

**Tiffany Shellam, *Meeting the Waylo: Aboriginal Encounters in the Archipelago*, Crawley, UWA Publishing, 2020; pp: 271; RRP \$29.99 AUD.**

At the core of Tiffany Shellam's *Meeting the Waylo* (2020) are the experiences of three Indigenous intermediaries; Boongaree, Bundle and Migeo. We learn that the men were 'native aides' in explorations to the Archipelagos of the north-west of Western Australia in the nineteenth century (4). The purpose of the study is to explore the ongoing effects of their presence during specific encounters from the period of 1818 to 1837.

*Meeting the Waylo* comes to us in paperback form and consists of five 'parts' with sixteen chapters. The front cover depicts an image of an encounter that Shellam directly engages with throughout her study. This cover design effectively establishes Shellam's interest with 'unraveling' narratives of encounters and creates a sense of continuity throughout the book (17).

In part one Shellam argues that Boongaree, Bundle and Migeo are 'only partially visible' in exploration archives (5). This 'absence' motivates Shellam to go 'beyond the paper trail left behind by crew members' in search for the 'presence' and 'legacies' of the men (16). Part one also becomes crucial in establishing the book's primary thesis statement where Shellam chooses to work

against a conventional emphasis on the exploits and achievements of the singular, heroic explorer and discard the chronology of an expedition as a narrative device to tell the story of encounters (7).

In order to sustain this proposition, Shellam abandons chronological order in her study. She begins part two with Migeo a Whadjuk Nyungar man in 1837. This part examines Migeo's incorporation of negotiating and memory techniques. Part three then 'tracks' back in time to Boongaree, a Kuringgai man in February 1818. Here Shellam looks at the 'construction of stories at the time of encounters and retrospectively' (16). The effect of Shellam's time jumps can be somewhat disorienting for readers but her lucid prose and short chapters allow the book to seamlessly flow between the men and how they uniquely 'countered the cultural and environmental foreignness they experienced while exploring with Europeans in an unknown Aboriginal territory, as well as the process of preserving their stories' (59).

Part four focuses on Bundle, from Dharawal Country in 1821. This part explores the exchange and representation of Aboriginal material culture. Part five closes the study with three chapters that consider how the utilisation of counter archives can return and restore these men as central figures within narratives of encounter. Each of the parts work well to highlight the mobility and autonomy of Migeo, Boongaree and Bundle respectively.

Shellam expertly weaves together historical scholarship, discussions with Indigenous Elders, artists, historians and archival research to inform the study's methodology (14). Shellam consults 'counter' and 'alternative' archives to inform us

of the theoretical perspective she adopts in *Meeting the Waylo*. In chapter nine Shellam inspects a postscript of a 'Yuburara man's log' (111). Shellam carefully examines the postscript in its rough stages comparing it to published versions. This inspection reveals that there have been changes to emphasise Indigenous 'passivity' instead of 'agency' (115). This chapter prompts us to consider that

while postscripts and marginalia might seem irrelevant in a vast expedition archive such as this one, attending to them enables us to understand the ways in which an encounter story takes shape over time (118).

Shellam's attention to detail in this chapter rewards our reading experience and reminds us not to forget that 'representations' can be 'mediations' too (180). In this way the book provides wanted insight into how and why it is necessary to look and look again at knowledge production, its preservation and distribution.

The book's greatest strength lies in Shellam's dedicated approach to shifting between angles and historical perspectives when engaging with stories of encounter. In part two Shellam turns to the 'Beagle archive to draw out what we can know of Migeo's history-making through the production of an Aboriginal song cycle' (15-16). Shellam moves slowly and steadily through this archive, alert as to how it

allows us to do more than catch Aboriginal songs on the page; they might enable us to unravel something of the process of Nyungar history-making through the genre of song and get a sense of Migeo's voice and view from the ship (41).

Shellam includes perspectives from other historians who might interpret these colonial accounts as 'messy cross-cultural documents' which allows her to assess her own critical reading position (41). Here, Shellam displays an acute awareness to existing debates within her field and this greatly enriches the complexity of her discussion. Shellam concludes this section by suggesting that ultimately 'to dismiss such stories as impure flattens the specific Indigenous geographic knowledge and experiences of travel that their narrators expressed in the moment as explorers negotiated and transcribed them' (49).

*Meeting the Waylo* is a valuable contribution to the field of historical study. Shellam's commitment to 'sift, read and reckon' with the archives illustrates to other historians and archivists the occasionally 'rich scenes and stories' that such a 'reckoning' can bring (5).

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