Cole, Anna; Haskins, Victoria; Paisley, Fiona (eds.), 2005. *Uncommon Ground. White Women in Aboriginal History*. xxxi + 279pp. ISBN 0 85575 485 0, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.
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> 'common ground' – a point accepted or shared by each of two or more conflicting or differing parties (*gemeinsame Interessen, Eigenschaft*)
> 'uncommon' – out of the ordinary, unusual (*selten, ungewöhnlich*)
> 'ground' –1) the solid surface of the earth 2) an area of knowledge or subject of discussion or thought (*Erdboden, Terrain*) (*The New Oxford English Dictionary of English*)

Vicki Grieves, an Indigenous historian from Worimi, mid-north coast NSW, stated during a panel discussion on the theme of 'Perceptions of Indigeneity: Continuity and Change' at the 8th biennial EASA conference 'ReVisions of Australia: Histories, Images, Identities' in Debrecen, Hungary, in September last year (2005), that Aboriginal people have yet to come to terms with the recent history of colonial conquest, but the problem is that this history has not fully been discovered yet. (The scholarship in Aboriginal History is only about 30 years long.) We are, she said truly, only at the tip of an iceberg in terms of discovering the "truth " of our past and this lies in the exploration of regional and local, individual and family histories.

This volume offers a jigsaw piece for the reconstruction of Australia's colonial history. In fact, the necessity of challenging the 'common ground' of written history in Australia is stressed at the very beginning by a quote from Gayatri Spivak (1986): "Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?" This seems to be the contributors' maxim, but not only in order to unveil silenced history, particularly that of female and Aboriginal voices, but also to scrutinise the intertwined histories of coloniser and colonised, which thus lead to 'uncommon ground'. Such ground, Vicki Grieves explained, that includes meaningful, intimate and complimentary relationships across the race divide, may be more common than we have been led to believe. Especially, the chosen methodology of a biographical approach highlights the linkage of 'white' and Indigenous individuals in the course of history. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous contributors are lecturers, PhD students and a post-doctoral fellow from various fields including Gender Studies, History, Anthropology, Aboriginal and Australian Studies, an Indigenous academic currently focussing on Kimberly art, and an Indigenous art and cultural director, who share an interest in feminist, postcolonial and literary history, biographical studies, anthropology, race relations and social justice issues. The book's focus is on settler colonialism, white woman and Aboriginal history. It consists of four parts: 'On the home front', 'Shared struggle', 'Public lives' and "Knowing' the Aborigines'. The book is well structured; the authors constantly refer back to their set focus on domestic lives, which they consider a crucial part of the colonial enterprise, the intersection of race, class and gender and the political context. All twelve chapters are richly annotated, some contain illustrations, and use of terminology is carefully explained.

Editors and authors critically reflect on their 'authorial' position and carefully place this book in contemporary political and academic debate on how to deal with Aboriginal history. Reflections on the three female 'white' editors' motivations to write this book are therefore stated at the beginning of the book. Anna Cole stresses the importance of desegregating the arena of Aboriginal History in order to write 'a history of interaction, of relationship' and she quotes Carole Ferrier, who has argued that "[t]he problems of speaking about people who have been constructed in the dominant discourse as 'other' cannot…be a pretext for not doing so" (xv).Victoria Haskins discovered that her great-grandmother had been active in the Aboriginal rights movements in the 1930s. However, the fact that nobody in her family remembered this story serves as an illustrative example of Australia's historical experience of 'whiteness'. Fiona Paisley asserts that the past is not disconnected from the present and neither are its actors; therefore she seeks to move away from ignorance and move towards active engagement with history. Nevertheless, the contributors' methodological approach not merely serves to legitimate their positions as white women in Aboriginal history, but rather by dealing with private as well as with public interactions of white women and Aboriginal people, the complexity of issues, of identities as well as of words and actions is highlighted; in fact, the volume is a complex read. Consideration of the delicacy of Aboriginal history with respect to blame, responsibility and complicity, led Cole et al. to focus on a concept of 'whiteness as positionality' meaning "to squarely address the location of white women within their relationships with Aboriginal people, and within Aboriginal history generally" (xxii). Moreover, power relations in which white women possess more empowerment than Aboriginal women are the result of colonial and personal structures. In the same vein, the editors face the challenge of representing the complexity of historical intercultural relations and at the same time of avoiding appropriation of a history that is not their own without denying structural racial inequalities. In this respect the role of the author to his/her subject (matter) is constantly reflected; thus a new way of writing and understanding history is intended to be achieved. Sources include family recollections (in effect what is and is not remembered), oral history and missionary archives. The contributors are aware of the fact that their careers are an outcome of white women's concern with the rights and status of Aboriginal women during settler colonialism –their investigation topic.

Although white women were more empowered than Aboriginal woman, they nevertheless had to face experiences of inequality in the context of imperial history. These women were not powerful in the imperial scheme of things: as it is put in the preface "[white women's] concern for Aboriginal people, a readiness to participate in their administration or a desire to contribute to their 'uplift' were welcomed by governments only as long as the women who felt this way did not advocate a change in policy, criticise Australian governments overseas, or support Aboriginal people against authorities" (xxiv). Furthermore, white women's position within settler colonialism in itself was a fragile and dependent one and their work and achievements described were sometimes of an ambiguous nature. As the colonial process is a dynamic one which still affects the present and since "the idea of indigenous 'response' or 'resistance' to an imperialist initiative no longer captures the dynamic of either side of the encounter (between Aboriginal and white women) (xxv)", the biographical studies in this volume depict some of these encounters between 'colonizer and colonized' as moments in time and space. Finally, a biography is tinted by the author's interpretation of events, his/her own autobiography as well as a shifting reassessment of the past in the light of current political debates. Two chapters on Daisy Bates (notably) illustrate this inevitability.

This volume is of particular value in the current political climate of stereotyping and polarising Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history. It highlights possibilities of human intimacy within the framework of racial, gender and class inequalities. The book includes previously unknown figures as well as more prominent white women, public as well as private figures – outstanding, 'remarkable' women including activists, writers, and workers in missionary groups and administration, as well as leading Aboriginal female activists who worked with contemporary white feminists. Moreover, it has been a deliberate choice to focus on white women rather than men to address an imbalance in historical record.

'On the home front' (Part One) contains biographical studies of white women working in so-called Aboriginal homes, probably one of the most well known and at the same time darkest chapters in Aboriginal Australian history. But then again it does not seem to be that well known and a tendency to stereotype historical experiences is recognized and counteracted. What also becomes evident is an occasional contradiction between private and public good intentions in order to save the 'doomed race', which, in effect, turned out to be based on assumptions of 'white' superiority. Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton, the 'light in the darkness' as the heading of the first chapter has it, represents how a shifting of positions can occur. She initially worked as a missionary and in opposition to church, government and her own Christian belief she sided with the Aboriginal people in order to further their empowerment. She voiced her strong opposition to the prevailing 'blame the victim' mentality. A strong courageous woman ahead of her times, a 'woman of the word' nevertheless silenced until now.

Chapter two is about Jeannie Parsons Smith, a missionary's wife, who became 'the mother of the [Singleton Aboriginal Children's] Home' (chapter heading). The Home became her project rather than that of her husband. The latter being the one who was officially responsible though. Christine Brett Vickers, the great-granddaughter of Jeannie Smith and author of this chapter, stresses the importance of telling stories like that of her great-grandmother, despite having to face the hardships and overwhelming human suffering involved, because "they are part of our formation (30)." Moreover, stories like the one of Jeannie Smith highlight the significance of interactions between Indigenous people and white women often cut along a racial divide through official policy.

Joan Kingsley-Strack (Ming), the 'heroine' of chapter three, personifies the 'well-heeled' urban upper-middle class, who took Indigenous 'apprentices' for domestic work in the 1920s. Motivated by her own experiences, she spoke against the silence of those families who profited from the servitude of the Stolen Generation. Mary, Ming's maid is part of the traumatic history of 'indentured domestic service'. Ming's and Mary's relationship is one of mutual dependence. Although both reflect on the complexity of their relationship and make claims for each other's support as a matter of course for them, it is not based on friendship but on their respective roles in the colonial system. Mary's pregnancy and eventually her poverty-stricken death highlight the inequality of the two women. Why Joan Kingsley-Strack did not take Mary back into her house after she has been sent to an institution for single mothers and then to the Aborigines Protection Board is a matter of interpretation. So are further 'contradictions' in her behaviour like campaigning against the Board's apprenticeship policy, but refusing to take Mary's child, blaming the government's bureaucracy for mistreatment of Aboriginal apprentices but not supporting Mary herself. She seemed to be torn between romantic maternalism she could not act out (a comparison to slavery is made a few times) and being part of a system of racial oppression. The shock of Mary's death newly ignited Kingsley-Strack's political activism for Aboriginal rights, which the author, John Maynard, claims are purely redemptive. Maynard further suggests that Ming deliberately kept letters and papers, thus her story becomes part of the present. I find this chapter particularly interesting, because it illustrates the mechanisms of a system of racial oppression and how the two women's attitudes and actions are consciously as well as subconsciously manipulated. In fact, one wishes to have the opportunity to ask these women why they acted the way they did. In hindsight gaps in the interpretation of these women's lives remain.

Part Two entitled 'Shared struggle' explores collaborative relationships. Chapter four deals with Ruth Heathcock, a South Australian nurse, who cared for people suffering from leprosy initially (and officially) against her husband's knowledge. She campaigned for a repeal of legislation under which 'leprosy suspects' were detained and which was part of a 'framing disease, framing environment and framing race' tactic led by the same white anxiety of 'protection' and 'pollution'. Such a 'treatment' of leprosy was in stark contrast to Aboriginal's 'social medicine' of love and inclusion. Ruth Heathcock was very much a 'part of both worlds'. Aboriginal women were her closest friends, teachers, extended family and her experiences and healing practices were respected in the same way. She valued the knowledge and resources of Aboriginal people and understood their relevance for white people's existence. Based on mutual trust Ruth was given more and more knowledge and responsibility. In fact during her husband's absence their base, a police station, became a

'women's space'. However, after Ruth husband's death; Ruth was not able to maintain her activism since she was left job-and homeless.

The Gambanyi woman Pearl Gibbs, daughter of an Aboriginal mother and a white father, was the first Aboriginal woman to be heard on the radio and the first to present a radio show. She was a public figure working together with all leading activists, Indigenous and white, in the 1920s and praised for her captivating public speeches and networking abilities. One of her main concerns was to achieve citizenship for Aboriginal people. Gibbs was involved in organising a committee for Aboriginal citizenship of which the aforementioned Joan Kingsley-Strack became secretary. She was the only Aboriginal member of the Committee and in the 1950s she was the only woman to be elected to the Aboriginal Welfare Board. Gibbs embodied the conviction that women are to participate in politics. Together with Lady Jessi Street she paved the way for the 1967 referendum. "She lived reconciliation before it was ever conceived of as part of Australia's political life (124)" although she said: "I don't think colour or creed makes much difference. Let us put in our time for human rights and let us live toward that... This is what I want people to remember" (124).

Part Three 'Public lives' comprises the biographical studies of white women who became public figures to support Aboriginal issues. The feminist Mary Montgomery Bennett was concerned about the condition of Aboriginal people and made marriage (the custom of polygamy) the centre of her argumentation. In her view the marital status of Aboriginal women and Aboriginal future were closely connected. Alison Holland's intend in writing about Bennett was to focus on her humanitarian rather than purely feminist approach. An interesting question (similar to the ones the contributors reflected on in the preface to this volume) is: "Why did she feel she could speak on Aboriginal women's behalf, and was there any basis to her view [t]hat Aboriginal women were in fact seeking their freedom in this way" (131)? Bennett's activism started after her husband's death at a time of growing interest in indigenous issues nationally and internationally. Agency in this field at the same time offered work for a female intellectual and also a purpose for life. Bennett saw her agenda as part of a civil rights movement as well as of an anti-slavery campaign, thus the complexity of political currents in which her activities are placed are difficult to analyse. Moreover, her unique achievement was to link gender and racial aspects of colonialism in her approach. Following feminist objectives in the inter-war years was also a way of defining women's identity as the new citizen of a new civilisation. However, a response to her requests was much stronger in England than in Australia due to the latter's denial of a critical assessment of its colonial history. A change in attitude only took place in the 1990s in the context of a developing post-*Mabo* consciousness. Despite the credit owned to Mary Bennett, the chapter seems slightly redundant in its elucidation.

The inclusion of biographical stories derived from official records and interviews of a working-class woman like Ella Hiscocks, further add jigsaw pieces to the historical puzzle. Her story might be a contrast to those 'left behind' by people from a higher social strata in letters or journals for historians to study later. Hiscocks represents the ambiguous position Board employees often found themselves in between being 'protectors' and 'carers'. By reconstructing such a working life, an understanding for the moral dilemma these women were exposed to, can perhaps be raised. Apparently, Hiscocks was not aware of the 'broader' assimilation policy, she rather sought to protect Aboriginal girls from 'bad Aboriginal

mothering' and 'predatory Aboriginal sexuality'. Moreover, implied assumptions of 'white superiority' surface, as 'Whiteness' was equivalent to cleanliness and accordingly determining Hiscocks' ambition. Locally based women's groups like the Country's Woman Association supported Hiscocks, which is another instance of contradicting 'historical stereotyping.' Interestingly, Hiscocks is also an example of the paradox between being protected by racial privilege but not by economic security.

Constance Ternent Cooke (chapter eight) represents a "crossover figure in the history of Aboriginal rights" (174) by combining her activism to improve conditions for Aboriginal people with her work for the government. What I find remarkable was her awareness of the interrelationship of Aboriginal land claims and self-determination, an important issue still debated and yet not fully acknowledged today. Cooke used opportunities to talk about Aboriginal people's situation overseas for which she was criticised in Australia. She was also criticised for 'stepping out of her course' since "a women's organisation should be concerned with equality between men rather than equality between the races, the latter detracting from their course" (192). The question what motivated Cooke's activism cannot be answered but her personal relationship with Aboriginal people was a crucial aspect of her life and needs to be mentioned especially.

The final part of the book is concerned with "Knowing' the Aborigines'. Chapter nine deals with the story of the Anglo-Celtic woman Daisy Bates and the Ngumbarl Jukun Aboriginal man Billingee. The two produced a 20-page artists' 'drawing book' with sketches made by Billingee and notes made by Bates, which actually has personal and political significance, as the author Cynthia Coyne argues. To save an apparently 'vanishing culture' was Bates' argument for its making from an anthropologist point of view. However, exactly the opposite had been achieved, namely the continuity of Aboriginal traditional culture despite colonial impacts has been presented, which has thus strengthened the author's political view on the future of Aboriginal culture. Billingee's motivation of producing and presenting his art might be manifold: an assertion of equality of value of Aboriginal culture, drawing attention to the significance of rituals and land or claiming his territory. Although Bates' methods can be criticised, she nevertheless was the first to collect linguistic, socio-cultural and kinship information in a systematic way. Billingee's drawing book underwent shifting attributions of value ranging from being an item at a second-hand bookstore in London to currently being on display in the State library of WA. Maybe the last word of this chapter 'priceless' summarizes its value most adequately. Coming back to my personal fascination with the relationship between land and people, as in the previous chapter also in this context of aesthetics of Aboriginal art, it becomes evident that the land is an influential factor.

Jim Anderson offers another view on the 'famous' anthropologist Daisy Bates (chapter ten): For Anderson Bates was an embodiment of personal reinvention as "a lady, a journalist, an ethnographer, philantrophic agent of the British Empire and Aboriginal spirit woman" (217), "the revered grandmother of ancient tribes, the great white queen of the desert, a goddess" (226) made possible in the 'new world' of the British colonies. He considers her racist, eccentric, untrustworthy and unhappy. He acknowledges her 'true delight' in the Australian landscape, though. Fringed by a masculine Anglo-Protestant dominated society, she chose a nomadic lifestyle. She was thus also a 'crossover' figure with respect to class, religion, race and gender. Anderson criticises her fixation about the 'doomed race theory' as a disguise of the violent reality of dispossession. In a nutshell, Anderson condemns her as

"the absent mother of a living child, (...) [becoming] the legendary 'Grandmother' of a dying race" (229). Both chapters on Daisy Bates include supportive arguments for each 'perception'...I need to meet Anderson to stop asking myself is he an angry white man?

Chapter eleven looks at the sensitive issue of Aboriginal identity, authenticity, authorship and appropriation. All these issues come into play when looking at the story of Elizabeth Durack. What at first sight seems to be an act of exploitation, can in fact be understood, claims the author of this chapter, Franchesca Cubillo. Elizabeth Durack confessed that she has submitted artwork under the name of a fictitious Aboriginal artist ('Eddie Burrup'). In fact, the author agues that it was exactly the creation of an Aboriginal alter ego that rendered her an "authentic and sensitive commentator on Aboriginality" (234). Cubillo states that non-Indigenous people believe that an Aboriginal identity has many benefits but for Durack it was rather her ongoing intimate, trustworthy and respected relationship with Aboriginal people and her family's dependency on their knowledge of the land in remote Australia that made her an eligible figure to depict Aboriginal culture, especially at a time when Aboriginal people were generally marginalised in society. On the other hand, her Aboriginal alter ego can also be seen as a romanticised re-invention of her childhood. A parallel to Daisy Bates' construction of herself comes to mind.

The last chapter of *Uncommon Ground* deals with the author Catherine Martin, whose book *The Incredible Journey* (1923) contests the view of inadequate Aboriginal motherhood. Progressive in her views, exposed to a hostile environment, Martin wrote about the Stolen Generation at a time when the majority of white people had no interest in this history/reality. In her story the removal of the child is due to Indigenous practices as well as to the "white man's greed". Although Martin creates "the Aboriginal woman of the future" she sees their future in becoming part of 'white progress', in effect as workers on a station under 'white' leadership. Motivation why she wrote such a book can be found in her own biography.

Often it becomes evident that the authors (have to) make a guess to explain what might have motivated these women's concerns and behaviour. Moreover, these biographical studies illustrate the complexity of 'black' and 'white' history, as a continuum of interrelationships that defies the binary of race relations that is still so accepted in the broader Australian society today, on the one hand, and brings untold histories to the surface, on the other. The focus on the concept of 'whiteness' proved to be a feasible 'key' to understand certain 'practices'. I noticed that I felt I had to use many quotation marks, because I did not want to use the respective words without somehow demonstrating their ambivalent meanings. Also in these biographies it becomes evident that by acting in one way a second meaning or outcome is inevitable. These women not only seem to 'write' 'Uncommon Ground' but also find themselves on it. To gain more knowledge of these 'entanglements' you must read this book.