

## Chapter 2

# Understanding the North–South Cultural Divide

**Abstract** While much of my family’s history is rooted in southern Australia, growing up in the north has given me a sense of cultural differences between northern and southern Australia. Looking deep into my own family history shines a light on these and I use this understanding to seek some reconciliation between the two. In this chapter, I’ll use three different stories spanning my distant *and* recent past to tease out the south-to-north drivers of the three cultural agenda outlined in [Chap. 1](#). First I explore the drivers for the resource exploitation agenda through my family’s earlier northern pioneers; teasing out the reasons for their migration from the south. To explore some of the origins of the resource preservation agenda, I also look at the transition of my immediate family from life in the south to life in the north through the experiences of my father. Finally, I set the scene for understanding some of southern Australia’s responses to the Indigenous rights agenda through my own experiences in Indigenous affairs in both the north and the south.

**Keywords** Resource decline · Northern migration · Race relations

### 2.1 From Southern Decline to Northern Bounty

Although rarely mentioned, one of the drivers of the south’s resource exploitation agenda for the north arises from natural resource declines in the once bountiful south. Few realise that this has been an ongoing theme since colonial settlement began in Australia. In researching my own early family history in Tasmania’s Launceston district, I was somewhat surprised to learn that pastoral resources there were already being depleted by the mid-1800s, leading to the departure of second and third generation Tasmanians to new pastoral lands in northern and central Queensland.

Much is known about the Tasmanian side of my mother’s family through the lineage of Samuel Lette (1821–1856). I understand that Samuel (my great, great, great grandfather) was from a landholding family in County Wexford, Ireland and

was the first in my direct family to migrate to Australia. The wider Lette family, featured by Kathy Lette in *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, became prominent pastoralists near Launceston from the mid-1840s (Lette 2010). By exploring this mob's history, I gained a sense of why many in the south yearn for unlimited northern development.

Family historians have it that my branch of the family emerged from Samuel's link to a convict servant called Catherine Little. Their prison-born child was the first of several generations of landless sea-farers and urban workers. Samuel, however, went on to marry Elizabeth Murray, the daughter of his pastoralist neighbour. While we understand that Samuel travelled to an early death in England, part of my family's northern story began with Elizabeth's re-marriage and the relocation of three of Samuel's five children to Clermont, a pastoral district in northern Queensland (Baxter 2002).

It was during a recent trip to the Evandale district near Launceston that I came to understand some of the reasons behind the Lette family's northern shift. I was with some Queensland mates who mentioned other well know north Queensland families that had shifted from around Evandale about the same time as the Lettes. It seems this early phase of domestic migration was made necessary by the rapid over-use of natural resources in northern Tasmania's meagre pastoral districts. As such, Samuel's children went on to become key pioneers in the new north Queensland frontier.

This is a common theme in the history of northern Australia, as early depletion of natural resources in the south became the basis for an opportunity-driven northern migration. In more recent years, I have seen entire groups of farmers migrate north from southern communities in decline. These families, often from places like rural Victoria or south west Western Australia, are the new pioneers who have opened up fresh agricultural areas in the north (e.g., around Mareeba and Emerald).

It seems likely that the competition for limited natural resources and associated resource decline has been a key driver in the call for northern development. The opportunities presented by fresh lands in the new frontier continue to beckon many from the south. However, while the Clermont Lettes went on to be long term pastoralists in that district, my branch of the family stayed in the urban south. With such a stark difference in family circumstances, one would think that the two divergent family paths would never cross again. It was to eventuate, however, that a bizarre reconnection would come in north Queensland some five generations later.

Part of the drive for me writing this book is my academic interest in regional development. I reckon we can build a stronger form of regionalism that can both create greater self-sufficiency *and* better link our regions to the outside world. Much of my work in this field emerged from a nation-wide research project set up under the inspired vision of Phil Price when he was CEO of Australia's Land and Water Research and Development Corporation. Phil understood that securing sustainability in the Australian landscape meant working at the regional scale. Driven by the flailing National Rangelands Strategy he commissioned three long-term 'experiments' in regional approaches to sustainability (ANZECC (Australian

and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council) and (ARMCANZ) Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia Joint Working Group 1996). Eventually, he settled on three different approaches based in the Goldfield's of Western Australia, the Western Plains of New South Wales and Queensland's Central Highlands, inclusive of the now Lette family-dominated Claremont district. I led the Queensland project.

While I'll be returning to the intent and purpose of the Central Highlands work in [Chap. 9](#), it is suffice to say here that I built lasting links with communities in the Highlands. This gave me some cause for concern a few years ago after a visit with my wife and kids to Brisbane's Exhibition. Entertainer James St James was playing out his unique brand of formula-driven stage hypnotism. While I find such shows tedious, my wife loves them. Her thrill is in watching others make fools of themselves, and she is drawn by the possibility she could prod me on-stage to be one of them. This time, I succumbed and took to the stage, but only after a quick scan of the crowd to make sure there was no one in the audience that I recognised. After a feeble attempt at letting myself be hypnotised, I was rudely ejected by St James as he despairingly referred to me as 'Old-Spice'. Being in my early 40s, I thought that was a bit harsh.

As I walked off stage I bumped headlong into the large, cross-armed frame of Keith Bettridge, the Mayor of the 900-person Jericho Shire. Keith was one of the more colourful characters I had worked with in the Highlands, and he chided me laconically. 'Allan' he scoffed, 'I didn't think you'd take on that sort of behaviour'. Hoping to disappear into the crowd, I somehow changed the subject and scuttled back to my seat. Some two years later, my mother (Val Dale) showed me a document she had had squirrelled away for many years. It was the first time I had ever seen full details about the descendants of Samuel Lette. The document clearly showed Keith and others I knew well in the Highlands and Charters Towers were Lette's direct descendants. I rang Keith to tell him the news. 'Allan' he said in his cheeky style when he answered the phone, 'are you still under that hypnotic spell!'

Mum's document had exposed others among my north Queensland friends as being family, but it also emphasised the cultural gulf between the two divergent Lette lineages. My line became asset-poor urban Australians in the south, and their mind-set diverged from those that remained in regional Australia. As one of the few in that line that grew up in northern Australia, however, I can see the strong connection and the pride that my northern cousins in the pastoral industry have for their country. They have been in the farming business for generations. There has never, however, been enough of the farm available to hand on to all the children. The consequence has been that many in the new generations tend to either move to the city or on to the next frontier.

Understanding our family history shows that, over 400 years, this pattern has taken us from rural England to rural Ireland to rural Tasmania to remote northern Queensland. With nowhere else to go (except perhaps into the Timor Sea) more recent generations have been building more intensive farms or just heading back south or east to the city. For many who moved back to the city, there is still a

hunger to see new resource frontiers developed. From this I can clearly see why many in the south might push for the further development of northern Australia.

Equally, I can easily see how, after generations of an urban existence in the south, a north–south or perhaps rural–urban disconnect has emerged between the branches of my family. In the following section, I will explore how my own family’s urban existence in the south shows how many come to subscribe to the resource preservation agenda and adopt a longing for the north’s wilderness values.

## 2.2 Towards Northern Solitude

While I’d never heard a religious word from my father’s lips, I often recall him referring to northern Australia and Far North Queensland in particular as ‘God’s Country’. It’s a common colloquialism you still hear in the north. Harry Dale Senior clearly felt a deep connection with north’s wildness; a connection forged on his way to the jungles of New Guinea during the closing stages of World War II. Like many young diggers, the trek north for training on the Atherton Tablelands and the coast north of Cairns was his first step into a very different world from a suburban upbringing in Australia’s southern capitals. Dad grew up in Kogarah on Sydney’s rapidly growing fringes. The emptiness one gets from growing up amid diverse bushland and market gardens as they are ruthlessly replaced by suburban banality is comically described by Clive James in his reminiscences of his own early life in Kogarah (James 1980). Indeed, as a young man, Dad moved even deeper into Sydney to live with his sister in a house below Mascot Airport’s flight path.

At the start of the war, Harry was working at a rope factory in Mascot. It was a protected industry and he wasn’t required to join up. Despite this, with characteristic speed repeated in two later conflicts, he joined the Militia as soon as he turned 18 in 1943. He later joined the regular army and served in the 24th Australian Infantry Battalion in New Guinea, Australia’s most northern territory, and the Solomons (Fig. 2.1).

In preparation for service, Harry trained on the Atherton Tablelands before being sent Bougainville. This initial connection with the north was to ultimately lead to a lifelong drive to revisit the north’s beauty and remote solitude. The Tableland’s tour-of-duty, a subsequent visit to Cairns on-route to the Korean War and years of jungle warfare in Bougainville and Malaya pre-set his longer term destiny to live in the wet tropical parts of northern Australia.

Bougainville was Harry’s first stint at jungle warfare. In mid 1944, the Australians took increasing responsibility in the campaign to oust the Japanese. Rather than just holding the enemy at bay, Australia’s political leaders decided that their forces would go on the offensive, thus making the campaign one of the most costly for Australia in the defence of the north. The push made little difference to the overall outcome of the war in the Pacific, leading it to be one of the most

**Fig. 2.1** Harry Dale Senior on Bougainville during World War II. *Source* Val Dale Collection



controversial of the war.<sup>1</sup> It was these gruelling war experiences in the humid Bougainville forests that first forged Dad's strong attachment to Australia's Wet Tropics. He returned to Sydney after the mopping up operations in New Guinea and the Solomons. Not long after meeting my mother in 1947, Harry started to drift north, returning to his father's home town of Brisbane. Only later did he make his way back to Sydney to ask Mum to marry him.

The call north came again as soon as the crisis in Korea emerged. He was either a sucker for punishment or a mateship junkie. It was indeed perhaps his continuing restlessness in the metropolitan south that made him re-enlist. He ended up a poster-boy among the first volunteers to enlist for Korea in August 1950. On departing Sydney on the *Changte* he wrote a series of letters to his sister. They chronicle his travels north and they include his recollection of a 'short but sweet' stop-over in Cairns. This stop-over seems to have been of great importance in Dad's life and it became another step in his commitment to return to the north for

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<sup>1</sup> Australian War Memorial Website ( <http://www.ww2australia.gov.au/lastbattles/shadows.html> ). Accessed 25/12/2013.



**Fig. 2.2** Harry Dale senior departing Cairns wharf on the *Changte* on his way to Korea in 1950. His experiences in the north provided a strong driver to re-enlist. *Source* Val Dale Collection

good. In perhaps my favourite family photo, he was in a buoyant mood on his departure from Cairns (Fig. 2.2).

Korea was a very difficult war for my father. His letters suggest that the cold was a real problem and that he suffered badly from frostbite. Like most diggers though, little was ever mentioned openly of the experience on his return. While the frostbite was no doubt the least of his worries, it seemed to be a harmless topic he could open up on. In fact one of the few things my father ever told me about his entire war service was to *never* get frostbite; making the tropics a good option for him. Until recently, I knew little of the influence Dad's war experience had on his drive to settle his family in northern Australia. Its embracing emptiness and natural integrity kept an old jungle-fighter in his comfort zone and allowed him to escape a far-too urban society. Indeed, it was only in recent years, well after his death, that I had any idea of the gruelling engagements faced in Korea by the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (3RAR). These included the poor odds they faced in the Battle of Kapyong. For their contribution in this action, 3RAR were awarded a US Presidential Citation.<sup>2</sup> The psychological legacies left behind were, however, hard for us to see and understand.

After returning from active service in Korea, Dad immediately re-enlisted *again* in Sydney in July 1953. He remained in the army till 1959, spending another two

<sup>2</sup> United States citation: 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (transcript), [www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/pow/korea/3rar\\_citation/](http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/pow/korea/3rar_citation/). Accessed 22/11/2013.

years in active service but based at Ingleburn (near Liverpool in Sydney). Mum and Dad eventually married in 1952, and when the first of my brothers (Terry) was born in 1953, they moved out to the sprawling western suburbs. During the later phase of the Malayan Emergency Mum and Dad were sent to be stationed at the Australian base at Butterworth in northern Malaysia with Terry and new son Harry Junior via Darwin. In that time 3RAR was on jungle patrol for long periods, and Dad returned with a fantastic collection of dozens of photos he had taken while on patrol.<sup>3</sup> This was perhaps one of the best photo collections of the Australians on patrol in Malaya and they gave me a sense of why the Wet Tropics beckoned my father on his return. As the Malayan emergency closed the family returned to western Sydney and Dad started the somewhat dreary experience of working in Cabramatta making flyscreens; a far cry from his previous life. He later started up his own screen repair business as the balance of the boys arrived: Glenn in 1962, me in 1965 and Paul in 1972.

With army service and baby making out of the way, and following the stress of a major heart attack in his late 40s, my father was set to finally return to the oft-imagined solitude and wilderness of the north. Clearly all of us as boys somehow shared his sense of the natural beauty in those distant lands. Dad eventually used the excuse that Harry Junior (a keen scuba diver) could go to James Cook University to do Marine Biology. I don't know that this was my brother's plan and Mum wasn't keen to leave Sydney. Eventually, Dad sought to woo her with promises of 'a cool brick house and all the fish she could want'. In fulfilling his long term dream to return to Far North Queensland, he sold the business and moved the family to Trinity Beach in 1975. The Beach remains our family's base to this day.

Dad soon got a job at Hanush's Cordials, but after working in hot and damp conditions for long periods, he had a relapse of the serious tinea that he had originally picked up somewhere in his jungle fighting days. This was the start of a decline in his health and he was too proud to apply for a TPI (Totally and Permanently Incapacitated) Pension. After leaving Hanush's, he started growing plants with driftwood backdrops for nurseries in Cairns. This was a job-come-pastime that, as kids, kept us in the bush and coastal country between Cairns and Mossman.

It was these frequent forays into the northern wilderness that kept Dad most connected to the essence of the north that he most loved; a unique mix of solitude, independent attitudes and an unavoidable connection to the natural world. It was perhaps one of the most relaxed periods in his somewhat stressful life. This lifestyle, and Dad's influence, certainly built my own personal commitment to making sure the north doesn't trash its natural values as the south has done to a significant extent.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian War Memorial Website ([www.awm.gov.au/atwar/emergency.asp](http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/emergency.asp)). Accessed 25/12/2013.



Unfortunately, my father died too young in December 1982; some three weeks after I had finished Senior at Cairns State High School. Having moved from Sydney after his first major heart attack but before his fatal second, he must have known the game was up. In that period, he had knowingly repositioned his family as northerners. It was the natural affection that my father had for the remote and isolated beauty of the north, however, that gives me a strong understanding of the desire of many in the urban south to protect what may loosely be called the north's wilderness values.

### 2.3 Southern Attitudes and Indigenous Rights

Another set of documents squirreled away by my mother showed that yet another Lette relative had immigrated to colonial Australia. Charles Lette went on to marry the daughter of one of Australia's most notorious *resource exploitationists*, Robert Towns. Towns was a legendary entrepreneur and suspected blackbirder based in Sydney.<sup>4</sup> While his name lives on in through the north Queensland city of Townsville, the time Towns spent there actually amounted to a measly three days.<sup>5</sup> While I have already discussed the rural-urban divergence of Samuel Lette's two families, the Town's connection makes for an even more interesting racial divergence within the family in later generations. Samuel Lette's grand-daughter (my great grandmother Florence Lette) married Francis Wilhellam a descendant of African-West Indians and Dutch farmers. Wilhellam was from Santa Cruz Island (now St Croix) and his marriage to Florence was an unusual union for the late 1800s.

The real implications of racial divisions and the way they played out in northern Australia in particular are well drawn out by Reynolds (2003). The implications for our family's future also became different once black heritage became a feature. Francis Wilhellam's daughter Emily (my grandmother) had a pretty tough life. She ended up institutionalised in facilities such as the Home of Hope for Friendless and Fallen Women run by George Ardill in Sydney. Her child (Clara) also grew up in these institutions. At the time, Ardill was a member of the NSW Aborigines Protection Association, and his aim was to produce 'useful' citizens of the State via structured domestic work and work placements external to his homes.<sup>6</sup>

After leaving the *Home of Hope*, Emily went on to marry my grandfather, Michael Quinsey, an Australian-born boot-maker of Irish parents. There was such

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<sup>4</sup> ABC Stateline Transcript. Townsville slavery. Broadcast 23/09/2005. Reporter—Mark Hides. [www.abc.net.au/stateline/qld/content/2005/s1467096.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/qld/content/2005/s1467096.htm). Accessed 25/12/2013.

<sup>5</sup> Chronological history of Townsville, 1770–1900, [www.townsville.qld.gov.au/townsville/heritage/Pages/chronology.aspx](http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/townsville/heritage/Pages/chronology.aspx). Accessed 22/11/13.

<sup>6</sup> Heather, R. 'Ardill, George Edward (1857–1945)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/ardill-george-edward-5048/text8413>. Accessed 22/11/2013.



a family desire to keep the two apart that Michael's sister drove him to join the Merchant Navy, keeping him in steamships plying the north coast of NSW. Despite this, the pair survived this pressure and eventually had nine children. Through all this, Mum and her sisters never knew about Emily's institution-born daughter Clara.

In the early late 1980s, I was spending a few months in Canberra doing record searches about the history of rural development projects at Aurukun, an Aboriginal community in Western Cape York Peninsula. Unbeknownst to me, Clara's grandson was living in Canberra and researching her veiled past as a 'black orphan'. After a few false starts, he discovered Clara's mother was Emily and that Emily had a second family after her life in the *Home of Hope*. From this connection, he contacted my mother. Following a call from Mum in Cairns, I was able to meet Clara's family. The family resemblances were immediately obvious, but Mum found the discovery of an unknown sister confronting. While my grandmother was not Indigenous, to me, however, having been involved in Indigenous affairs and knowing the fragmentation suffered by Indigenous families, the institutionalisation she had faced was something familiar to me.

Even my own knowledge about our African-West Indian heritage was something I stumbled upon when I first starting visiting Sydney and Canberra to access files and records for my doctoral research. Before this, I thought the wide spectrum of skin shades among my brothers was related to the relative amount of time each of us spent working outside. I had no inkling our background was anything but 'Anglo-Aussie'. The knowledge barriers crumbled on one of my early visits to Sydney, when I would often stay with my father's sister at Mascot. I remember her showing me through old family photos, passing briefly over one of a black woman standing with a white woman. The women in the photo looked like great mates. When my Aunt mentioned that it was a photo of my grandmother, with legendary ignorance, I asked who the black woman was. 'That *is* your Grandmother!' she replied with some surprise.

For the first time, I finally understood why, over the years, I'd drawn the odd race-related comments. These ranged from being called a 'lazy wog' at the school bus stop to being rejected as an 'Arab terrorist' while looking for a rental house. My wife and I travelled for some years to a regular Saturday night dance in country south-east Queensland. While it takes time to get to know people in any small town, we were often bemused by one small girl that would always stand well away and stare at me. After about a year, I asked her why she was always staring. I perhaps wasn't quite ready, however, for her somewhat insightful reply; 'because you're a nooger!' (Fig. 2.3).

Having previously drifted into work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs to better understand how people connect with their country, discovering my black heritage wasn't as much a bombshell as an interesting realisation. Things that had previously seemed a little odd suddenly made better sense, even though they had never registered with me as a real problem. What perhaps helped me deal with the new knowledge, however, was my own understanding of the perverse role of negative race relations in Australian society and the scale of the political

**Fig. 2.3** My grandmother Emily Quinsey at home in Rosebury in Sydney. *Source* Val Dale Collection



dilemma faced by Indigenous Australians. The knowledge I gained through the ‘grandmother photo’ and the reunion with Clara’s family gave me new insights into wider community attitudes about race.

Being a northerner, however, finding out these things while working in the south gave me a good sense of how differently people in the remote north and the urban south think about issues of race. While racial stereotypes are often held among white Australians right across the country, in the north’s multi-racial melting-pot, there is often a bizarre, almost comical, dualism going on. On the one hand, many white northerners can hold deep racial stereo-types. At the same time, however, they most often also offer qualified exceptions to those Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders that they have good relationships with (i.e., the ones they actually know).

In the south on the other hand, few people have substantial interactions with or real relationships with Indigenous Australians. Those in the south often lack substantive links to Indigenous culture, and unfortunately, this doesn’t help people to build a shared understanding of our common humanity or the great diversity of world views among Indigenous people. The end result is that many in the south,

both those supportive of or opposed to Indigenous rights, often cast their views on the altar of limited understanding. Either way, whether they are dealing with people and institutions in the north or the south of the country, life continues to be an uphill battle for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in northern Australia.

## 2.4 History's Slant on the North–South Culture Wars

So, my family has a southern Australian origin, while I grew up in the north. My exposure to my recent and more distant family history has also given me a stronger sense of the cultural divide between the northern and southern parts of Australia. As introduced in [Chap. 1](#), these cultural differences and the political processes that have set the stage for conflict between them represent the ‘north–south culture wars’. I decided to tease out the nature of this cultural divide via stories told through my own eyes and the eyes of my wider family. I feel we perhaps view things through a shared understanding of both the northern *and* southern Australian experience. As well as teasing out the essence of these cultural differences, I could also step the reader through the recent historical and political processes that underpin this cultural clash.

Unlike the politically driven black-white culture wars of the past two decades, I draw attention to the cultural differences between the north and south, not to further divide us, but to help reconcile the two for the benefit of the nation as a whole. In my view, the politically-motivated black–white culture wars simply drove another un-necessary wedge between black and white Australians and diverted our society away from more exciting new paths towards genuine reconciliation. Alternatively, getting the relationship between northern and southern Australia on the right footing offers all Australians great opportunities for the future.

In each of the stories in the following Part II of this book, I try to build a sense of the overarching culture of northern Australia. The stories outlined memorialise the stoic self-reliance and the strong sense of self-worth held by northern Australians, qualities absolutely derived from the north's economic and social remoteness from the south. They are also qualities that have emerged from life in a fundamentally different climate and a raw dependence on relatively less exploited natural resources. The stories have also been selected to tease out the nature and influence of the three cultural agendas from the south that have affected northern Australia's recent past.

Apart from its origins in resource declines in the south, the resource exploitation agenda has also been fed for generations by southern ‘fears’ about northern Australia, so well described by Henry Reynolds. These fears used to be based on the ‘empty’ north being perceived as a security risk from our Asian neighbours and refugees *and* on fears about the north's multi-cultural makeup. At the same time, southern Australian's have always seen the ‘new colonial’ opportunities the north presents for capitalists and workers alike. Over recent decades, the balance of these

perceptions has shifted from Australians battling a fear *of* Asia to us hoping to take advantage of market opportunities *in* Asia. Whatever the driver, there have always been calls for the same type of unlimited resource exploitation that has already caused massive degradation and the over-allocation of southern Australia's natural resources.

A classic representation of these changing cultural drivers in more recent years can be seen in ex-Prime Minister Howard's establishment of the Heffernan Committee. The Committee was established in response to drought's impact on the Australian economy.<sup>7</sup> Bill Heffernan (a Liberal Senator from the south) heartily called for agriculture to move from the climate change-wracked dry south to the mythical land of milk and honey, the wet north. With characteristic enthusiasm, such calls often cite the early predictions of climate scientists, suggesting parts of northern Australia will become even wetter under projected climate change scenarios. Tropical rains, however, just aren't like the rains from those gentle winter cold fronts in the south.

The resource preservation culture, on the other hand, has paradoxically emerged from economic maturation in the south. It is a cultural response to the perceived pillage of northern Australia's unique and relatively intact natural and cultural environment. Unfortunately, this southern Australian understanding of 'wilderness' can demonise certain people in the north Australian landscape (e.g., miners and pastoralists). It can also proffer feigned respect for Indigenous traditional owners, as at the same time, the agenda perhaps unwittingly seeks to limit Indigenous control over country. Some might characterise it as the south's new *enviro-colonialism*.

The final cultural driver, the south's response to northern Australia's Indigenous rights agenda, is confounded by the limited knowledge many southern Australian's have for Indigenous aspirations, history and culture. The south's response to northern Australia's Indigenous rights agenda combines the desire of some to limit the economic power of Indigenous people *and* the more liberal desire of many others to respect Indigenous rights and values. Both these assimilationist and more liberal (self-determination) responses to this agenda have sought Indigenous parity with southern Australians. Both, however, may have also had some disastrous economic and social consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. One agenda has been focused on reducing Indigenous power and control over natural resource use and the other has perhaps unwittingly contributed to Indigenous communities becoming chronic welfare traps.

These three cultural drivers from the south have underpinned the clashes between northern and southern Australia in recent history. As a consequence the north-south cultural divide has led to many social, economic and environmental casualties since the 1970s. My father was a southerner who fell in love with the north's culture and landscape before these culture wars began. Since the 1970s,

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<sup>7</sup> Northern Development Taskforce committee announced. [www.abc.net.au/site-archive/rural/wa/content/2006/s1912597.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/site-archive/rural/wa/content/2006/s1912597.htm). Accessed 22/11/2013.

however, his five sons, myself included, have all been deployed in various aspects of the north's greatest cultural battles. Through my eyes, the following chapters tell some of the more revealing stories from these battles.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-05596-1>

Beyond the North-South Culture Wars  
Reconciling Northern Australia's Recent Past With Its  
Future

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2014, XVIII, 148 p. 12 illus., 6 illus. in color., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-05596-1