‘Never really heard of it’: the certificate of exemption and lost identity

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When I first heard the call for papers for the ‘Indigenous Biography and Autobiography’ Conference earlier this year, I felt that I was being offered a unique opportunity to share the genesis and the findings of my Honours thesis entitled “‘Never really heard of it’: a study of the impact on identity of the Queensland certificate of exemption for Aboriginal people’. I came to research the certificate of exemption largely as a means of finding answers to questions that I have carried around all my life. These questions concern my identity, my family history and information relating to my cultural heritage. My journey to answer them involved a search for my own identity and the genealogy of my family. In a very real sense, this research reflects both my own Indigenous autobiography and biography.

Beginnings

From my earliest memories as a child in the late 1950s I recall asking my parents questions about my identity, in particular ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Where do we come from?’ I was curious about these issues, and about photographs showing that I was a blue-eyed blonde as a young child. Whenever I put these questions to my parents, my dark skinned brown-eyed mother and fair skinned blue-eyed father always gave me the same answer – ‘You are an Australian, Judi’. This answer, however, always left me wondering: ‘What did it mean to be an Australian?’, ‘What did an Australian look like?’, ‘Did I look like an Australian?’ and ‘Did my family look and behave like Australians?’ I knew that I was different to all my friends but I could not compare myself with them as none had parents with the same mixed heritage as mine.

Later, as a teenager I felt driven to find out more, when I came to realise that my mother’s heritage, which she denied, was Aboriginal. My father was of mixed European heritage.¹ His sister, one of my favourite aunts, cautioned me about my personal journey to find my mother’s family. She asked: ‘Why not say you are Italian, and therefore save yourself the heartache?’ I wondered what she was really saying. Why did she think it was easier to claim Italian heritage rather than Aboriginal? At the time I was extremely upset to hear my aunt’s words, because it seemed that she wanted me to deny or erase the Aboriginal part of my mixed cultural heritage. Alternatively, perhaps it was because she did not want to be seen to have relatives with any Aboriginal heritage; then again it may have been something else.

Recently when my aunt was reflecting about the relationship between my mother and herself, she said, 'I have known your mother for over 50 years and we have never had an argument'. Again, what was she really saying? Was it because they were really 'soul sisters' or was it that my mother chose not to say anything controversial and certainly nothing about the exemption certificate that had silently erased her parents' Indigenous heritage and her own? Nevertheless, in recent years I have come to comprehend the 'heartache' my aunt spoke about, as my work and research has meant confronting the impacts of my elders renouncing their Indigenous heritage.

By the late 1970s and again in the mid 1980s, when I was working within the Aboriginal community, first at Queensland Health² and later with the Aboriginal Health Service, I became increasingly aware that I had been cut off from my own kinship and homelands. I was constantly reminded of the fact that I did not know the answers to the questions Aboriginal people (Murris) were asking of me.³ 'Who is your family?' and 'Where do you come from?' Many of the Murris I was working with were able to answer those important questions about their own biographies. Eventually, I found that the answers I was searching for had been lost, due to Queensland government legislation introduced in 1897.

After my grandfather passed away in 1980, my mother found his certificate of exemption while sorting through his belongings.⁴ This piece of paper presented me with questions about my grandfather's biography. What was he doing with this certificate? What exactly was it? What did it mean? My curiosity was triggered by the discovery of this old document and inspired me to continue my personal journey of biographical research and discovery. It was during the early 1980s that I befriended an Aboriginal woman who was studying at TAFE in Brisbane. I decided to return to study the following year to enrol in the same welfare course for Indigenous people that she was undertaking. It was through this course that I started mixing with other Indigenous people for the first time, in the classroom, at community meetings and community social events. At that stage, I was like a sponge soaking up all the information I could to learn more about my Indigenous cultural background.

In the mid 1980s, to find out more about my Indigenous heritage, I made contact with various Queensland government departments via letter and telephone, even visiting some of them on a few occasions. Sadly, all my investigations failed to reveal anything about my Aboriginal heritage. At this time, access to government records and information was often restricted, especially to Indigenous people. Fortunately, Queensland's *Freedom of Information Act* 1992 has changed this situation to a degree, and opened the way for further Indigenous research.

During the early 1990s I enrolled at the University of Queensland and graduated with a social work degree. In the late 1990s and early 2000s I worked as a social

worker with 'Link-Up', an organisation that engaged in re-uniting Indigenous families who had been fragmented by Stolen Generation legislation.⁵ In time, I discovered that this work was subconsciously taking an emotional toll on me because, with each reunion I was involved with, I was always wondering if this family could perhaps be part of my family? Moreover, as I had been taught nothing of my Indigenous cultural and spiritual heritage, I felt lost and disconnected from my identity as an Aboriginal woman. This situation triggered a personal turning point in my life, re-directing me to resume my quest to discover my own lost identity. Taking up tertiary studies again in 2004 offered me an opportunity to further this quest, through researching the Queensland certificate of exemption and its impact on identity as my honours thesis topic.

The exemption certificate and the erasure of Indigenous identity

Initially I began by searching for scholarly literature about the Queensland certificate of exemption. I discovered only a very small number of publications about the exemption certificate and its repercussions. Some notable authors mentioned various aspects of the certificate of exemption.⁶ These included the fact that once Aboriginal people gained the certificate they would in effect have to lose their Indigenous identity and culture, their family and their homelands, in exchange for living in the wider community. Yet the social impact on cultural identity for the certificate holders and their descendants remained largely unexplored by research and analysis.

This situation drove me into researching material about the legislative origins of the exemption certificate, '*The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897 (Qld)*', housed in Queensland's state archives.⁷ The parliamentary debates in relation to the '1897 Act' reflected a range of political arguments and differences of opinion regarding the treatment of Indigenous Queenslanders that existed amongst the parliamentarians of the era. Several arguments were posed as justification for the 1897 Act, but three points detailed in the debates were specifically emphasised. The first concerned the establishment and enforcement of legislated penalties for supplying liquor to 'Aboriginals' and 'half-castes'. The second referred to similar provisions outlawing the supply of opium to 'Aboriginals' and 'half-castes'. The third referred to making it a punishable offence for non-Aboriginal people to possess government blankets that had been issued to 'Aboriginals' and 'half-castes' by the State appointed Protectors of Aboriginal Queenslanders.⁸ As historian Rosalind Kidd has noted: 'Protectors were directed to see that they do not get any liquor or opium, that they keep their blankets'.⁹

In general, the focus of these parliamentary debates centred on the belief that a system of 'care and protection' for Aboriginal people would work for their

betterment. The passing of the 1897 Act empowered the Queensland government to regulate, discipline and control every aspect of Aboriginal Queenslander's lives. It meant that the government dictated where Indigenous Queenslanders could live, where they could work, how they could spend their wages and whom they could marry. In many cases the government decided if they could keep their own children.

With the knowledge of hindsight, it is clear that in reality, 'care and protection' was in fact regulation through 'control and incarceration' most particularly via the removal orders of Section 9 of the 1897 Act. This Section 9 gave government officials the legal right to remove Aboriginal people from their homelands and elsewhere and place them onto reserves and missions.

Section 9: It shall be lawful for the Minister to cause every aboriginal within any District, not being an aboriginal excepted from the provisions of this section, to be removed to, and kept within the limits of, any reserve situated within such District, in such manner, and subject to such conditions, as may be prescribed. The Minister may, subject to the said conditions, cause any aboriginal to be removed from one reserve to another.¹⁰

Other parts of the 1897 Act were equally oppressive and reveal the extensive powers of the Chief Protector in regulating Indigenous lives and communities. They included the authority to control and restrict all movements on and off reserves (Section 11), determine, regulate and revoke 12 month employment permits issued to 'Aboriginal and half-castes' (Sections 12 and 13), supervise all 'Aboriginal and female half-castes' in employment (Sections 15 and 16) and prevent any removal of Aboriginal people to other districts or outside the colony of Queensland (Section 17).

It is now recognised that the removal system created by the 1897 Act delivered a trans-generational impact on the lives of Aboriginal people that is still felt today. Many researchers and writers have noted that the process of removal resulted in the demise of Aboriginal societies, with the loss of homelands, kin, culture, language and identity.¹¹ Queensland's 'protectionist' system can be characterised by an ongoing multi-faceted and systematic attempt to transform Aboriginal societies and culture. With the many removals fragmenting families and kinship groups, numerous Aboriginal languages and sub-cultures were transformed to the point of extinction.¹² The certificate of exemption itself was introduced originally in Section 33 of the 1897 Act, which stated that:

It shall be lawful for the Minister to issue to any half-caste, who, in his opinion, ought not to be subject to the provisions of this Act, a certificate, in writing under his hand, and that such half-caste is exempt from the

provisions of this Act and the Regulations, and from and after the issue of such certificate, such half-caste shall be so exempt accordingly.¹³

The exemption certificate represented the only legal mechanism by which Indigenous Queenslanders could live independently away from reserves or missions, out from 'under the Act'. However, it required severing all ties with their Aboriginal kinship and culture including connections with country, or the exemption could be revoked by the state.¹⁴

Historian Thom Blake has noted:

Exemption Certificates were granted only to those Aborigines who demonstrated to the Chief Protector's satisfaction the capacity to survive in the outside world. In other words, they were imbued with capitalist values concerning money, time and work. But the standards required for exemption were high; certificates were not freely issued.¹⁵

In his view, exemption from the 'under the Act' was offered as an incentive, a reward for working hard and obeying the rules. He argues:

As well as punitive measures; there was one incentive for workers to give faithful and diligent services – exemption from the Act.¹⁶

Castle and Hagen, in the only, albeit unpublished, article written entirely about the certificate of exemption, 'Turning black into white: the exemption system in Queensland 1908-1965', emphasise the economic situation concerning Aboriginal workers' labour relations and unionism issues, triggered by the government's 'protectionist' policy. They argue that '[t]he aim of the 1897 Act was to establish a system which would cover all Aborigines in the Colony and regulate their contacts with other inhabitants of Queensland'.¹⁷ The financial and logistical advantages for government would be less Aboriginal people to care for. In effect the system established by the Act enshrined the distinction between Aborigines and 'half-castes'.¹⁸

My research into official exemption statistics found that over the 60 years from 1908 until 1967/8, a total of 4092 certificates of exemption were issued. This figure included 2520 males and 1570 females, as well as 1165 children on their mother's certificate. The age groups of exemptees varied from the very young (9 months, in 1908) to the very old (88 years in 1958). It is likely that the older applicants were seeking their certificates of exemption so that they could claim their entitlements as Age Pensioners. Prior to 1958, Commonwealth benefits for Aboriginal people were only given if the person lived off a 'reserve or mission'.¹⁹ In another example, information found in the 1958 Register of Certificates of Exemption Issued involved Aboriginal people at the Lazaret on Fantome Island, where inmates applied for Invalid pensions and other Commonwealth benefits after being exempted.²⁰

One personal highlight during my research was to actually hold the original '*The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897 (Qld)*' document in my gloved hands for a few minutes. Whilst I realised that this was a great privilege, I also realised that I held in my hands the very document that had literally enslaved my family and countless other families over many decades. I was aware that this piece of paper was responsible for so much loss and heartache for thousands of Indigenous Australians. The loss of kinship, culture and traditional land, which also encompassed stolen wages²¹ and even stolen children, was the painful legacy of this aging document. The 1897 Act had come close to achieving the genocide of Australia's original inhabitants and it was certainly responsible for generations of despondency and helplessness that persist to this day.

Aboriginal writers, when writing their autobiographies, typically seem to skip quickly over the issue of exemption certificates. Was the certificate of exemption something that they were not comfortable writing about? Or was it that they knew very little about the exemption? To leave a State Reserve or church mission required an application for a certificate of exemption. I can understand now why many Aboriginal people sought a certificate as the only possible path to freedom and independence. This has been explained by such writers as Marnie Kennedy, Jackie Huggins, Albert Holt, Regina Ganter and Ruth Hegarty.²² Their writings illustrate the varied lifestyles each was forced to adopt in order to survive injustices and live within contemporary Australian society. For those still living 'under the Act' it meant to live a life of subjection and servitude, with very few, if any, of the freedoms enjoyed and taken for granted by the wider community.

Uncovering and reclaiming Indigenous identity

Sifting through large quantities of mostly undisturbed printed documents and records in the Queensland state archives inevitably meant uncovering the biographical material about Indigenous Queenslanders which has shaped my own identity. I found my grandfather, Roy, was born at Nanango, in the South Burnett region of Queensland in 1901. Daisy, my grandmother, also a Queenslander, was born on Boomarra Station, north of Cloncurry, in 1900. I also found out how that each had their young lives affected by state removal orders. The Queensland Government removed Roy, aged 13, from Taabinga Station near Nanango to Purga Mission near Ipswich in the south-east of the state in 1914. He was enrolled at the Mission school in 1914 and later sent out to work when he was 16-years-old.²³ At the age of 20, Daisy²⁴ was removed from the Hillcoat's family home at Teneriffe in Brisbane and taken to Purga Mission.²⁵ Roy and Daisy met there and were married in 1924, at the Purga Mission Salvation Army Church.

Figure 6.1: Daisy, baby Gwen and Roy Smith taken in 1926.

Roy, Daisy and my mother Gwen, aged 13 months, left Purga Mission after Roy gained his exemption certificate on the 25 March 1926. My grandmother did not herself require a certificate of exemption as she was exempt from removal orders under Section 10c of the 1897 Act as 'A female lawfully married to, and residing with, a husband who is not himself an aboriginal'. Therefore, after 25 March 1926, my grandfather and his family were legally no longer classified as Aboriginal and could reside away from the mission provided they upheld the conditions required of them by the certificate of exemption.

Uncovering this family genealogy, while it began to throw some light on my multiple identities, left me with mixed feelings. On one hand, I was happy to finally find information about my grandparents, but on the other hand, I was saddened to know that they suffered so much. My research uncovered documentation that both my grandparents were removed prior to my grandfather being granted a certificate of exemption, thus they were twice subjected to cultural identity loss.

Fortunately, prior to commencing this archival research, I had discovered diaries that my grandmother Daisy kept methodically during the 1940s and 1950s. These were a unique find and are possibly the only surviving records written by an Indigenous woman from this era in Queensland. They provide much insight into my grandparents' lives as exemptees after they left Purga Mission. From various family members, I have been able to obtain six of these diaries, each one recording the annual family events for the years 1942, 1944, 1945, 1947, 1949 and 1951.

The 1951 diary contained a brief entry written by Roy in 1979, on Daisy's birthday, four years after she had passed away: 'How I miss you Mum'. They were a very close couple throughout their married lives. Their closeness appears to have been an important aspect of successfully maintaining their exemption and overcoming the isolation from other family members that the exemption rules required.

Figure 6.2: Daisy with Mervyn and baby Maurice taken in the early 1930s.

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Figure 6.3: Roy Smith and his football team taken in the 1940s.

Figure 6.4: Roy Smith and his beloved car – the Rigby.

Figure 6.5: Roy and Daisy Smith taken in the 1950s.

In these diaries, Daisy recorded in detail the Smith's daily family life in regard to housekeeping, work, education, housing, sport, travel, entertainment and community/civic life. Here is an example of her daily entry:

Cleaned out all the house. Roy still out near the Plateau.
Maurice mustering cattle for Tim Downing.
Les. & Ruth. went up to the Hospital & then up to town.
Valma. at school. All went to see 'Song of the Island'
at night. No mail. Posted letter to Gwen.²⁶

She also recorded major events in Queensland, national and international public affairs. The entry for the end of World War II, shown as:

Roy and gang down at Wethern. Roy on tractor.
NEWS came through at 9.15. Peace being Declared.
And what rejoicing. I did my washing and hosed
out the Kitchen. Val went up town but were too late
to shop. All went to pictures.²⁷

After reading through the diaries, I became aware of the things they did not mention. There were no references to any Aboriginal issues, social or political. For instance, Daisy makes no reference to 26 January in any of her diaries as being a day of significance for Aboriginal people. Neither did she mention Aboriginal friends or visitors, apart from immediate family members. Instead,

the diaries reveal only the ordered law-abiding measured lives my grandparents lived to ensure that they maintained the exemption from living 'under the Act'.

For my grandfather, the decision to apply for the certificate of exemption must have been a difficult one to make. Choosing to either to live 'under the Act' or fend for himself and his family in the wider community was something that he had to consider carefully. I wonder if I could have gone down the same road as my grandfather and grandmother in 1926, and been as brave, progressive and enterprising as they? Today, however, I can see their reasoning, concerning what they wanted to achieve for their family. Again I wonder, if my grandfather could have looked into the future and seen the loss and heartache resulting from gaining the certificate of exemption, would he have taken the same road again? Nevertheless, it seems clear that he insisted his daughter and my mother, Gwen, always be conscious of the rules and regulations pertaining to the certificate of exemption, and the consequences for her family if they were not obeyed. Throughout her 82 years, Gwen has complied meticulously with the conditions of her father's exemption, and as the daughter of an exemptee has never seen or referred to herself as Aboriginal.

Making sense of exemption

In trying to make sense of the powerful impact of the exemption certificate, I was attracted to the work of the late French social theorist, Michel Foucault. A number of other researchers have adopted Foucault's theories regarding crime and punishment and his concepts of surveillance and self-regulation to analyse the various government policies that affected the Aboriginal population in Queensland.²⁸ In *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*, Foucault identifies two dimensions of discipline, both of which can be seen to have operated on the reserves and missions – 'the discipline-blockade' and 'the discipline-mechanism'. Foucault notes that:

There are two images, then, of discipline. At one extreme, the discipline-blockade, the enclosed institution, established on the edges of society, turned inwards towards negative functions: arresting evil, breaking communications, suspending time. At the other extreme, with panopticism, is the discipline-mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come.²⁹

Searching some of the official correspondence written in the 1920s requesting advice or clarification clearly shows how closely Aboriginal Queenslanders were controlled and managed, through the authority of government officials charged with the responsibility for their well being. Here is an example:

Only two of the six sets of correspondence related to females seeking exemption. They indicate a paternalistic and moralistic approach to the

treatment of Aboriginal women in the care of the Office of the Chief Protector. The first application, which was unsuccessful, contained seven pages of supporting documentation from the Protector in Cloncurry. The rejection was made without explanation despite the good references, the applicant's ability to 'read and write a little', a considerable savings account, and the applicant 'having had no association with coloured people. Even the fact that she had both a sister and a brother with certificates of exemption, and that she spoke good English without the slightest accent' counted for nothing. The applicant was advised, 'the girl should be assured that as long as she maintains her present good character she need not fear being removed to a Reserve'.³⁰

Foucault's work provides a powerful theoretical explanation of the oppressive regulation dispensed by the state to Aboriginal Queenslanders who sought exemption. Those who successfully obtained and maintained exemption did so through a process of ongoing self-regulation, which involved sobriety, thrift, cleanliness, regular employment and disassociating from Aboriginal kin, culture and country. In effect, the laws and instituted policies resulted in a 'self' shaped by the domination of every aspect of the lives paradoxically exempted from 'under the Act'.

Foucault's work on surveillance pinpoints my mother's biography perfectly. As noted earlier, Gwen has lived a measured cautious life, like her parents, to avoid triggering the attention of authorities who could return her and her family to the reserve for violation of conditions of the exemption. In particular, avoiding association with Aboriginal people has been a quiet preoccupation for Gwen. For example, as far back as I can remember, Mum has always asked me questions like: 'Who are those [darkies] and do you know them?' It seemed that it was alright for me to enquire, but not her. As a teenager in the mid 1960s I remember our local church appointing a Torres Strait Islander as our Curate, but outside church and school we had no contact with him and his family. My mother's apparent fear of socialising with Murris probably best accounts for the small size of my family as a child and the almost total absence of Aboriginal people within the family's circle of friends. Foucault referred to this kind of management and control as 'biopower'.³¹ In more recent years Gwen has claimed that she 'was always free', but what was she free from? To me her life has been highly regulated through disciplining of her self. Was she talking about the freedom from the strictures of life on the reserve? One can only guess as she has never discussed these aspects of her biography and does not wish to do so.

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Figure 6.6: Judi Wickes.

Biographies of others descendants of exemptees

Originally, I planned to interview Aboriginal people who themselves were exemptees or descendants of someone who had an exemption certificate to gather material about the 'lived experience' of exemption. I found that the legacy of this regime evident in the erasure of Indigenous cultural identity amongst the greater percentage of those descendants of the exemptees interviewed for the thesis research.

I interviewed a total of six participants and found that the interview material fell short of my expectations, as the interviewees lacked knowledge about the exemption certificate. When I asked about this 110-year-old legislation, I discovered that almost all the interviewees had 'never really heard of it'. Most were not even familiar with the draconian conditions imposed upon Aboriginal Queenslanders who were forced to live under the 1897 Act for the next 70 years. When describing their own sense of self, the interviewees responded in different ways. Few of them shared commonalities in terms of their perceptions of personal identity. None identified as 'white' or non-Indigenous Australians and most reported experiences of racism as a result of being identified as Aboriginal people by non-Indigenous Australians.³²

Nevertheless, what has become a journey of reclaiming my own Indigenous heritage as the descendant of exemptees has continued since completing and submitting my Honours thesis in December 2005. For example, recently more information about my family's biography has come to light as the result of attending a local historical and genealogy group. In particular, information about my grandfather's European family history, for which I have been searching for over 20 years, has emerged. I found that my maternal great-great grandparents were both Irish born, met and married in Brisbane in 1852 and went on to have 12 children. My great-grandfather was their eleventh child. He passed away in 1920 aged 43. I discovered that Roy's mother, Maud Taabinga, died in childbirth at Nanango. I have no further information about my great-grandmother other than her name on Roy's marriage certificate. Each new discovery, however, opens up more questions about my ancestors who were responsible for my mixed heritage. So far, I have no records of Roy from birth to age 13, when he was removed to Purga Mission. I wonder if Roy and his father were together on Taabinga Station during those 13 years until he was removed? One can only guess at this stage.

By Aboriginal standards, my family group is very small, consisting of those descended from my grandparents Roy and Daisy and my grandmother's sister Nancy.³³ When growing up I learned very little about my maternal grandparents' family history. There were no stories told of the 'old days' or who their families were or where they came from. Yet, I still have fond memories of visiting the Hillcoat family home at Teneriffe, a suburb of Brisbane. The Hillcoats were a

non-Indigenous family who owned Boomarra Station in north-west Queensland, who my grandmother had known and worked for since she was a young girl. Interestingly, our two families have been intertwined for over 100 years, beginning as a friendly relationship between employers and employees. Later, the relationship continued as one established between good family friends. Finally, the third generation were to become as close as sisters. This relationship continues even to this day.

I am always looking for information about Daisy and Nancy's life prior to being removed to Purga Mission. Last year my mother gave me a Prayer Book with Daisy's name written on the inside cover. The book commemorates her confirmation in 1917 at the St Thomas Anglican Church, Toowong in suburban Brisbane suggesting that Daisy and Nancy were living in Brisbane with the Hillcoat family then. The Hillcoat sisters have subsequently confirmed that their family lived in the Toowong area prior to moving to Teneriffe. This also confirms that Daisy and Nancy lived with the Hillcoat family in Brisbane for at least three years prior to being removed to Purga Mission. When Daisy and Nancy moved initially to Brisbane with the Hillcoat family remains uncertain. More research is needed to fill the information gaps about my grandmother and her sister. It is worth noting that Daisy and Nancy and their families maintained a close lifelong relationship.

Another significant question in this jigsaw is: from what Indigenous nation or nations am I descended, and can claim connection to? Does knowing that my grandfather was born in Nanango and my grandmother born on Boomarra Station entitle me to say that my Indigenous heritage is Waka Waka and Kalkadoon? I can only guess. Whatever the answer to this question is, my exploratory research shows that the erasure of connection to kin and homelands required by the exemption certificate came at a high cost to exemptees and their descendants which reverberates into the present.

Further reflections

Biography and autobiography of people's lives is an important part of our 'lived experiences' and therefore, very much part of each individual's life journey and personal searches. I would like to think that my research might prove to be important and relevant to other Indigenous people who are searching for their family history, trying to establish their kinship ties and genealogy. Some of these people may discover that, like me, their grandparents or other members of their family were also issued with certificates of exemption. It appears that many of today's Aboriginal generation are totally unaware of the existence and consequences of this legislation. If attempts to trace their ancestry meet with a wall of silence, it may be due to the enforcement of the exemption certificate's requirements for complete separation from cultural and family ties. As noted earlier, my own research began as a journey to address questions which this

silence created for me personally. It continues to grow as I uncover more and more information about the facts and injustices relating to the exemption certificate. For instance, a number of local organisations have approached me to be a guest speaker, giving a lecture on the certificate of exemption. Another outcome relates to my niece, who after reading my thesis, created an art installation and then displayed it at a successful two-week art exhibition at Southbank in Brisbane with the theme 'certificate of exemption'. I am sure that the topic of exemption will take on a life of its own and eventually become more of an issue within the wider community.

It is my hope that this research will help to fill the educational void that exists, concerning the loss of identity and culture experienced by exemptees and their descendants. It may also serve to educate the non-Indigenous population about the hardships and heartaches experienced by so many Indigenous Queenslanders who were forced to live for many years 'under the Act'.

In conclusion, I believe that all Australians need to be informed about the deeply puzzling and traumatic loss of identity, culture and traditional homelands suffered by those exempted Indigenous people and their families. I am concerned that the vast majority of people whom I have spoken with since the completion of my thesis ask, 'What is the certificate of exemption?' and then remark, 'I never really heard of it'.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ My father has English and German heritage.
- ² I was working as a casual employee in the Special Projects (Indigenous) of the then Department of Health, Queensland government.
- ³ The regional term 'Murri' relates to Indigenous people who live in Queensland.
- ⁴ My grandparents were married for 51 years when my grandmother passed away first in 1975 and then, exactly five years to the day later, my grandfather also passed away.
- ⁵ Bringing them Home. A report into the removal of Indigenous children from their families was tabled in the Federal Parliament, Canberra on 26 May 1997.
- ⁶ Rowley 1970; Hall 1989; Kennedy 1985; Evans et al. 1993; Kidd 1997; Hollinsworth 1998; Huggins 1994; Blake 2001; Donovan 2002; Aberdeen 2002.
- ⁷ Public Acts of the Parliament of Queensland. *Aboriginals: An Act to make Provision for the better Protection and Care of the Aboriginal and Half-caste Inhabitants of the Colony, and to make more effectual Provision for Restricting the Sale and Distribution of Opium* [Assented to 15 December 1897].
- ⁸ Queensland Parliamentary Debates on the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Bill 1897: 1541.
- ⁹ Kidd 1997: 48.
- ¹⁰ *Aboriginals Protection and the Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* (Qld): 6175.
- ¹¹ See for example, Rowley 1981; Huggins 1994; Evans 1999; Reynolds 1999.
- ¹² Evans 1999: 116.
- ¹³ *Aboriginals Protection and the Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* (Qld): 6182.
- ¹⁴ The system of exemption was incorporated in protectionist policies later elsewhere after the federation of Australia in 1901. For example, *NSW Aborigines Protection Act 1909–1943* and later the *NSW Aborigines Welfare Act 1943–1968* in New South Wales, the *Aborigines Act 1905*, in Western Australia and the *Aborigines Act Amendment Act 1939* in South Australia including the Northern Territory. Like the

Queensland legislation, the conditions of exemption included the requirement of severing family connections and could be revoked at any time.

¹⁵ Blake 2001: 136-7.

¹⁶ Blake 2001: 136-7.

¹⁷ Castle and Hagen 1997: 2.

¹⁸ Castle and Hagen also make the observation that, by substituting the word 'Aboriginal' for 'half-caste' in its definitions, the amended 1939 version of Act made it possible for 'full-bloods' to become eligible for the certificate of exemption.

¹⁹ Correspondence of the Office of Native Affairs, Queensland State Archives, Brisbane, SRS 10431/Box 516 Batch 275.

²⁰ Fantome Island Exemptions Register, 1958 cited in Wickes 2005: 61.

²¹ Kidd 1997. As part of her PhD, Kidd uncovered Queensland government records revealing the widespread practice of misappropriation of Aboriginal people's wages, thus known as the 'stolen wages'.

²² Kennedy 1985; Huggins 1998; Holt 2001; Ganter 1998 and Hegarty 1999.

²³ Roy Smith has government records of his work in the Chinchilla region of south-west Queensland. Included as well is a letter written by him stating the appalling living conditions he was living in. Recently, I found in Daisy's 1951 diary, Roy has written a few sentences about his teenage years. Also, entries for a few months, written about nine months prior to his passing away.

²⁴ Grandmother (Daisy) talked about being hidden in the downstairs rooms of the house when police came around on previous occasions.

²⁵ I discovered that the police forcibly removed Daisy from Teneriffe, Brisbane, where she has been working as a single 20-year-old housemaid. My research revealed that it had been decreed that single Aboriginal females living in suburbia represented a source of moral temptation for the (white) males. She was taken, along with her 10-year-old sister, Nancy, to Purga Mission near Ipswich, Queensland in August 1920.

²⁶ Smith 1945: Friday 9 February.

²⁷ Smith 1945: Wednesday 15 August.

²⁸ Blake 2001; Kidd 1997.

²⁹ Foucault 1975: 209.

³⁰ Chief Protector of Aborigines 1923. This letter was in a box of correspondence: QSA-A/58734, 23/369. A total of seven pages of correspondence pertaining to this female applicant and her outcome: she was refused exemption. Location: Cloncurry. Date: 25 January, 19 February and 16, 23 March 1923.

³¹ Cuff et al. 1998: 273.

³² Knowing that Aboriginal people have been over-researched, especially by non-Indigenous researchers, I was very conscious of community protocols and the importance of anonymity and confidentiality in gathering and handling the data from interviews. Therefore, throughout the research and analysis, I strictly adhered to the principles of ethical research as set out in *Guidelines in ethical research in Indigenous studies*, AIATSIS 2000. Martin claims that non-Indigenous researchers usually conduct this kind of social research, as they tend to predominate in the field, Martin 2003. I believe that sharing a similar cultural background with the interviewees supported my research, as the participants felt they could freely discuss the culturally sensitive issues of impact and identity without the feeling of 'being judged'.

³³ Nancy married Jack Mittabong; they had one daughter, Gwendoline who only recently passed away in 2007. Nancy passed away in 2003 and Jack in 1991. Gwendoline was a widow for over 30 years and had no children.