this an understatement. In response to the charge that his ideas helped to
455 expiate colonisation, he replied in 1992: 'I have never said this'.¹⁰⁹

Further, in 1995 Jones made an important retraction. If isolation seemed a logical cause for a seemingly errant change in diet in the 1970s, it was because he had 'missed' important evidence later revealed by Bowdler: crayfish and large abalone had amply replaced scale-fish on the north and west coasts of Tasmania at that time. Indeed, the Tasmanian Aboriginal women's abilities to dive for these fish, Jones acknowledged, made 'effective occupation of the west coast possible'.¹¹⁰

465 If there is a thread connecting the scholars on Ryan's list, it is the recurring interest in ways that the Tasmanians' unique culture and geography might answer some of the founding questions of the natural sciences. The only scholar on Ryan's list who might warrant the label 'scientific racism' is Calder, for he

¹⁰⁶ Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, xxii–xxiv.

¹⁰⁷ Rutledge M. Dennis, 'Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race', *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 3 (1995): 243–52, 243.

¹⁰⁸ Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, xix–xx.

¹⁰⁹ Rhys Jones, 'Tom Haydon 1938–1991: Film Interpreter of Australian Archaeology', *Australian Archaeology* 35 (1992): 51–64, 59–60.

¹¹⁰ Jones, 'Tasmanian Archaeology', 428; Gary Dunnett, 'Diving for Dinner: Some Implications from Holocene Middens for the Role of Coasts in the Late Pleistocene of Tasmania', in *Sahul in Review: Pleistocene Archaeology in Australia, New Guinea and Island Melanesia, Occasional Papers in Prehistory* 24, eds Mike A. Smith, M. Spriggs and B. Frankhauser (Canberra: Australian National University, 1993), 247–57.

argued that the Tasmanian Aborigines' 'final extinction' was due to faults within their own society and thus 'assignable to very different causes than the hostility of the whites, to which it has been so much of the fashion to ascribe it'.¹¹¹ This thesis is reiterated by Windschuttle who misappropriates Jones's allegorical 'slow strangulation' of the Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural 'mind' to argue that their society was not only technically, but also morally, regressed: they bartered the women with sealers for dogs and flour and thus lost the mothers of future children. 'The real tragedy of the Aborigines was not British colonization *per se* but that their society was ... so internally dysfunctional'. It is therefore 'not surprising that when the British arrived, this small, precarious society quickly collapsed'.¹¹²

Windschuttle is reiterating an older misreading of Jones used by the very historian he most severely critiques. The contradiction is compounded when he earlier quotes Jones's comparisons to Buchenwald and My Lai alongside Ryan's measured, singular reference to genocide in Tasmania in order to make the scholarly antagonists seem in conspiratorial accord.¹¹³ As Ryan points out, it is in Windschuttle that we find the clearest case of fabrication as well as scientific racism. It is in his writing that we find the colonial apology for which Jones was wrongly accused, recycled with that very intention.

A 'Tylolean ring'

There is, however, an uncanny echo between Jones's idea of 'the world's simplest technology' and statements made by early evolutionary anthropologists. The idea of Tasmania as 'a culture of 'immense ... stability had', Tim Murray observed, 'a familiar Tylolean ring about it. The feeling that the archaeology of the 1960s had collided with the interpretive framework of the 1860s was compounded by an emphasis on the consequences of isolation'.¹¹⁴ For others Jones is a 'bridge', or even 'at one', with scholars such as Tylor and Lubbock.¹¹⁵

But this connection cannot establish Jones as a 'scientific racist', for the term is not easily applied to evolutionary anthropology. Certainly that nascent theory was racialist in its assumption that societies could be divided, and hierarchically organised, and as such was also Eurocentric. In turn it provided a representation of Aboriginal people that enabled colonists like Calder to vindicate their local history. But if colonisation 'made' evolutionary anthropology possible, its proponents did not seek to justify its expansion, nor replace primitive peoples with those more advanced. The broader subsequent uses and popular

¹¹¹ James Erskine Calder, *Some Accounts of the Wars, Extirpation, Habits, etc, of the Native Tribes of Tasmania* (Hobart: Henn and Co., 1875), 8.

¹¹² Windschuttle, 317, 386.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 4, 13–14.

¹¹⁴ Tim Murray, 'Tasmania and the Constitution of "the Dawn of Humanity"', *Antiquity* 66, no. 252 (September 1992): 730–43, 738.

¹¹⁵ Ian McNiven and Lynette Russell, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology* (Oxford: AltaMira, 2005), 64–6; White and O'Connell, 158.

understandings of evolutionary anthropology should not be conflated with its original intellectual intentions. Ryan runs that risk when asserting that there were ‘many attempts’ to define the Tasmanian Aborigines as the ‘missing link’. Nineteenth-century anthropologists rarely, if ever, used the term, but remained primarily focused on questions of contemporary racial difference.¹¹⁶

Moreover, as Russell Macgregor points out, ‘almost all scientific accounts of the Tasmanians from the mid-nineteenth century ‘were tinged with a sentimental regret at their passing’. If colonisation made anthropology possible, it also followed in its wake with a melancholic culture of collecting. ‘From the start’, Patrick Brantlinger observes, ‘anthropology has been a science of mourning’.¹¹⁷ Milligan was inspired to compile a list of Tasmanian words before the supposed, regretful, loss of their languages.¹¹⁸ A century later, we hear in Jones a similar sense of regret voiced in poetry, and born from empathy.

Conclusions: ‘the inheritors of a deep real past’

If there were echoes between Jones’s regression thesis and the conclusions about the Tasmanians drawn by the early evolutionary anthropologists, there were also sharp contrasts. Jones saw evidence of slow cultural decline. ‘Of degeneration’, Tylor wrote of Tasmania, ‘there is at present no evidence’.¹¹⁹ Stasis was a central plank of Tylor’s evolutionary anthropology. It was also central to Jones, but as Murray puts it, he ‘had it both ways’: that the Tasmanian Aborigines ‘degenerated (because of isolation) and that they were static (because of isolation)’.¹²⁰ Further, when we analyse how Jones and Tylor approached the question of stasis, we find a fundamental point of difference, as realised in Jones’s own comparison:

We seem once more to be turning back to the classic problem of the Tasmanians as seen by Tylor. Can we now look to the Tasmanians, not so much as the representatives of Palaeolithic man, but of late Pleistocene Australian man?¹²¹

Jones was suggesting a shift of continents and the realisation of Australia’s antiquity. He did not continue Tylor’s metropolitan and anachronistic view of Tasmania, nor the justification of colonisation that such a view has been widely assumed to hold. He continued an antipodean view of Tasmania, in which archaeologists, since Howitt, had looked to Tasmania as a key to the question of

¹¹⁶ MacDonald, 124.

¹¹⁷ Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings, Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 5.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Milligan, ‘On the dialects and languages of the Aboriginal tribes, and on their manners and customs’, *Journals and Papers, Legislative Council of Tasmania* 7 (1856).

¹¹⁹ Edward B. Tylor, ‘On the Tasmanians as Representatives of Palaeolithic Man’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain and Ireland* 23 (1894): 141–52, 148.

¹²⁰ Murray, ‘Tasmania and the Constitution’, 738.

¹²¹ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape’, 630.

535 their own country's antiquity. Jones had effectively solved the 'problem of the Tasmanians'.

540 But solving that older 'problem' 'paled into insignificance', observes Murray, 'alongside the startling discovery, by Jones and others, of a Pleistocene human occupation in the frozen wastes of southern Tasmania in 1981'.¹²² This discovery revealed a very different picture of Tasmanian prehistory than that imagined by Jones ten years earlier. The Kutikina excavations, Jones explains, divulged 'a totally different' stone implement industry from that of Rocky Cape. It was part of the unique culture of the 'southernmost humans on Earth', which had changed when warmer temperatures at the end of the Pleistocene brought denser forests and higher seas, enclosing grassy plains and flooding coasts.¹²³ At the other end of the temporal span was a late Holocene Tasmania that, scholars have agreed, witnessed a cultural renaissance. Aboriginal people began exploring new parts of Tasmania, including offshore islands, and developing new styles and media in their art.¹²⁴ By 1995 a site in Tasmania's mid-north revealed evidence of continued habitation from the early Pleistocene to late Holocene.¹²⁵

545 'The Aborigines of Tasmania', Jones announced, 'long constructed as an abstract frozen metaphor for Palaeolithic man, are now seen as inheritors of a deep real past'.¹²⁶ The shift away from Tylor's metropolitan view was total, and yet it recalled that older perspective in a new way: Tasmania now shared an antiquity equal with that of Palaeolithic Europe, making it possible, Jones reflected, to realise a shared story of global colonisation and adaptation.¹²⁷ This mutual antiquity reignited Jones's sense of a shared indigeneity. When Jones first entered Kutikina Cave he was 'reminded' of caves in south Wales. A sacred site for contemporary Tasmanian Aborigines demonstrated to Jones the 'fundamental unity in the history of humankind'.¹²⁸

550 This was the philosophy instilled in Jones by his Cambridge teacher Grahame Clark, who taught a concept of history that 'sprang from despair in the depth of the Second World War'.¹²⁹ Carbon dating offered the opportunity to realise common human origins, and reject profoundly the assumptions of racial science. But such thinking challenges fundamentally the notion of a singular Indigenous claim on Pleistocene prehistory and has ignited disputes

¹²² Murray, 'Tasmania and the Constitution', 739.

¹²³ Jones, 'Tasmanian Archaeology', 438–9.

¹²⁴ Steve Brown, 'Art and Tasmanian Prehistory: Evidence for Changing Cultural Traditions in a Changing Environment', in *Rock Art and Prehistory: Papers Presented to Symposium G, the AURA Congress, Darwin, 1988*, eds P. Bahn and A. Rosenfeld (Oxford: Oxbow, 1991), 96–108; Bowdler, 'Fish and Culture', 339; Julia Clark, 'Devils and Horses: Religious and Creative Life in Tasmanian Aboriginal Society', in *The Flow of Culture: Tasmanian Studies*, ed. Michael Roe (Canberra: Australia Academy of the Humanities, 1987), 50–72.

¹²⁵ Jones, 'Tasmanian Archaeology', 440.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 423.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 441, 423. See also Rhys Jones, 'From Kakadu to Kutikina: The Southern Continent at 18 000 Years Ago', in *The World at 18 000 BP, Volume Two, Low Latitudes*, eds Clive Gamble and Olga Soffer (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 264–95, 290.

¹²⁸ Mulvaney, 'Peopled Landscapes', 21.

¹²⁹ Jones, 'Dating the Human Colonization', 57.

over the reburial of repatriated human remains and control over heritage sites.¹³⁰ Mulvaney commended Jones for remaining adamant: 'if we lose sight of a global view, then we lose the whole point of the game'.¹³¹

There appears to have been a more recent acceptance of this global perspective, and from Jones's fiercest critics. Bowdler's unpublished report on the 2009 discovery in the Jordan River Levee, northwest of Hobart, of a human occupancy dating 40,000 BP inspired the epilogue to Ryan's 2012 *Tasmanian Aborigines*: this discovery extends previous understanding of the 'southernmost' Pleistocene humans, and thus 'in global terms is significant in adding to our current understandings of human evolution'.¹³²

Since the 1970s there has been a sustained critique of Jones for supposedly justifying Tasmania's colonisation by continuing nineteenth-century social evolutionary theory. It is a misreading not only of Jones's thesis, but also of those earlier theorists. It is a criticism based largely upon an interpretation of science drawn from a popular 1970s film that, conversely, aimed to challenge a generation of Australians largely ignorant of the violence of their colonial past. As the fuller picture of Tasmania's prehistory was realised from the 1980s, Jones admitted the limitations of his original thesis of Tasmanian cultural regression. But that thesis, like Jones's subsequent research, had revealed and interpreted Tasmania's deep past with empathic politics and impassioned poetry. It has in turn shaped significantly the ways Australia's recent past is written and understood.

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¹³⁰ Griffiths, 94–100.

¹³¹ Flannery, 'Brief Life of Clarity', 39; Mulvaney, 'Peopled Landscapes', 21.

¹³² Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, 360.