

# Exclusion zones: Aboriginal Australians in Maralinga's atomic tests and Melbourne's *Argus* newspaper

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## Abstract

*At a time of industrial change, when newspapers were being amalgamated and shut down, and their economic base threatened by the advent of a new technology, television, how did Melbourne newspaper The Argus report on the British atomic weapons testing series at Maralinga, South Australia, from its announcement in 1955 to the newspaper's closure on January 19 1957, in particular regarding its representation of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the region? Employing the critical discourse analysis methodology of Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach, this paper shows that Aboriginal Australians were not part of the Maralinga picture until after another newspaper broke the Warburton Ranges Controversy story in January 1957, which revealed the devastating effect on nomadic Aborigines, both of being moved off their lands to make way for the tests and their starvation and radiation illness that ensued. It explores the social context of journalistic discursive practices, and the cultural context of journalists' and governments' handling of Aboriginal affairs and the Maralinga tests, as analytical contexts to the textual analysis of news reports. It finds that Aboriginal Australians accessing the 'restricted' Maralinga region in South Australia during the joint UK-Australia 'Buffalo' series of atomic weapons testing in late 1956 were absent from the Melbourne Argus's newspaper reports considering the atomic explosions, just as they were excluded from the Australian government's considerations in their dealings with the British government when planning and assessing the tests. This paper contributes to the literature on the representation of Aboriginal Australians in the Australian media, at a time of industrial change, and provides precise historical evidence of the enduring themes of exclusion, misrepresentation and ideological management of hegemonic construction.*

## Introduction

In the South Australian outback in late 1956, at a place renamed Maralinga for the purpose, the British government exploded the four-strong 'Buffalo' test series of atomic bombs. In the Cold War period, in the aftermath of World War 2, Britain was intent on developing atomic bomb technology, and looked to Australia for testing grounds. It found a willing facilitator in anglophile Prime Minister Robert Menzies. Following some initial tests on the Monte Bello islands, Britain wished to establish a permanent testing ground. Maralinga in South Australia was identified as suitable, and the project was announced triumphantly by Supply Minister Howard Beale on May 16, 1955:

England has the bomb and the know-how; we have the open spaces, much technical skill and a great willingness to help the Motherland.

(McClelland, 1985, par. 12.5.14.)

This quote is telling, both regarding the subservient relationship of Australia to Britain at the time, and the official presumption of 'open spaces', apparently uninhabited, in which it would be suitable to explode atomic bombs.

This paper explores how the Melbourne *Argus* newspaper reported on the Buffalo series of late 1956, in relation to the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area. It contributes to the literature on the representation of Aboriginal Australians in the Australian media, including at a time of media industrial change. It provides precise historical evidence of the enduring themes of exclusion, misrepresentation and ideological management of hegemonic construction, where ideology is the 'shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups' (Giddens, 1997, p583), and hegemony is the societal consent achieved by the presentation (by civic institutions, such as newspapers for example) of this ideology as common sense.

During the decade or so prior to the Buffalo series of atomic tests, the Aboriginal inhabitants of the Maralinga area were progressively dispossessed of their lands. Ooldea Soak, a traditional, regionally vital, camping ground and well in the area, was all but destroyed by the construction and use of the transcontinental railway (Yalata and Oak Valley Communities & Mattingley, Christobel, 2009, pp14-15). A mission established at the site was closed without warning on June 24, 1952, and the Aboriginal residents abruptly and haphazardly expelled (Yalata et al, 2009, p27; Brady 1999, p3). Some were transported to the official resettlement spot at Yalata, but many others – an unspecified number – scattered to reunite with family and friends all over the region. The traditional owners continued to have a close relationship with their lands in the Maralinga region, and at the time of the tests they accessed the area for travel and ceremonial purposes (Yalata et al, 2009; Brady, 1999; Palmer, 1999).

Australia had talks with the UK about the testing of nuclear weapons in the South Australian outback as far back as 1946. Objections at that time concerning the possible ill effects on the local Aboriginal people, including from Dr Charles Duguid and Dr Donald Thompson, were ignored. (Yalata et al, 2009; Duguid, 1957). In 1947 Walter MacDougall was given the lone task of ensuring the 100,000 square kilometre area was free of nomadic Aborigines during the tests. MacDougall came into repeated and intensifying conflict with project authorities for raising the issue of Aboriginal welfare. The nature of this conflict was exemplified in what the Royal Commission Report calls 'one of the most telling of all statements to come before the Royal Commission'. The Department of Supply's chief scientist, William Butement, upon hearing in a memorandum that MacDougall could go to the press about these matters, wrote,

Your memorandum discloses a lamentable lack of balance in Mr McDougall's outlook, in that he is apparently placing the affairs of a handful of natives above those of the British Commonwealth of Nations.  
(McClelland, 1985, par. 8.4.38)

A report MacDougall made in August 1956 – immediately preceding the Buffalo series – that 1000 Aborigines were in the area and that numbers were increasing due to favourable conditions, was ignored. (Yalata et al, 2009, pp42-43.) *The Report of the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia* details a great number of reported sightings of Aborigines in the area that were ignored, and an official deliberate misinformation strategy of telling the press, should they ask, that patrols showed no Aborigines to be in the area (McClelland, 1985, chapter 8).

In 1959, 21 months after the final test had been completed, 'MacDougall reported that there were still Anangu living far inside the Prohibited Zone' (Yalata et al, p 38).

The Melbourne *Argus's* newspaper reports in 1956 about the Buffalo series of atomic explosions did not consider the possibility or reality of Aborigines accessing their traditional lands in the

restricted zone. There is a large body of research identifying the enduring journalistic practice of favouring official and expert sources (Crouse, 1973; Sigal 1973; Gans, 2003). In the Maralinga case, this manifested in expert opinion and official government statements being initially reported uncritically and without analysis by reporters working from the Melbourne newsroom or embedded in seclusion at Maralinga.

Lindy Woodward (1984) analysed the *Adelaide Advertiser's* coverage of the lead-up to the first Maralinga test. At the time, pronouncements in favour of nuclear power were coming 'thick and fast'.

Journalists had, as now, an important role in deciphering those pronouncements, but when 'the experts' declared that the tests were totally safe and crucial to peace, the Australian media took them at their word.

(Woodward, 1984, p18.)

The tone of the Melbourne *Argus's* coverage of the Buffalo series of atomic tests at Maralinga, from their planning to their execution and aftermath, followed a trajectory of entirely positive reports in the lead-up to the first test, to cautious, to outright critical. It was only coinciding with the third phase, the outright critical – following the Warburton Ranges Controversy in January 1957 (about the devastating effect the atomic program had had on nomadic Aborigines in the region) – that the effect on Aboriginal Australians became part of the newspaper's coverage.

The anti-nuclear movement was growing at home and abroad. *The Report of the Royal Commission* details the UK and Australian governments' concerns that public opinion be kept onside to ensure the test site could be used for another 10 years. To this end, the stakeholders devised a plan to court newspaper editors – for example, to give them privileged access to the site – to help make them predisposed to providing positive coverage (McClelland, 1985, chapter 12).

Media discourse involves hidden power relations (Fairclough, 2001, p41) in that source selection – that is, who gets to be heard in a media report – is all but predetermined by routine journalism practices and, less obviously, that the perspective adopted is usually that of the powerful (Fairclough, 2001, p42; Gans, 2003, p48). Sourcing practices shape the way news is constructed, which is why critical discourse analysis as a tool can unpack how this works to structure representation.

Newsroom practice has an effect on the order of discourse – on the production process and the news product. 'How discourses are structured in a given order of discourse, and how structurings change over time, are determined by changing relationships of power at the level of the social institutions or of the society' (Fairclough, 2001, p25).

The discourse in question – the representation by officials, experts and the newspaper of the Maralinga testing being a positive exercise, causing no harm to anybody – eventually fractured. A West Australian MP, William Grayden, tabled the cross-party *Report of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into Native welfare conditions in the Laverton-Warburton Range Area* in State Parliament on December 12, 1956, which linked the destitution of starving Aboriginal people in the Warburton Ranges to their having been moved off their traditional lands to make way for the weapons testing.

Media uptake was slow, but following *The Tribune* breaking the story on January 9, 1957, other outlets, including *The Argus*, reported on it. Some parliamentarians and journalists criticised the

report as exaggerated – most notably for this paper Rupert Murdoch, who ran editorials in his Perth and Adelaide newspapers disputing the veracity of the report's findings (McGrath and Brooks, 2010, p120).

Murdoch bought *The Argus*, which had been owned by the left-leaning London Mirror group, in January 1957, and closed it down. *Argus* staff were taken by surprise (Porter, 2003; 'So now it's goodbye', 1957). It published its last edition on Saturday January 19, 1957. Within a fortnight Murdoch filed a news report for the *Adelaide News* which asserted unequivocally that 'no aborigines in the Central Australian reserves are dying of thirst or starvation – or disease' (Murdoch, 1957). Murdoch's report has been much-criticised, both at the time and since, for being baseless and misleading (WCTU 1957; McGrath and Brooks, 2010, p120).

## Background contexts

The fact that Murdoch did this – both closed the critical *Argus* and swiftly published a report disputing Aboriginal disadvantage – was highly significant given the industrial, technological, political and cultural contexts of the time. 'In 1956, newspapers were the primary vehicle through which the [Australian] public learned about news' (Tiffen 2010, p345). However, the new technology of television was becoming widely available in Australia near the end of 1956, in time for that year's Melbourne Olympics. By autumn 1958, 20 per cent of households in Sydney and Melbourne had television sets (Holmes, 1958, p54).

Although the Australian population had doubled in the 50 years to 1953, the number of mastheads had declined by a third. There were four big newspaper mergers between 1946 and 1959, pointing to an oligopolistic trend (Mayer, 1964, p31), with Murdoch's Melbourne-based Herald and Weekly Times controlling an estimated 43 per cent of Australia's newspapers by 1960 (Karmel and Brunt, 1962, p63, cited in Mayer, 1964 p31). Tiffen puts HWT's 1956 proportion as 'roughly half the metropolitan daily circulation' (Tiffen, 2010, p348).

During the period under examination, late 1955 to early 1957, Aboriginal Australians did not yet have citizenship rights. The corrective referendum would take another 10 years to materialise. They were also subject to an official government policy of assimilation, or 'the current trend towards Europeanisation' (Berndt, 1957), which sought to eradicate traditional customs and languages and move Aboriginal Australians from traditional lifestyles to the lifestyles of white Australia. This was reflected in the resettlement of nomadic Aborigines from the Maralinga region over a period of time prior to the tests, and the subsequent official assurances to Britain that there were no Aboriginal Australians living in the area (McClelland, 1985, chapter 8).

There was a huge amount at stake with the Buffalo trials. The issue of Aborigines accessing the prohibited zone, should it have become publicly known, would have been politically very inconvenient. Britain was intent on developing atomic capability and Australia was intent on helping it to do so. Behind the scenes, Britain worked to have one of its own scientists – Sir Ernest Titterton, newly appointed as Chair of Nuclear Physics to the Australian National University – installed as Australia's scientific expert safety advisor (McClelland, 1985, par. 2.1.27). This conflict of interest was unexplored in the news reports under examination in this paper.

The modern Australian media has been shown to deal with Aboriginal issues in a consistently unsatisfactory, often clearly racist, way. For example, Indigenous Australians are seldom sources in news reports – that is, reporters seldom go to them for comment or information, even in stories concerning them. In the rare cases where they are sources – where journalists do

mention them – they are not actually quoted (Jakubowicz 1994; Meadows 2001; Bacon 2005). This renders them peripheral to the story.

Australia was more overtly racist during the 1950s than today and Australian newspapers in the 1950s were even worse regarding Indigenous representation than they are today. The exclusion of Aboriginal voices as sources in news reports, even when the reports were about them, was evidently a routine journalistic practice. However, regarding Maralinga, in *The Argus* prior to January 1957 there were no reports about them. Aboriginal Australians were not only rendered mute, they were rendered invisible.

It can be argued that the potential ill effects of the tests on servicemen's health was not considered in the news reports, and therefore that the reports did not just disregard the ill effects on the Aboriginal people but on all Australians. However, the news reports, while including mention of the servicemen's involvement – albeit without reference to the health and sickness issues – did not mention the Aboriginal people at all.

## Research approach

The Trove newspaper database was searched for *Argus* reports about the Maralinga tests – from the announcement of the Buffalo series in May 1955 to the newspaper's closure shortly after the series conclusion in January 1957 – resulting in 19 newspaper articles, which became the primary data set this study explores.

Taking a grounded theory approach (Bryman, 2008, p542), potential indicators were identified during analysis of the data as a means of theory generation. Coding was then devised and applied through the process of labelling, separating, compiling and organising the indicators.

From this process, five themes emerged as most common across the reports: the dominance and uncritical use of expert and official sources; the 'safety' assurance that Australian scientists would have to give the go-ahead before any tests were carried out; emphatic language being employed as a rhetorical device in hegemonic construction to minimise safety concerns; Aboriginal Australians being notably absent from the reports prior to January 1957; and a political tussle over state/federal responsibility for the Warburton Ranges situation in January 1957.

Norman Fairclough's dialectical relational critical discourse analysis approach, which is both a theory and methodology, excavates the construction of the news reports via close textual analysis of them with reference to the social and cultural contexts of their production. Its application exposes how journalistic discursive practices in conjunction with the external socio-cultural context shaped the news reports' exclusion of Aboriginal Australians.

Fairclough devised a framework for discourse analysis that has three levels of analysis: text, discourse practice and social practice. The analysis on each level involves description, interpretation and explanation – with description and interpretation being at times indistinct, with both the text's production and the interpreter's interpretation 'being embedded in a wider social practice' (Fairclough 1992, p198).

Linguistic phenomena such as news reports are vehicles and constructors of ideology and meaning. 'News as a form of culture incorporates assumptions about what matters, what makes sense, what time and place we live in, and what range of considerations we should take seriously' (Schudson, 2003, p190).

Contextual factors such as *The Argus's* closure, including its timing and nature, and the traditional owners' perspective on Maralinga, were uncovered by research beyond the news reports – that is, archival searches and reading of relevant books, academic articles and conference papers.

The nineteen *Argus* reports about the Maralinga atomic tests, between their announcement in September 1955 and the newspaper's closure in January 1957, are detailed in the following table:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Page number (and article type)</b>	<b>Headline</b>
13/09/1955	p1 (news report)	New atom test here soon – but no H-Bombs
27/04/1956	p8 (news report)	New A-missile will make jets 'harmless toy'
20/06/1956	p3 (news report)	A blonde bombshell blew up Maralinga...
21/06/1956	P1 (news report)	A-cloud adrift, but no danger
25/06/1956a	p4 (editorial)	Fear in the wind
25/06/1956b	p5 (news report)	We're right in the path of atomic rains!
26/06/1956	p4 (editorial)	BRIEF us next time!
29/06/1956	p4 (letter)	Stop these bomb tests
25/07/1956	p4 (editorial)	The winds of fear
15/08/1956	p5 (news report)	A-bomb tests 'will be safe'
25/08/1956	p1 (news brief)	Animals in A-test
28/08/1956a	p4 (interview)	Atom bombs and rain - blasts DO cause crazy weather
28/08/1956b	p16 (sports page)	They'll test atom tests
29/08/1956	p5 (news brief)	Blast!
12/10/1956	P5 (news report)	Children Cry as Bomb Rocks School
16/01/1957	p4 (opinion)	We all share the blame for this...
17/01/1957	p4 (editorial)	Black mark: the horrible truth
18/01/1957	p4 (letters)	Give all aid to the W.A. Natives
19/01/1957	p8 (news report)	'We didn't drive out natives' - says Beale

*Source:* compiled from The National Library of Australia's Trove database

Some other reports from January 1957 about the Warburton Ranges Controversy but which did not mention the atomic tests have been excluded from this list.

This critical discourse analysis comes from a critical realist perspective, having that news reports both reflect and affect the wider cultural context. Journalists' reporting is evidence of discourse, and contributes to that discourse. Intertextuality, where one discourse genre – a political statement, for example – shows up in or gives rise to another, such as a news report, is evidence of a discourse chain (Fairclough, 1992).

The language and structure of the news articles, including source selection, headlines and representation were examined. Particular attention was paid to whether Aboriginal Australians were mentioned or quoted in the news reports.

## Revealing moments

Fairclough recommends a data selection strategy which focuses on moments of crisis: 'These are moments in the discourse where there is evidence that things are going wrong.' He recommends this because, 'Such moments of crisis make visible aspects of practices which might normally be naturalised' (Fairclough, 1992, p230).

It is clear from analysis of the data set that *The Argus* prior to the Warburton Ranges Controversy did not consider the possible ill effects of the tests on any Aboriginal inhabitants of the region. Three 'moments' illustrate this.

### Moment 1: A unique news brief

Out of the 15 news reports prior to 1957, only one raised the issue of Aborigines in relation to the Maralinga tests. Crucially, this report was strikingly atypical – not only in its subject matter, but also in its placement and its construction. As evidence of a discursive practice, both in terms of what it shows and what it hides, this oddly edited 70-word news brief ('They'll test atom tests') which was buried in the sports news on page 16, on Tuesday August 28, 1956, requires close examination.

Firstly, as a news story it is very much out of place on the sports pages. Under its own subheadline, 'They'll test atom tests', it is bizarrely tagged onto the end of a longer story about test cricket.

It could be surmised that it was placed there in error, a compositor thinking it was a cricket story, but that is questionable with the presence of the word 'atom' in the headline clearly denoting its subject. That leaves open the puzzle as to how it ended up on this page. It could be an attempt by someone in the production process to get the news into the paper in spite of organisational values that would not deem it worthy – as evidenced in the editorial ('Brief us next time!', 1956) which is examined elsewhere in this paper. Or it could be a misplacement, illustrative of the dismissive way Indigenous issues are dealt with by the Australian media in general, then as now.

Secondly, the story's construction points to it having originally been either a much longer feature story, or to it having been an unedited news story that escaped the routine production process. It has a remarkable delayed intro – a device normally reserved exclusively for a feature story. A delayed intro is a technique for building suspense, or setting the scene. It is not routine journalistic practice to have a delayed intro on a news story. A delayed intro filed by a reporter for a news story would normally be rewritten or deleted (Hodgson 1987, p81; also Ricketson 2004; White 1995; Hicks 1993).

Routine news-writing practice dictates that the lead paragraph or intro of a news story should contain the essential information required for readers to grasp the story immediately and easily – that is, ideally, the where, when, what, who, how and why of the story (Hodgson 1987, p79; also White 1995; Hicks 1993). However, the lead paragraph of this snippet tells us very little:

ALICE SPRINGS. Monday. Mr Jack Grayden, a member of the WA Legislative Council, his brother David and journalist Tony Zanetti, arrived in Alice Springs last night after a 1700-mile journey from Perth.

It is only by the end of the second and final paragraph that readers are told what this story is about:

Mr Grayden said their object would be to try to assess what damage might occur in the native way of life in remote sections of the Gibson Desert following the forth-coming atomic tests at Maralinga.

As with most of the reports under examination, there is no byline – no journalist is identified as the author. A quick search on Trove, however, revealed that at this time, Gordon Williams, an *Argus* journalist and passionate advocate for Aboriginal rights, reported regularly from Alice Springs. Had he filed a longer story that was not given a run on the news or features pages? Had someone added it, unedited and hastily, to this sports page by accident? Or by design?

Whatever the reason for this odd placement, the effect is of this story, about Aboriginal welfare, being buried. Another effect is that it highlights the absence of any such consideration in the other news reports.

### **Moment 2: Faith in 'experts' eroded**

In the news reports under examination, hegemony is constructed then undermined. There is a discernible shift from implicit acceptance of officials' and experts' assurances that there were no health risks to the tests, to explicit criticism of officials' and experts' decisions and the resultant health risks.

As the first reports emerged in *The Argus* about the impending tests at Maralinga, experts' opinions and safety assurances were delivered to readers uncritically. Indeed the reports' lexical choices often served to further minimise concerns. For example, regarding assurances from Supply Minister Howard Beale, the paper reported

*None* of the 1956 tests would exceed in power the explosion of a few thousand tons of TNT and some would be *smaller*

and referred later to a '*baby* atom bomb' (emphases added, 'New atom test here soon', 1955).

There were also some humorous or facetious reports about the tests, pointing to a certain lack of gravity attached to them initially ('A blonde bombshell blew up Maralinga'; 'Blast!').

This discourse then began to shift in tone to uncertainty when, just prior to the first Maralinga test, a radioactive cloud passed over WA and Queensland from an exploratory test on the Monte Bello Islands.

Presupposition, connotation and exclusion are some of the linguistic textual features of note in a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Richardson 2007). In the editorial 'BRIEF us next time!' on June 26 1956, under the subhead, 'THE PLAN', the editorial says,

The contaminated cloud from last Tuesday's 'successful' atomic blast at Monte Bello, off the West Australian coast, was SUPPOSED to drift seaward.

The use of quote marks connotes lack of commitment to the official line that the test was 'successful', and the capitalisation of 'supposed' highlights the failure of this aspect of the plan.

The column asks: 'What safeguards, if any, will prevent radioactive fallout in populated areas after the forthcoming atomic tests at Maralinga?' This is interesting for a couple of reasons: firstly, it shows faith being eroded in the possibility of 'safeguards', and secondly, by putting a focus on 'populated' areas, it presupposes the existence of unpopulated areas; that is, it disallows the possibility that there are nomadic people in the region of the tests.



Further, this editorial is only concerned with the cloud over Queensland – but the cloud moved over northern WA and the Northern Territory before it arrived in Queensland, where radioactive rain was measured. As is also evident in the news story ‘A-cloud adrift’, which makes reference to the cloud passing across a presupposedly uninhabited ‘Dead Centre’, this editorial presupposes there was no one in the cloud’s path. Aboriginal Australians are not part of this picture.

The editorial concludes with the concern that

An atomic bomb, said to be the size of the one dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, will be exploded in a few months at Maralinga – only 43 miles from the Transcontinental railway and 550 miles from Adelaide. A terrible responsibility rests on the authorities concerned to make sure the ‘charged’ clouds do not stray.

Being an editorial and thus the de facto ‘voice’ of the newspaper, this editorial illustrates *The Argus’s* organisational values in its coverage of this issue. There is no mention of the Aboriginal Australians of the region. They are excluded, hence to *The Argus*, they don’t matter.

The assumptions about what mattered regarding Maralinga were to be challenged dramatically. What came to matter to the public and some sections of the press clashed overtly with what mattered to the British and Australian political and military stakeholders, as illustrated by the next example.

### **Moment 3: The Warburton Ranges Controversy and its aftermath**

It was only after the Warburton Ranges Controversy broke in the wake of the WA select committee report that linked the Maralinga tests to the plight of destitute, sick and starving Aborigines in the ranges that the tone of *The Argus’s* coverage of the Maralinga tests changed to critical and suspicious.

In an extraordinary turnaround, on Wednesday January 16, 1957, on page 4, the prominent editorial page (incidentally, that day’s editorial was not on this issue), Gordon Williams – the campaigning journalist mentioned above – wrote a long accusatory opinion piece (‘We all share the blame for this’, 1957). He charged the white Australian populace with complicity in the destitution of Aboriginal Australians, saying White Australia ignored the issue, which he claimed he and others had been writing about for years. Williams draws a clear connection between the Maralinga project and the destitution discovered in the Warburton Ranges. He also criticises the effects of mining – ‘searches for minerals that will help to stabilise our economy’ – in dispossessing Aboriginal Australians of their lands, and also points to the fundamental role of ‘the economics of the cattle industry’ in having Aborigines moved to reserves to provide accessible, cheap labour.

He wrote that white Australians (‘we – you and I’) had allowed themselves be ‘fobbed off with inquiries, explanations, denials’ about the causes of ‘the black fellow problem’:

Mostly the white population around the areas where these doleful conditions exist accept them as part of the blackfellow problem, forgetting quite comfortably that there was no blackfellow problem until the white man created it.

The next day, January 17, 1957, there was an editorial on the issue (‘Black mark: the horrible truth’) calling on the Federal Government to make funds available to help the Aborigines of the Warburton Ranges, and again drawing links with the Maralinga tests. This was accompanied by

an editorial cartoon entitled 'The bone', showing a dying Aborigine in the desert being offered from a white hand a bone inscribed 'White man's apathy'.

This was followed on Friday January 18, 1957, by a letters page with the banner headline 'Give all aid to the WA natives', underneath which were letters critical of the atomic testing that drove Aborigines from their tribal lands, calling on governments to 'stop the wrangling about State or Federal responsibility towards these people' and questioning the financial cost and environmental safety of the tests. One letter urges *The Argus*: 'Will you please keep up your agitation for a better deal for the Australian aborigine?'

That day's *Argus* also has a lead story on page 8 (headlined 'MLA hits out at critics: "Act quickly to save the natives"') about William Grayden's defence of the select committee report against critics 'who had never seen conditions out on the native reserve'.

The very next day, Saturday January 19, 1957, to the total surprise of its staff (Porter, 2003), *The Argus* was published for the last time. It had been shut down by its new proprietor, Rupert Murdoch (Mayer 1964). The only article referencing the Warburton controversy in this final edition was an interview with Supply Minister Howard Beale – who denied any Federal (as opposed to State) responsibility for moving Aborigines off their lands.

## Conclusion

By focussing on the three moments examined above, in line with Fairclough's recommended data selection strategy which focuses on moments of crisis for the naturalised aspects of practices they make visible (Fairclough, 1992, p230), this paper shows that *The Argus* failed until January 1957 to alert its readers to the existence of and danger to nomadic Aborigines in the area of the Maralinga tests.

Goshorn and Gandy (1995) write that how race issues are framed in the news,

[M]ay influence public support or rejection of public policy... [T]he ways that stories are framed will influence how causes, consequences and options will be understood.  
(Goshorn and Gandy, 1995, p134)

The Aborigines' plight made a dramatic entrance in January 1957's news pages following the Warburton Ranges report, which posed very inconvenient questions about the Maralinga tests at a time when public opinion was turning against them. This coverage was sustained for a week before the newspaper was shut down.

This new advocate for Aboriginal Australia was silenced in a precarious and fast-changing media environment by a new, young proprietor Rupert Murdoch who, within a fortnight, printed in the *Adelaide News* an inadequately researched and much disparaged news report refuting the Warburton report's central concern: that nomadic Aboriginal people from the Maralinga region had been very badly affected by the 'Buffalo' series of atomic weapons tests in the outback of South Australia in 1956.

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