

Young Indigenous Meatworkers' Gazette

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From the Bush Projects returns to Cape York

It is plain to see that many of the problems in remote Aboriginal communities can be overcome by engaging young people into work orbits.

But this is something easily said than done. It can't be done by policy directive because whenever and wherever it was tried it didn't work—so we were told. It even took Milton James, a professional social work practitioner (with extensive experience in working with young Indigenous people not responding to standard forms of intervention) over 10 years to learn how to do it properly. And it remains a field of practice that is well beyond the capacity of any generalist.

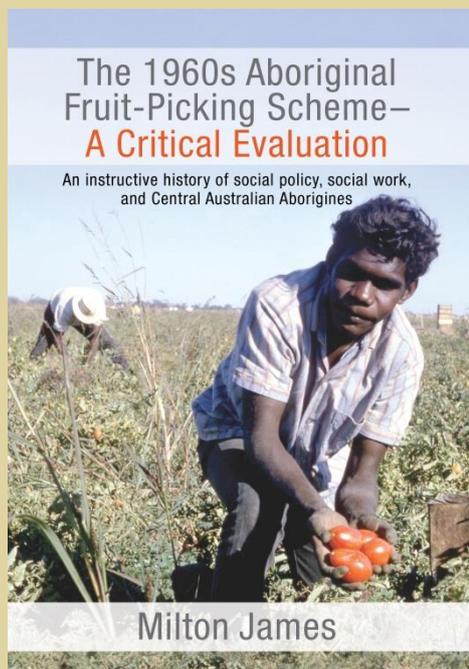
In 2009, From the Bush Projects (formally Boys from the Bush Projects) turned its attention to remote communities in the Northern Territory where it obtained the same unrivalled success as it did on Cape York Peninsula and in the Kimberly region. By the end of 2013, all of our practise trials had been completed, notwithstanding tremendous opposition from both the black and white communities.

At the request of Noel Pearson and the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, and with support from the Queensland Government, we are now turning our attentions back to disengaged youths on Cape York Peninsula, in particular those youths in Aurukun who are not responding to standard forms of intervention.



Now available

The 1960s Aboriginal Fruit-Picking Scheme— A Critical Evaluation



This is a must read book about a historical event that challenges the way in which past and present Central Australian Aborigines have been portrayed in regards to their willingness and ability to engage in work orbits.

See page 2 for more information.

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Profits from the sale of this book go to From the Bush Charity

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The 1960s Aboriginal Fruit-Picking Scheme— A Critical Evaluation

An instructive history of social policy, social work,
and Central Australian Aborigines

This book provides the untold history of the 1960s
Aboriginal fruit-picking scheme, which involved
hundreds of Aborigines living on missions and
government settlements in Central Australia.

When the fruit-picking scheme was being developed a new, so called “progressive”, ideology was sweeping across Australia. This new ideology put an end to this and all other similar schemes.

The same ideology that swept this scheme aside turned these remote missions and settlements into permanent communities. Coupled with an increase in the settlement training allowance—euphemism for a welfare payment—these communities strengthened the culture of dependency and passivity, and reversed what little economic incentive these people had to leave these institutions and build independent lives for themselves.

To find a way forward we must first understand the past. The history of the 1960s Aboriginal fruit-picking scheme, and how it gave way to the development of outback welfare ghettos, will provide important missing gaps in our understanding of where it all went terribly wrong. From this understanding comes the knowledge of what we have to do to turn this situation around for the better.

In 2005, Milton James—a not so ordinary social worker—put ideology to one side and took up a common-sense approach to overcoming the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The results were outstanding. Milton had thought he had embarked on something new, but he was to discover that he was repeating what worked in the past. This book is the result of many years of painstaking research and the necessity to travel thousands of kilometres to uncover the almost forgotten history of the Aboriginal fruit-picking scheme.



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Peterborough is located in the southern Flinders Ranges region of South Australia. It has a population of about 1,600 people, and surrounded by dryland agriculture and pastoral properties—pictured below.



On the outskirts of Peterborough is a small abattoir employing about 80 people. This abattoir is the larger of two abattoirs that process free range camels for export. They also process horses and cattle.



We first used SAMEX in 2013 (See: Young Indigenous Meatworkers Gazette, Newsletter No. 26, dated 18 March 2013). SAMEX and Peterborough have a number of qualities that we were looking for.

First is the location. It is vitally important that we give our young workers every opportunity to succeed; this means finding locations far from the distractions and negative influences of their home community and large regional centres. Peterborough fits the bill perfectly.

Second is SAMEX’s offer of good jobs in the meat processing industry.

This is an industry that our young workers enjoy and it offers them more security than the mining industry—as it is now plain to see.

Third is the offer of suitable rental accommodation not far from the abattoir. This is very important for it is not easy to rent a home for a group of young Aborigines from remote communities. The great thing about Peterborough is the manager of the SAMEX meat processing plant, Christine Duggan, owns a local hostel and is happy to provide accommodation to our young workers and our off-site/on-site supervisor. Moreover, she has offered to be their cook. Forth is daily transport to and from work. Here again, Christine is able to help out with the assistance of other good people working at the plant.



Pictured above is camel meat being processed at Peterborough



Pictured above is SAMEX Peterborough plant manager Christine Duggan

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I am delighted Cape York Institute is involved in putting things in place so that some young people from Aurukun get the opportunity to work in real jobs in the meat processing industry in South Australia.

I couldn't be more pleased that we have re-established our old partnership with Milton James' From the Bush. Some of you will remember the 'Boys from the Bush' program from a few years back. In my opinion it has been far too long since we had opportunities for young people to successfully orbit into real jobs down south, learn new skills, save some of their hard earned cash and put themselves on a pathway to a better life.

It is great to have Milton's knowledge and wisdom on board to make sure the young people that get this opportunity in the meat works will succeed.

It is through Milton we have established an exciting new partnership with the SAMEX Peterborough abattoir in South Australia. The Peterborough abattoir processes a lot of camel meat from the APY Lands for exporting to the Middle East. SAMEX has had young Indigenous people from the Northern Territory work in the abattoir before with great success. Now, Christine Duggan, Plant Manager at the Peterborough abattoir is as determined as we are to open up this work opportunity to young workers from Aurukun. Hats off to Christine for this great opportunity!

As our first six young men from Aurukun get prepared to go off to work, I urge you all to get behind them and support them for taking this really positive step. They will be working alongside Anton McMillan and Mitchell Mahoney who have proved themselves as really good workers with Boys from the Bush in the past. They will be supervised at work and in their homestay environment.

This is great for the individuals and families involved, but it is good for Aurukun too. There is a real opportunity for Aurukun to impress Christine and SAMEX with its young workers, so that this becomes a work opportunity open to more people from Aurukun.

I look forward to seeing this work becoming a real turning point for those that have been selected to take up these jobs. These young people will have an opportunity to work so they can achieve their goals, such as to buy a car! It also is a good way to achieve a better life and to make their family and the community of Aurukun proud!

Noel Pearson

Anton McMillan embarks upon his **third** work orbit



Pictured above is Anton McMillan, aged 22, from Santa Teresa community in the Northern Territory. He has just begun his third work orbit with From the Bush Projects working for SAMEX meat processing plant at Peterborough, South Australia.

Anton's first orbit was a three year stint with Rockdale Beef/JBS Swift at Yanco in New South Wales processing beef, and where he completed Certificate III in Meat Processing Work – Boning.

His second orbit was a one year stint with SAMEX in Peterborough, South Australia, where he obtained experience boning camels and horses.

He has now returned to Peterborough to begin his third orbit with SAMEX and to present as a role model and mentor to young people from Aurukun. He is assisted by Mitchell Mahoney, another graduate from the Northern Territory wishing to engage in his second orbit.

This is what the practice of youth orbiting is about—as developed by From the Bush Projects.

Mitchell Mahoney embarks upon his **second** work orbit



Pictured above is Mitchell Mahoney, aged 26, from Alpururulam community in the Northern Territory.

Mitchell's first work orbit was a three year stint with Rockdale Beef/JBS Swift at Yanco in New South Wales processing beef, and where he completed Certificate III in Meat Processing Work – Boning.

He has just begun his second work orbit with From the Bush Projects working for SAMEX meat processing plant in Peterborough, South Australia, and to present as a role model and mentor to young people from Aurukun.

With Anton and Mitchell in place, we are now waiting on just one more crucial component before we begin bringing down young people from Aurukun who have also signed up to the completion of Certificate III in Meat Processing Work.

This last crucial component will be revealed in our next newsletter.

A word about work ‘orbits’

It has become quite apparent that the word ‘orbit’ in relation to work mobility has a different meaning or inference to different people. This essay will clarify what we mean by work orbits.

Noel Pearson had this to say about work orbits:

I have introduced the concept of orbits as a solution to the problem of how we can avoid economic integration becoming a one-way ticket for the young away from their origins, a prospect that many parents and community elders dread. Even though Norman travelled and worked in other areas, he **retained a strong link with Kuku Yalanji country** (bold added) and spent much of his life there. He was a person who would have been able to embark on orbits of the kind I envisage. His example shows that it is possible to choose to **maintain an Aboriginal identity and be completely able to interact with modern society** (bold added).

Mining Magnate, Andrew Forest, used the term ‘orbit’ in his report to government titled “Creating Parity”, which the government has used to base its present Indigenous employment policy. Forest offered no explanation of the term, other than what was provided by the Cape York Institute. But he then went on to say that we need to support people to come and go from ancestral lands for the purpose of work without losing their access to housing or employment in their home community. It’s not exactly clear who he is talking about here. He could not be talking about the vast majority of people for whom there are no employment opportunities in these remote communities and there never will be. And I have never heard of any person returning from a period of employment arranged by From the Bush Projects having difficulty in returning to the same living arrangements that were available to them prior to going away. His report stated:

The Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership introduced the term (*sic*) ‘orbiting’ in relation to Cape York communities—see <http://cyi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Cape%202020Agenda%2020final.pdf>. Broadly speaking, the term refers to the mobility of Indigenous people from remote communities to take up education and employment opportunities in regional and metropolitan centres, while also retaining **their connection with ancestral lands** (bold added). We need to build on existing programmes and significantly expand support for people to take up work where the market provides it, and enable them to orbit back to their home communities **without losing access to housing or employment** (bold added).

Sociologists also use the term ‘employment orbits’ to describe the spatial distance in which workers are able to travel each day from their home to their place of employment (See for example, Bracey, H.E. (2002), *English rural life: Village activities, Organisations and Institutions*, Routledge). Anthropologist, Jon Altman, used the peculiar term ‘orbit in’ as opposed to ‘orbit out’, to describe Aborigines reoccupying empty landscapes to ‘manage the country’ (whatever that means) (*Altman, J., What future for remote Indigenous Australia? Economic hybridity and the neoliberal turn*, Altman, J. & Hinkson, M. (eds.) (2010), *Cultural Crisis — Anthropology and Politics in Aboriginal Australia*, UNSW Press).

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In circumstances where people choose to relocate for the purposes of work, we normally use the term ‘migration’—this can be either internal (within the country) or external (outside of the country). Speaking of ‘internal migration’ for the purposes of work, Deshingkar and Grimm (*Deshingkar, P. and Grimm, S. (2005), ‘Internal Migration and Development: A Global Perspective’, Overseas Development Institute, IOM International Organisation for Migration*) have identified four broad kinds of internal migration: 1) rural-urban, 2) rural-rural, 3) urban-rural, and 4) urban-urban.

1. Rural-urban movement occurs as a result of an urbanising economy; rural workers moving to larger towns, cities, and industrial centres where there is a higher demand for labour, more and varied opportunities.
2. Rural-rural movement occurs when workers from rural areas with few jobs travel to another rural area where there are more jobs.
3. Urban-rural movement usually occurs when individuals return back to their home town. Often, these people bring back skill sets that benefit their home area.
4. Urban-urban movement takes place from city to the outer suburbs, or vice versa, or from one city to another.

In addition, we have ‘**circular migration**’ or ‘repeat migration’. This term refers to the temporary and usually repetitive movement of a migrant worker between home and host location for the purpose of work. It represents an established pattern of population mobility, whether cross-country or rural-urban (*Newland, K. (2009), ‘Circular Migration and Human Development’, Human Development Research Paper (HDRP) Series, Vol. 42, No. 2009*).

Circular migration is a developing concept. It refers to a loose notion of various definitions. Fargues (*Fargues, P. (2008), ‘Circular Migration: Is it relevant for the South and East of the Mediterranean’, CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes – Circular Migration Series, 2008/40*) notes that:

One finds both restrictive definitions like the one adopted by the European Commission, and the wider, more inclusive definitions of some researchers. They take into account the ‘transnational’ nature of many modern migrant communities around the world, and anticipate that in the future, thanks to easy and cheap transport and communications and to the close ties migrants can keep with their country of origin, **circulatory will become the rule, not the exception** (bold added).

Agunias and Newland (*Agunias, D.R. and Newland, K. (2007), ‘Circular Migration and Development: Trends, Policy Routes, and Ways Forward’, Migration Policy Institute*) have identified four types of circular migration: 1) Permanent migration—one or several generations later—permanent return, 2) Permanent migration and temporary return, 3) Temporary migration and temporary return, 4) Temporary migration and permanent return. Agunias and Newman have listed a number of criteria that make migration circular:

- i. Temporary: periods of stay are limited in duration;
- ii. Renewable: several periods are possible;
- iii. Circulatory: freedom of movement between home and host communities is fully-enjoyed during each period of stay;
- iv. Legal;
- v. Respectful of the rights of migrants;
- vi. Managed in order to match labour demand in one location with supply from another location.

Using the above conventional typologies, the type of migration taken up by young Anton

McMillan, mentioned on page 2, is a **type 3 rural-rural voluntary circular migration**.

Evidence shows that circular migration, for the purposes of employment, has been an important route and necessary condition for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. An analysis of remittance flows throughout different parts of the world reveals enormous sums flowing back to home communities and can account for a substantial proportion of household incomes (*Sok, H., Chea, H. and Sik, B. (2001), Annual Economic Review, Development Resource Institute, Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Al-Ali, N. (2004), 'The relationship between migration within and from the Middle East and North-Africa and pro-poor policies', Report by the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter for DFID; Karan, A. (2003), 'Changing patterns of migration from rural Bihar, in Iyer, G. (Ed.), Migrant Labour and Human Rights in India, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 102-139*). In addition, returning migrants may also bring back a range of skills which can benefit their home areas immensely (*Zhao, Y. (2001), 'Causes and Consequences of Return Migration: Recent Evidence from China', Working Paper No. E2001010, China Centre for Economic Research, Beijing University*).

But is or could this be the case with individual Australian Aborigines from remote communities? Certainly, it was the case in the early 1960s, before the introduction of unemployment benefits. For example, a feature of the mission's economy on Bathurst Island was the migration of able-bodied males for a period. They'd travel to labouring jobs in Darwin, the salt works in Shoal Bay, and the forestry work on Melville Island. In 1960-1961 the total wages (training allowance) paid to people on Bathurst Island was £2,173.40d, added to this was £943.19.4d for the sale of local produce, whereas, in the same period £8,611.2.4d was spent by Aborigines in the local cash store. The difference in these amounts was mainly due to earning brought back by the migrant workers (*James, M. (2015), The 1960s Aboriginal Fruit-picking Scheme: A Critical Evaluation, Australian eBook Publishers*). These migrant workers were in effect subsidising the mission. There was also the situation where in 1964 a large group of men from Ernabella Mission migrated up to the forestry works near Darwin for 11 months of the year (*James, M. (2015), The 1960s Aboriginal Fruit-picking Scheme: A Critical Evaluation, Australian eBook Publishers*). But the broadening of the criteria for welfare payments, in particular the provision of unemployment benefits to residents of remote Aboriginal communities, much of this migration ceased.

According to Deshingkar and Grimm, international experience has shown that policies, programs or actions that tend to restrain mobility or to provide incentives for people to stay on their land do, in the long run, lead to unmanageable situations (*Deshingkar, P. and Grimm, S. (2005), 'Internal migration and development: A global perspective, International Organisation for Migration, No. 19, Switzerland*). And this is what has occurred in so many remote Aboriginal communities, to the point where the Western Australian Government and Federal Government are now proposing to shut down between 100 and 150 Aboriginal communities in Western Australia (A document prepared by the Federal Government in 2010, titled, 'Priority Investment Communities – WA', categorised 192 of 287 remote settlements as unsustainable).

But how then do we explain the reason for young Anton McMillan engaging in his third circular migration? And for that matter, how do we explain the near 200 young people that have signed up to circular migration with From the Bush Projects over the years, many of whom were receiving welfare or CDEP payments? (See: James, M. Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme, Progress Report #4, 31 January 2011, www.fromthebush.org/papers). Their willingness to engage in circular migration can be explained by the term '**accumulative migration**'.

The term accumulative migration is used in the international literature (*Deshingkar, P. and Start, D. (2003), 'Seasonal Migration for Livelihoods, Coping, Accumulation and Exclusion', Working Paper No. 220, Overseas Development Institute, London*). A study by Rao distinguishes between migration for **survival** (sometimes referred to as **distress migration**) and migration for **additional income** or

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the **acquisition of new skills** or to **gain new experience**, all of which has been named accumulative migration (Rao, G.B. (2001), *Household Coping/Survival Strategies in Drought-prone Regions: A Case Study of Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh, India SPWD-Hyderabad Centre*).

The stone-age hunter-gather existence of Australian Aborigines is an example of **survival migration**. The nature and scope of this migration varied widely from those living in the wetter coastal regions to those living in the harsh central inland desert regions where it was necessary to roam over great distances (Young, E. and Doohan, K. (1989), *Mobility for Survival: A Process Analysis of Aboriginal Population Movement in Central Australia*, Darwin: North Australia Research Unit, The Australian National University).

In the contemporary context, it's important to note that economic distress or survival migration is not limited to deprived families, and that accumulative migration is not limited to families who are relatively well-off (Deshingkar, P. and Anderson, E. (2004), *People on the move: New policy challenges for increasingly mobile populations, Overseas Development Institute*, Natural Resource Perspectives, No. 92, London). In the case of Anton McMillan he states that his motivations are all of the above: income, acquisition of additional skills and qualifications, and new experiences.

We are all aware of the social and economic situation in remote Aboriginal communities. There is no real employment for most of these people, and to remain living in these communities means settling down to a life of total welfare dependency. A few will drift away, but not necessary for the purposes of employment. Some young people will drift to urban centres in search of youth culture, fun and excitement. Some will leave home to spend time with relatives. Others will leave to seek certain goods and services not available to them in their remote community. This sort of movement can be defined as various forms of accumulative migration. Others leave to escape the chaos and violence (**distress migration**). Take for example the situation in 2011 when over 100 people fled Yuendumu in fear of their safety (See article by Verity Edwards, 'Aboriginal people flee to Adelaide to escape Yuendumu violence', The Australian, 10 February 2011). This sort of movement is best described as distress migration. Very few have the inclination, confidence, skills, and resources to leave unassisted for the purposes of employment.

Many of us are aware of the growing number of Indigenous youths that have disengaged from education and training and get into all sorts of strife. Moreover, many of them are not responding to standard forms of intervention. From the Bush Project was established specifically for these young people. What we offer these young people is fulltime employment in a meat processing plant at award rates and under award conditions with intensive on-site and off-site support and supervision. It is a voluntary scheme, but designed in a manner that favours their continued participation. We have on occasions accepted referrals from the Children's Court as an alternative to ordering a custodial sentence.

Our scheme is not a recruitment agency for labouring jobs in other parts of the country for the purpose of financial gain (see for example, Migrant Workers – China - YouTube). Our scheme recruits disengaged youths for meat processing work in other parts of the country to help save a failing social system. This is a form of migration that is not described in the international literature.

This scheme has been developed by From the Bush Projects for the Cape York Institute as a **type 3-4 rural-rural voluntary circular migration** project that provides a number of **accumulative** benefits for the participants, their families, and home community. It has been named the **Aurukun Youth Orbiting Project**. The accumulative benefits include:

- Diversion from the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol

- Diversion from offences against persons and property
- Diversion from family/parental abuse and neglect
- Diversion from other negative influence within the community
- Diversion from the justice and welfare systems
- Provision of a suicide prevention strategy
- Provision of real employment paid at award rates and under award conditions
- Provision of financial self-reliance
- Provision of savings and investment support opportunity
- Provision of the opportunity to boost family income through remittances
- Provision of pro-employment and pro-social role models
- Provision of good physical and mental health activities
- Provision of 24 hour support and supervision
- Provision of constructive social, recreational and cultural activities
- Provision of life skills and life education, which includes helping to develop a moral character, the expression of gratitude, and framing of desires
- Reducing the demand on public housing and other public services in their home community
- Paying tax on income
- Creation of social capital at an individual level
- Creation of social capital amongst family, friends and community
- Creation of social capital in the workplace
- Creation of social capital in the host community
- Creation of social inclusion

(See: James, M. Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme, Progress Report #3 dated 8 May 2010, and Progress Report #4 dated 31 January 2011, www.fromthebush.org/papers.)

Milton James

