Abstract
This paper looks at the story of the Aboriginal reserve system in Australia through the lens of Cummeragunja where my Yorta Yorta forebears were forcibly relocated during the heyday of the infamous Aborigines Protection Board administration of the late 19th and early 20th Century. Tracing the origins and mindset of the reserve system, and the policies of segregation and control that were used to regulate and control reserve life has been a lifetime journey. The journey took me on a full circle to North America, the UK, and Ireland and is a continuing work in progress.

Using the Yorta Yorta and Cummeragunja as a case study, the paper argues that the history of dispossession, incarceration and control lay at the very foundations of British colonisation. The practice of removing the traditional owners from their ancestral lands so that it could be appropriated by settler society is a well-worn path of British colonial policy and practice. It is a system that was brutally applied in Ireland, in the 16th Century under the Cromwellian colonization, practiced in North America under the Indian Removal Act, of the 1830s and applied relentlessly in 18th Century Indigenous Australia.

The paper follows this path and argues that while dispossession and control was a common practice of British colonisation, it becomes a more formidable process when sanctioned by the law of the land. The law is applied to legitimise colonial rule, and in the Australian context, it is used to deal with the reality of Indigenous occupation of the continent. The paper concludes by arguing that the reserve system and the policy of segregation and control as it was applied in Indigenous Australia went hand in glove with dispossession, and was the means by which the legal fiction of terra nullius was legitimised.

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