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Too hot to handle

A German Missionary's Struggle with Ethnography in Australia

Pastor Georg Reuther (1861–1914) was the Lutheran missionary in charge of Bethesda mission at Lake Killalpaninna for eighteen years, from 1888 to 1906, precisely during the three decades when Germany joined the ranks of colonial empires with its own external acquisitions (1884–1915).¹ Reuther and his junior colleague Pastor Carl Strehlow accomplished the first Bible translation into an Aboriginal language, the Dieri of the Coopers Creek area of South Australia – also known as Diari, or Dyari. Reuther then continued to engage with Dieri language and customs, producing a massive manuscript that became a translation of Dieri religious texts into German, rather than the other way around. He was quite unaware that this move from missionary translator to ethnographic interpreter represented a paradigm shift: from teacher to learner, from cultural innovator to conservator of tradition. It was the ultimate *faux pas* of a colonizer, a form of ‘going native’, but of course Pastor Reuther could not conceive of himself as a colonizer – he was a saver of souls, an idealist consumed with the metaphysical, in his own estimation truly the opposite of a self-interested colonial settler.

Reuther struggled with ethnography, both in the sense of his engagement with the body of knowledge that he was trying to map, and in the sense of his relationships with significant others in his discipline: his employers, colleagues, the academic gatekeepers, and his Indigenous informants. Reuther's material legacy is so vast and, in fact, so half-finished that it is still largely untapped, except that his register of place-names has been published, and the intrepid linguist Luise Hercus (2015), now in her nineties, has been “looking at the detail” of his language records. In the South Australian Museum (SAM) Reuther's work occupies 3.71 linear meters of shelf-space (Heffernan and Zilio 2011). Its sheer quantity raises the question why he wrote so much, and for whom he was writing.

Anna Kenny has recently provided an intriguing answer to such questions by exploring the intellectual legacy of Reuther's colleague Carl Strehlow, who was better schooled and better connected to the German world of science. The following is an attempt to extend the same explanatory lens to Strehlow's senior colleague Reuther.

The South Australian Museum purchased first the vast ethnographic collection and later the accompanying ethnographic manuscripts of this self-taught ethnologist, that have been well-nigh impossible to publish. That the museum was interested in the Reuther material has two reasons as narrated by one of its current curators, Phillip Jones: Primarily it is due to the German imprint in the history of the SAM, which in turn reflects the strong German presence in South Australia at the time. In the early 1880s its director was the German zoologist Wilhelm Haacke, who recruited

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Amandus Heinrich Christian Zietz (1840–1921), a former collector for the Godeffroy ethnological museum in Hamburg, and Zietz went on to become assistant director of the museum in South Australia from 1900 to 1910. Jones also mentions the exclusivist tendency of leading anthropologist of central Australia, Baldwin Spencer, that prompted Edward Stirling as museum director (1889 until 1912) to turn instead to the Lutheran missionaries for ethnographic material and information (Jones 2011).

From Reuther's own records we can see that he was aware of the value of his collection and that he played his cards well in this negotiation. He invited media attention to his vast ethnographic and botanical collection, made contact with German artefact buyers, and then offered his collection to the nearest museum (see also Jones 2011). In October 1907 assistant director Zietz travelled to the far end of the Barossa Valley to see the recently retired Pastor Reuther from Killalpaninna mission. Zietz reported that he "inspected" the collection, but Reuther's diary categorically states on 14 October 1907 that "Mr. Zietz packed the museum things" (Reuther Diary; *Advertiser* "Museum Report"). Presumably Zietz packed some specimens. The entire collection was much too vast to pack in one day. The two Germans must have reached an understanding quite easily once Zietz saw the massive and well-described collection. Reuther made no secret that he was also negotiating with Berlin and Hamburg. His agent was Frankfurt-based anthropologist Moritz von Leonhardi, who also facilitated Carl Strehlow's profitable sale of ethnographic material to German institutions that same year. The museum purchased Reuther's collection for £400, a sum that roughly equalled four years of salary for Reuther. In effect he had constructed his own early retirement package, of which he was now in dire need.

Reuther had fled from the Bethesda mission at Lake Killalpaninna in disgrace. Through his marriage to widow Pauline Stolz, Reuther had joined a family that was at the core of the South Australian Lutheran mission community (see also Lucas 2015). Pauline's father Pastor Julius Rechner (1830–1900) had been presiding over the mission committee, her first husband had been the pastor of the Strait Gate church, and later one of her sons became president of the South Australian Lutheran Synod. But at that moment of turmoil in Reuther's life, his 'Father' and patron, Pastor Julius Rechner, had already passed away, while the seven 'sons' of the couple, who were later to become ordained pastors, were still studying. No longer secure in the lap of the South Australian Lutheran community, the Reuthers were buying a property to make themselves an independent home at Eudunda, three miles from Point Pass, where some of their sons were schooling. At age 46 Reuther was at his lowest ebb in health, wealth, and spirit. How did he fall so hard?

When 27-year old Reuther arrived at Killalpaninna in 1888 the mission was well established with a substantial church and a thriving local economy. There were three other German couples on the mission and its outstations (Kopperamanna, Etadunna and Bucaltaninna). The mission staff had to pay school fees of £1 per child for schooling in German and English (Reuther to Kaibel, 2 January 1900 Correspondence, LAA and Immanuel Synod Minutes, 3 April 1902, 2 February 1905, 16 March 1905). The colonist Heinrich Vogelsang had been a pioneer of the mission and knew all the practical aspects of the station work, but very soon young Pastor Reuther, recently arrived from Germany, was put in charge as superintending missionary and station manager. From the start Reuther felt that he was working at the limits of his capacity and that he was out of his class. Just being an ordained pastor was a

deeply felt honour for him, and he struggled to live up to his own expectations of the profession and to the reputation of his esteemed mentors in the Neuendettelsau Mission Society. As mission superintendent, he felt that he was thrown into a challenging situation with little preparation, no English, and no idea how Australian society worked (Reuther to Kaibel, 20 March 1908, in Reuther File Neuendettelsau). Nonetheless he made his home in Australia, married an Australian-born woman in 1889, and was naturalised in 1896 (Reuther File NAA). There was no turning back.

An annual income of around £100 had this large family at the permanent edge of poverty. Georg and Pauline Reuther struggled to afford an education for their ten surviving children. Most of the boys schooled at the Lutheran college in Point Pass, where Pastor Leidig charged £20 for each student. To afford their enrolment in the missionary training seminary in Neuendettelsau, Reuther appealed directly to its director, Inspector Martin Deinzer, who took in four of the Reuther and Stolz boys free of charge (Reuther File Neuendettelsau).

The Reuthers in their turn also hosted long-term guests in the Killalpaninna mission house that became something like an unofficial sanatorium. Perhaps this helped to cover costs, though there is no indication that any of the guests made any financial contribution. The Reuthers continued this practice in their Gumvale home, which they liked to call the “pilgrim’s rest” (Reuther at Gumvale (Julia) to Neuendettelsau, 19 April 1913 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau). At Killalpaninna the English teacher Henry (Harry) Hillier stayed in the Reuther home for ten years, initially to recover from pulmonary disease while acting as the English tutor of the Reuther boys (Reuther at Gumvale to Deinzer at Neuendettelsau, 8 February 1910 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau). Pastor Paul Löhle from Natimuk in Victoria also spent a while for recuperation from sickness. The Reuthers also took in Aboriginal long-term patients, such as 15-year old Maria Pingilina, who died there from consumption around 1895 (Stevens 1994: 123; for a biography of Maria’s father Johannes Pingilina, see “German missionaries in Australia a web-directory of intercultural encounters” – <http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/>). Another Aboriginal girl afflicted with pulmonary disease spent the first half of 1904 in the Reuther home (Reuther, 1 June 1904 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau). This may have been Frieda, who was to be Reuther’s undoing at the mission, his fall from grace. The story of Frieda in Pastor Reuther’s biography continues to mystify.

Frieda spent about three years in the Reuther household in her early teens. In a letter to his step-son Paul Stolz in September 1903, Reuther explained that Frieda was “Mother’s adopted daughter”, a mixed-race descendant suffering from “pulmonary consumption” (*Lungenschwindsucht* – presumably tuberculosis), and Reuther had little hope that she would survive for long. This suggests that Frieda must have moved into the Reuther household after Paul’s departure for Germany in February 1903. Reuther said that Frieda “grew up” in their home:

Ein halbweißes Mädchen, welches in unserem Hause großgezogen worden war und für eine Zeit bei unseren Kindern in Lights Pass diente, kam mit mir zurück nach der Station, wurde in ihrem Zimmer im Logiehaus genotzüchtigt, gebar ein dreiviertelweisses Kind und ich sollte, weil sie des angegebenen Vaters, weil Nacht unschlüssig wurde, zuletzt der Vater sein. Das Gerücht war schnell genug in die Welt hinausgeplaudert u. kam vor die Synode. (Reuther, 14 January 1907 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau)

He called her “our Frieda”, as if she were a daughter, and “mei Mädle” (Bavarian for ‘me lassie’). Reuther had a habit of speaking of domestics as part of the household family, for example if he referred to “Siebert’s girls” he meant Siebert’s Aboriginal domestics (whose approximate age in their early teens can be ascertained from a photograph held in the Lutheran Archives Australia, P02953 05908). This slippage between a “daughter” and a “domestic” arises from the German conventional concept of the “Haustochter”, where young women who worked in a household were treated as members of the family. In a humble household, where the daughters performed labour rather than getting served like the genteel daughters of the upper middle class, such an arrangement did not evoke class distinctions, as the concept of ‘domestic’ does.

In early 1904 young Frieda (presumably in her early teens) spent a period at Point Pass with three of the Reuther boys who were sent there for education, Martin (age 14), Arthur (age 13) and Albert (age 12). Reuther brought her back to the mission to be accommodated in the *Logiehaus* (meaning either visitor accommodation or the mission house; Reuther, 14 January 1907 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau). In 1905 she had a light-skinned baby in a childbirth that was conducted “in secrecy” according to some of Reuther’s co-workers, who felt that he tried to cover up instead of investigating (Reuther, 14 January 1907, 1 June 1904, 17 June 1905, in Reuther File Neuendettelsau). Frieda maintained that she had no idea who the father was and explained her pregnancy as a night-time rape at the lodge (*Logiehaus*). Neither did she absolve 45-year old Reuther. Reuther was called to a hearing before the Synod, at which most of his confrères accepted his innocence, but he further implicated himself by leaving the mission in the midst of all these allegations. By January 1907 Frieda had passed away and the Reuthers adopted her baby Laura, who stayed with them like a dutiful daughter, so that twenty years later Pauline Reuther wrote that Laura “is a great help to us” (Rechner 2008: 235). Several photos of the Reuther family show an adult Laura Reuther ringed by her adopted uncles (*ibid.*). There seemed to be a general sense that Laura “belonged” to the Reuther family, though by what genetic or social particulars remains a mystery that Pastor Reuther took to his grave, leaving the strong impression that he was protecting someone.

In 1905, while the ‘Frieda incident’ was under investigation, Reuther consulted two physicians, Dr. Edward Stirling, professor of physiology at Adelaide University and director of the SAM, and his family doctor, who wrote:

J. G. Reuther consulted me to-day [sic] for attacks to which he has been liable for twelve months in which he has convulsive jerkings of his limbs followed by loss of consciousness lasting for some hours. Under these circumstances I advise him to leave Killalpaninna and live in the cooler climate along the coast and give up his mental work and live where he can have a more varied diet (Reuther, 14 January 1907 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau).

Reuther felt that it was his ethnographic work that was driving him mad. He wrote that both physicians agreed that he had to “leave off from the books” or end up in a lunatic asylum:

Seit einem Jahr habe ich keinen Nervenfall mehr gehabt. Es dauerte über 3 Jahre bis die Nerven zur Ruhe kamen. Die Doktoren in Adelaide hatten Recht. Vor der Irrenanstalt, die sie mir prophezeiten. (Reuther, 8 February 1910 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau).

The 'Frieda incident' brought Reuther to the point of physical and mental collapse in 1905, but he had shown signs of strain for several years. In January 1902 he reflected on how many child funerals he had conducted that year. After long contemplation he concluded "*Es will Abend werden*" after Lucas 24. 29 "it is toward evening and the day is far spent" (Reuther Diary). This was the period of his intensive ethnographic investigations buoyed by visiting scientists and Reuther already felt overtaxed by his responsibilities and suffered from nervous exhaustion.

For years Reuther watched helplessly as the mission population dwindled. He could literally "smooth the pillow of a dying race" (Bates 1940) by taking some of them into his home, but he could not halt the population decline. He found purpose by trying to record their culture and spiritual life-worlds before it was too late. Thus the Reuther home became like a satellite dish of trendy Aboriginal policy slogans and fashionable scientific investigations.

In July 1900 Dr. Erhard Eylmann showed great interest in the Dieri grammar, and again, in 1901 Prof. J. W. Gregory and his students used Dieri legends to try and find diprotodon bones at Lake Eyre. In August 1903 Professor Alexander Yashenko (or Aleksandr Jashenko) from the Imperial Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences spent ten days at the mission, during which visit it seems that their discussions delved into multifarious theories. Shortly afterwards Reuther expressed the conviction that the religious ideas (*Götterlehre*) of the Dieri stemmed from Mosaic teachings, and that local Aborigines had Phoenician origins. The ancient tribes had been pushed ever further into the interior, the argument ran, and their legends "led to the Jews" while their astrological knowledge could be traced to the Phoenicians, and their religion was an admixture of both. This imaginative theory, presented as agreed fact (though only in one letter to his step-son Paul Stolz) may have emerged from long evenings on the mission verandah with Yashenko. Yashenko left Reuther with the impression that he wanted to publish his ethnographic work, but Reuther protested it was far from ready. In 1903 Reuther already anticipated his own death and warned that one day one of his sons may have to complete his work. Reuther's ethnographic engagement with the Dieri had become an all-consuming passion:

Nun ja, ist die eigene Seele gerettet [sic] und, hilf's Gott, noch einige anderen [sic] dazu, dann ist die Tagesarbeit mit ihren Beschwerden nicht umsonst gewesen und mir nicht leid, gelebt zu haben. (Reuther at Killalpaninna to Paul Stolz at Neuendettelsau, 24 September 1903 in Reuther File, Neuendettelsau)

It had all started with the translation of the New Testament into Dieri, a proper task for a Lutheran missionary, and much commended. It ran to 600 pages and was the first complete translation of the New Testament into any Aboriginal language, considered a major achievement and receiving much praise. (The second, and last, New Testament translation by a Lutheran missionary was Carl Strehlow's Aranda bible soon afterwards.) There is some disagreement about the relative input from Carl Strehlow and Reuther, with Reuther claiming the larger share.² The mission

2 Reuther later claimed he had started this work before Strehlow arrived on 11 July 1892 but his diary shows that he began to translate the Gospel on 10 April 1893. According to the SAM's Guide to the Records, Reuther and Strehlow completed the Bible translation in 1895, but according to the Immanuel Synod Committee Minutes it took until 1897 to be sent to G. Auricht, the Lutheran publishing house in Tanunda where it was published with funding from the British and Foreign Bible Society in August 1898. (Minutes of 16 August 1898, 19 April 1900). It was only then that Reuther recorded in his diary, on 16 August 1898, that he had "finished the new Testament", four years after Strehlow had left Killalpaninna mission.

committee rewarded Reuther with £18 and Strehlow with £10 “in recognition of their excellent achievement in translating the New Testament into the Dieri language” (Immanuel Synod Minutes, 6 September 1899).

Reuther’s ethnography was not so praised. After Strehlow was posted to Hermannsburg mission in 1894 and began work on the Aranda language (also known as Arrernte), Reuther continued with ethnographic and linguistic work on the Dieri, gathering myths, legends, beliefs, and objects, including a large fossilized tree that is still on display outside the SAM. Reuther produced altogether some 2,600 pages in dense German handwriting, bound into 14 thesis-sized volumes. The mission committee in South Australia castigated him for his excessive writing:

Wenn Du für die dicken Stöße Lügenden & Fabeln, welche Du zurecht geschrieben hast, die keinem Menschen etwas nützen – wer wird das Geld zum Drucken daran wenden? – uns monatlich kurze Nachrichten zukommen ließest, erfülltest Du Deine Pflicht, befriedigtest und tätest etwas Nützliches.

(If only you would send us some brief monthly reports instead of the fat reams of lies and fables which you write up and which are of no use to anybody - who will spend the money for printing that? - then you would be fulfilling your duty, satisfy us and do something useful.) Kaibel to Reuther, 18 February 1904, Box 19 Bethesda, LAA.

This irascible invective must have been very painful for Reuther. Reproach from their own ranks was always hardest to bear for missionaries, who often came under fire of criticism from settlers, police, protectors, reformers, and Indigenous people. There had also been tensions on the mission. In his later recollections Reuther gives the impression that he was labouring alone, when in fact he had assistant missionaries for most of his time at Killalpaninna. Most of them stayed only a couple of years: Carl Strehlow (1892 to October 1894), Otto Siebert (March 1894 to 1902), Nicolaus Wetengel (1896 to 1899), and Johannes Bogner (1900 to 1902, and again from about 1904). Reuther thought there was not enough work for two missionaries, but too much for one, yet he complained that Bogner was “only half in the saddle” (“Bogner sitzt hier blos (sic) halb im Sattel” – Bogner’s wife was ill with malaria in the South, so he travelled back and forth frequently, with long absences from the mission; Reuther 1 June 1904 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau). All of this suggests that Reuther was not a good staff manager.

Otto Siebert persevered the longest as Reuther’s assistant, possibly because he created some room for himself off the mission station as a travelling missionary on the 750-square mile mission reserve. Siebert learned Dieri very quickly and reputedly preached in the language three months after his arrival. He also collected a vast amount of ethnographic material. When Siebert arrived on 11 March 1894, Reuther prayed “God grant that our trio [Reuther, Strehlow and Siebert] will work together in love and faith and humility” (Reuther Diary, 11 March 1894). But there was much friction between Reuther and Siebert. Even after Strehlow left, Reuther kept pleading that there was not enough work even for two missionaries, hoping that Siebert would be withdrawn. Neither the mission committee in South Australia nor the director at Neuendettelsau believed him. When Siebert fell ill in 1901 Reuther downplayed his condition as if Siebert was shirking. In early 1902 Reuther claimed that his colleague was “quite recovered”, but only a few weeks later he had to admit that Siebert was spitting blood (Reuther, 3 February 1902, LAA.) Siebert was hastily

granted furlough to Germany with his wife and two-year old son. He left in May 1902 and fully expected to return to the mission one day, but Reuther had no intention of taking Siebert back. He even suggested that Siebert's possessions left behind at the mission should be put up for auction. Whatever it was between these two, the tension was palpable: a really bad match in the social isolation of a remote mission.

Siebert's opinion was to have a strong impact on the posthumous reception of Reuther's work. Siebert resented the way in which others eclipsed his own scientific contribution: Erhard Eylmann ascribed to Reuther the Dieri grammar which Siebert claimed as his own (though actually the Dieri Grammar ascribed to Reuther makes little advance on that of Johann Flierl according to Luise Hercus, pers. comm.) Alfred Howitt published joint work under his own name, Reuther allowed visiting Pastor Adolf Ortenburger access to Siebert's work, (after which Siebert no longer shared his work with Reuther), and what Reuther published on the Mura Siebert basically claimed to be his work (Tindale 1937). This claim raised questions of intellectual property that made Reuther's work too hot to handle for its posthumous academic gatekeepers.

Siebert's experiences were typical of the way in which missionaries were used as sources of field data in the unequal relationships that characterised the emerging fields of ethnography and anthropology. With Germany now in the ranks of colonial empires, interest in ethnography soared and ethnographic collecting reached a commercial peak: to graft onto the scientific networks that formed its international market, missionaries needed the support of respectable scholars as much as the armchair scholars needed the collecting missionaries (Quanchi and Cochrane 2007). This is the dynamic which Anna Kenny (2013) defines as central to the scientific work and academic reputation of missionary Carl Strehlow, who had a solid working relationship with one of these 'armchair anthropologists', Baron (*Freiherr*) Moritz von Leonhardi. Leonhardi first approached the Neuendettelsau mission institute in May 1899 to make contact with their Australian missionaries and to follow up on ethnographic comments in the mission newsletter. He submitted thirty open-ended questions and received responses from Carl Strehlow and Wilhelm Poland (Leonhardi to Deinzer, 1 Mai 1899 in Reuther File Neuendettelsau). Reuther, perhaps belatedly, addressed three of these questions with a 14-page essay on dreams, which he sent to Neuendettelsau in 1904 (Reuther File Neuendettelsau).

The interpretation of dreams was at that time in vogue at continental salon conversation, shifting the re-enchantment of the European imagination – manifested as spiritualism, séance meetings, spirit photography, mesmerism and a vast range of holistic healing practices from Kneipp's water cures to Hahnemann's homeopathy to Per Henrik Ling's Swedish massage – into the realm of respectable *Wissenschaft*, a transition linguistically facilitated by the non-distinction in German between 'arts' and 'sciences', i.e. both referred to as *Wissenschaften* (Veit 2004, Zantop 1997, Murray in Veit 2004).

Sigmund Freud's *Traumdeutung* (The Interpretation of Dreams) was published in November 1899, and in 1901 Loewenfeld and Kurella published an abridged version as part of a new German publication series on "Boundary Explorations of the Soul and Nervous System". This field of studies focussed on a psychoanalytical reading of dreams, including Aboriginal dreaming, which Freud took up with his *Totem and Taboo* (1913) as mentioned by Gingrich (2015). Reuther's observations on Aboriginal

dream interpretation, in other words, were at the cutting edge of scientific interest in Europe.

Inspector Deinzer at Neuendettelsau scribbled a polite “thank you” in the margins of Reuther’s essay (presumably as an instruction to Reuther’s step-son Paul Stolz to write a reply) and filed it away together with Reuther’s other voluminous letters in the Reuther file, where it still remains in the Neuendettelsau archives (now part of the Landeskirchliche Archiv in Nürnberg). It is unlikely that Reuther’s notes ever reached Leonhardi. Instead, Leonhardi began a very productive relationship with Carl Strehlow at Hermannsburg. This moment, more than any other, defines the subsequent misfortunes of Georg Reuther.

Reuther’s letters to Neuendettelsau were long, self-absorbed, agonizing, and difficult to decipher. The Bavarian farm boy Reuther was less educated and less sophisticated than Carl Strehlow. Strehlow was able to build a lasting reputation on his ethnographic work, while Reuther failed to do so, and according to Anna Kenny the big break for Strehlow was his working relationship with Leonhardi who prodded and coached him towards the questions that occupied the European world of science.

In 1907 Leonhardi mediated the sale of some of Carl Strehlow’s ethnographic material to Germany at a munificent price, and Reuther also began to negotiate through Leonhardi (Reuther to Stirling at SAM, 25 August 1907 stating that the Berlin museum is interested in purchasing his collection, but he is offering it to the SAM, AA 266/14/2, SAM).

Reuther had long known that there was commercial value in his collection. When Professor J. Gregory was visiting the mission in 1901, Reuther felt irritated because Gregory was visiting Siebert, rather than himself. He confided to the mission committee:

Do not believe that I will bring my museum out (for that I should get a lot of money). It already cost me a lot of money out of my own pocket. The natives are not in a hurry to give anything away, as some of their pieces are rare. They say: *Kalala*. Many of their things are already rare, and they ask steep prices.
(Reuther to Kaibel, 26 November 1901, Correspondence, LAA. Clara Stockigt (pers.comm.) kindly translated “kalala” as meaning “finished”, “nothing is left”.)

The notion of “bringing the museum out” – showing exhibits rather than allowing access to a dedicated room – suggests that in 1901 Reuther’s collection was still reasonably modest. Five years later he had over 1,000 artefacts and drummed up press interest in his collection. The *Adelaide Observer* in February 1906 favourably reviewed his missionary work, his bible translation, his fossil tree and his enormous collection and supplied impressive photographs of the now colossal Reuther collection. In 1905 Harry Hillier had produced sketches and watercolour drawings of the toas (way markers) presumably to prepare for the sale of Reuther’s collection. Hillier submitted a separate request for payment for his 400 sketches (Hillier to Stirling, 8 July 1916 SAM). The more that they were *kalala*, the more the Dieri artefacts themselves and representations of them, became valuable commodities on a market.

Reuther had sold his vast collection, but he still had the manuscript that actually deciphered it in detail. He had sent some of the watercolours and parts of his manuscript to Leonhardi in Frankfurt. Leonhardi used this material to publish on the Mura under his own name in 1909 (Reuther to Stirling at SAM, 14 November 1907,

AA266/14/5/1-4 SAM. See also: Leonhardi 1909). Siebert, who was now in Germany, at once went to see Leonhardi in August 1909 to discuss this publication and then followed up with a *Globus* article in 1910 to correct Reuther's statements as reported by Leonhardi (Völker 2001). Siebert (1910) argued that the Dieri legends did not permit the conclusion of a belief in a Higher Being, unlike the Aranda and Loritja (also known as Arrernte and Gogadja). He insisted that what Reuther claimed as a "high god" (*Mura*) among the Dieri, was merely an adjective, meaning sacred, and that the redoubling (*mura-mura*) was an intensification of that meaning (Boehmer 1928). Neither Leonhardi nor Wilhelm Schmidt, the highly respected editor of the journal *Anthropos*, agreed with Siebert's interpretation. Nonetheless Siebert's intervention meant that Reuther's standing as an authoritative source was undermined as soon as his name appeared on the publishing scene, and by one of his closest collaborators. By this time Reuther, on his Gumvale property, no longer suffered from panic attacks, but his mind was still clouded with depression, evident to his family. On the last day of the year 1913 the 52-year old Reuther entered in his diary:

May the year of 1914 be my last year. I am yearning for the heavenly home. After all, there is no peace on earth, for alongside the joys of this earth there is much sorrow. Mother is very worried ... A long wished-for death would be my salvation and deliverance from this earthly sorrow (Reuther Diary, 31 December 1913).

He then sold the remainder of his life work, the Dieri manuscripts, to the South Australian Museum for £75. A few weeks later he drowned in a horse cart accident which meant that the seventy guests arriving for the Reuthers' silver wedding anniversary were instead attending a funeral. His whole estate was valued at £3,000, therefore the altogether £475 paid by the museum equalled 14% of his entire life savings – a substantial proportion. For the Museum, too, it was a considerable amount, an investment that had to be put to use. Reuther's 13-volume handwritten German manuscript ended up on the desk of the busy curator of the ethnographic collection, Norman Tindale, who had his own ambitious project of mapping all Australian tribes. Reuther had given up his struggle with ethnography and the Museum had bought into it.

The endeavour to translate the Reuther manuscript took longer than the twelve years Reuther had taken to write it (1894–1906). It began with Volume 12, Reuther's descriptions of toas, since these were of most direct interest to the museum, which now had the world's largest collection of these cultural objects unique to the Lake Eyre region (Jones and Sutton 1986). Zietz and director Stirling himself, assisted by Stirling's daughter T. B. Robertson, brought this volume to publication in the *Records of the South Australian Museum* (1919) accompanied by copies of Hillier's watercolour drawings.

It took another decade of inaction before the son of a Tanunda pastor, Paul Hossfeld³, translated two volumes on religious ideas, Volume 10 (Religion: Myths and Legends, 1927, 1928) and Volume 11 (The World of Gods and Spirits, 1929). This was

3 Paul Hossfeld's father, Pastor Franz Hossfeld (1862–1937), studied at Hermannsburg and married Berta Richter in 1895, so he was related to Reuther by marriage. He was expelled from the South Australian Evangelical Lutheran Synod ELSA in 1895 for remaining faithful to the Hermannsburg Mission Society and joined the Immanuel Synod in 1909. He was pastor at Dutton from 1892 to 1928 and then assisting pastor of the Tabor Church in Tanunda, which means that he was available to help his son with the translations. (Weiss: 2001–2007).

the most promising part of the manuscript from a religious point of view. However these two translated volumes also languished without publication.

A few years later Norman Tindale, evidently under pressure to put the manuscript to some use, requested help. In 1935 he asked Ted Vogelsang, who had grown up and worked at Killalpaninna mission, and was familiar with Dieri and German, to “assess” the Reuther text with a view to translating the remaining nine volumes (Tindale to Hale, 28 October 1935, AA 266/5/10, SAM). Tindale began to edit Hossfeld’s translations of Volumes 10 and 11 in preparation for publication and produced a list of all the different spellings of tribes in the Reuther manuscript. Tindale also turned to Carl Strehlow’s son, the Rev. Dr. Ted Strehlow, for help with the many place names mentioned in Reuther (File note, May 1935, AA266/23; and Tindale, 16 November 1935, AA266/5 SAM). Tindale wanted a cataloguing clerk assigned to prepare the Reuther manuscript for publication (Tindale to Hale, 4 February 1935, AA266/23 and AA 266/5/5/1-2 SAM). He began to make inquiries in Germany, and in early 1937 he visited Otto Siebert near Hannover and Dr. Leo Frobenius and others in Frankfurt (Tindale to Hale, 2 May 1937, AA 266/5/13; Tindale, May 1937, AA 266/5, SAM). The correspondence between Reuther and Leonhardi could no longer be found in the ethnographic institute in Frankfurt (later the Frobenius Institute), and one of the volumes of the manuscript that Reuther may have sent to Leonhardi, is missing (Volume 14, Songs of the Dieri).

It was the discussion with Siebert that sealed the fate of the Reuther manuscript. Siebert described Reuther as “a good practical man” but “lame at languages”. That “his work was confused and disjointed” accorded with the opinion Tindale himself had by now reached. More to the point, Siebert claimed part authorship, in particular of the Dieri grammar, but also of the legends (some of which he had published, but in less detail), and of the genealogies and social organisation of the Dieri. Tindale now asked Reuther’s son Tom to look through the Reuther diaries to ascertain how much of the work was done by Siebert, Reuther, and Strehlow. Reuther’s diary does not reveal such detail. Pastor Tom Reuther offered to translate his father’s manuscript free of charge (Sheard 29 July 1937, AA 266/5, SAM), but Tindale (1937) by now judged the work as unworthy of further investment of time and effort – it was too bulky and disjointed for publication and needed condensing and re-writing.

The world of science had given up on Reuther’s work, but Lutherans continued to express interest in it. The manuscript rested for another 37 years before Pastor Philip Scherer, the first archivist of the Lutheran Church of Australia (a national body formed in 1966), obtained funding in 1974 for a translation from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS formed in 1964 now AIATSIS). When the AIAS grant ended, Scherer continued unfunded. Meanwhile the young linguist Luise Hercus with the help of her German-speaking mother translated the four-volume Dieri grammar and Reuther’s comments on the Wonkanguru and Yandruwanta grammars (AA 266/14/2, SAM).

Once Scherer’s opus of translation was completed, negotiations between AIAS and SAM stalled as the Museum asserted its legal ownership of the original manuscript. Neither party felt in a position to fund a publication, so only a microfiche version was produced, more as a preservation than a publication of the manuscript. The suppression of this manuscript was well advised, since it contained too many

secrets: much of it is too hot to handle and needs protecting from public access, containing gender-specific and sensitive information.

Using Scherer's translation, two of the senior staff of the museum, Dr. Philip Jones and Dr. Peter Sutton, published *Art and Land* (1986) providing a scholarly discussion to accompany a much debated exhibition at the South Australian Museum in 1986. They refer to Reuther as an "untrained observer" which indeed serves as much to excuse as to accuse.

Reuther was certainly untrained, since there were no Australian anthropology departments in 1888 when he arrived at the mission. But his manuscript reveals an empathetic purveyor of knowledge, who respects those whom he describes, and attempts to show the internal hermeneutics of a sensible and decipherable *Lebenswelt* (life world). Only occasionally he distances himself from the assertions made, particularly when his own religion requires him to do so, but in general he does not pass judgement on what he writes. He records and narrates it, and most of all, tries to organise it into a cohesive system. Luise Hercus points out that he did so without any index cards, let alone the electronic devices that facilitate editing and information management nowadays. In most cases, he simply layered a more recent elucidation of an issue over those written up earlier. This results in an overall impression of repetition. For example, Volume 13 is a revised version of Volume 12. Hercus (2015) noted that Volume 10 was based on public versions of the stories told by the Dieri informants, whereas Volume 7 has a very similar content, but is based on restricted versions. This partly answers the question posed at the beginning – why Reuther wrote so much, and for whom.

Reuther must have misunderstood some of the information he was given by his informants, but he dedicated all his energies to systematizing the information. Apart from the grammar and the description of cultural objects, Reuther also renders the myths, legends and beliefs of the Dieri and relates these to names, places, spirit beings, and objects. He well understood the interconnectedness of all of these dimensions – the spiritual, the spatial, the personal, the social, and the material. Volume 7a explains 1,100 place names and has been digitised by the South Australian Attorney General's Department. Volumes 8 and 9, also digitised, describe the meaning of 303 personal names. Volume 10, on myths and legends, originally listed 175 *mura-mura* (spirit ancestors) and was condensed by Scherer to about 30, with some explanatory notes now forming separate chapters. Volume 11 on the "*Götterwelt*" (spirit world, or realm of the gods) describes 226 spirit beings and refers to six languages. It gives the forms for key terms in Dieri and in the five neighbouring languages to demonstrate the degree of variation between them, inspired by the *Kulturkreislehre* approach favoured by German anthropologists at the time. Volume 12 describes 383 toas and 591 items in the ethnological collection.

Sitting before this massive manuscript gives the clear impression that it represents an all-consuming life work, an obsession, an intellectual labyrinth that leads further and further into a life-world which resisted the author's stubborn intent to classify, order, number and understand it. Even without formal training, Reuther did understand much of it, since there is much that can be learned just from comprehending the grammar of a language. Reuther, in line with Lutheran thought, was convinced that his command of the Dieri language enabled him to think and feel with the Aborigines.

Magic, secrets and devils pulsate through the manuscript, even where it deals with grammar. Footnote 5 in Volume 11 lists the 24 grammatical forms of the personal pronoun “he”, which are mirrored by the 24 forms of “she”. To paraphrase, the form depends on whether “he” is (1) present, or (2) in the visible distance, or (3) at a remote distance, or (4) in the remote past (deceased), and whether the verb is (1) transitive or (2) intransitive, and whether it is (1) certainly him or (2) not quite sure or (3) not important. In other words, the personal pronoun has $4 \times 2 \times 3$ forms. For example, *nauja* is “he” who is present, definitely him, in the intransitive form. *Kutji* is the spirit – and there can be benevolent and malevolent ones – and in combination *kutji nauja* is the spirit-who-is-present: actually, the devil in person (Reuther 1981). Just reading the grammar of the personal pronoun can strike the heart with fear.

The main informant on sorcery and spiritual beliefs was Elias Palkalina, one of the two top shearers at the Etadunna sheep station belonging to the mission. Palkalina narrated in detail the process through which he became a *kunki*, which means he was occupying the highest position of honour in his group. In the process of telling and recording, some kind of synthesis is taking place between the teller and the reporter. The process involves an ordering, formalisation, fossilisation, and therefore a creation in just the same way as writing down an oral language always does. Reuther recorded the 17 steps of the 3-day procedure and the 13 principles of the *kunki*, always seeking to create order and identify rules.

Addressing the question of an all-Father in Indigenous societies, a topic that was much debated at the time, Reuther explains that there are many *mura-mura* (spirit ancestors) who account for the linguistic diversity among the Dieri and their neighbours, because they each did their own naming of useful plants and animals. Their souls are stars and constellations. *Mura*, the all-being, creator of everything, is constantly petitioned by the *mura-mura* for edible plants, animals, rain, and other things necessary or desirable for life. These *mura-mura*, acting for different groups of Dieri, make conflicting demands, therefore not all demands can be met. The Dieri can submit such demands by enacting the biography of a particular *mura-mura*, including where he surfaced, where he travelled, what he met, and named, where he found water, food, and where he died. Of course, Reuther notes, instead of petitioning *Mura*, one can also just engage in trade in order to obtain the things that are necessary or desirable.

The Reuther manuscript clearly arises out of a dynamic between Reuther and his informants. Reuther was instructed in terms that made sense to him and that inculcated in him a respect for the system of thought he encountered: The bad and evil is the realm of the devil, but there is an all-powerful creator (much like the Christian God) who can be appealed to through the intercession of spirit ancestors, who really did once live on earth and have biographies (much like Christian saints). Chanting sacred texts will help a person in need or great fear (much like praying). Upon death the soul rises into the heavens, and there is a beautiful heaven above in the skies.

This is precisely the kind of narrative that gave rise to the allegation, raised for example by Alfred Howitt, that the missionaries invented the all-Father of Aboriginal cosmology. However, such accounts might be better understood as products of the contact zone that generated a mutual invention, in just the way that Richard White describes for the American north in his celebrated book, *The Middle Ground* (1991). Robert Kenny (2007) invokes a similar joint invention in one of the founding mo-

ments of the Moravian mission at Ebenezer (Victoria), where a group of missionaries and young local men colluded to produce a possible, but highly unlikely, connection between the evangelical written story of a Wimmera orphan boy, and the lived experience of the young Wimmera men present at the reading of the story. In the collusive process of telling and re-telling, a story written in England and read out to them at Ebenezer became a story of their real lives, and text became transformed as lived reality in an electric moment of substantiation. It was this moment that created a craving for what the missionaries had to teach at Ebenezer: reading and writing, a powerful tool for carrying knowledge across vast distances.

This craving for a new technology of power is also central to Anna Kenny's (2013) explanation of Strehlow's access to Aranda secrets.

Reuther also related that witchdoctors can save souls and act as intermediaries to the *Mura*. He recognised the parallels in this Dieri narrative with the teachings he was trying to impart on the Dieri, but here he felt compelled to insert one of his disclaimers. Witchdoctors differed from Western priests because they were associated not with the benevolent creator, but with the devil. As a matter of fact the contact cults such as observed by the Jesuit missionaries at the Daly River (see Rose 2000 on the tyaboi) and by the Pallottine missionaries in the Kimberley (Berndt 1974 and Petri 1950 on the Kurangara) cast the colonisers, including their priests, as the evil force, according to the anthropologist who later discussed them.

The whole Reuther manuscript reads as if Reuther was being recruited, or trained, into a Dieri way of knowing. Why else would he be told how to cast a magic spell on fifteen types of objects including waterholes, yellow ochre, brown ochre, the sun, and the rain? And was this an appropriate task for a missionary? The mission committee found it more appropriate for a pastor to manage a sheep station and send quarterly reports.

Anna Kenny's treatment of Carl Strehlow, *The Aranda's Pepa* (2013), offers a surprising answer to the questions I have been posing about Reuther: who was the missionary ethnographer writing for, and why did his informants share so many secrets with him? There are many instances of mission experience that show how magical powers were seen to be invested in the Bible and other kinds of paper. The Bible was the object in which resided the powerful law of Christians, it had to be handled with care and respect, because of its immanent meaning, force and power. Senior lawmen were interested in this new technology of power. *Pepa* was the address the Aranda used for Father Strehlow, so the Aranda's *Pepa* was Father Carl Strehlow. But *pepa* also meant paper, in particular this paper embodying the law, the Bible. Kenny suggests that the Aranda lawmen told Strehlow everything that was necessary to produce the authoritative law-book of the Aranda, the book of Aranda law in paper, the Aranda's *Pepa*.

Is it possible that the Dieri tried to get Reuther to write down the Dieri book of law to compete with the Christian book of law? Reuther became so lost in the Dieri lifeworlds that it affected his sanity. He increasingly suffered from insomnia, trembling and epileptic fits, to which he referred as his "nervous condition". In the end he believed that he would either have to leave it alone or face the lunatic asylum. According to Reuther's own account, when he left the mission in a great hurry in 1906, it was his ethnographic work that he was running away from, rather than the suspicions of his Brethren. Perhaps he realised that his Dieri informants had turned

the tables: he had become the student and they the teachers. They were colonising his mind and he was losing his.

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