CONTENTS

Preface v
Notes on Contributors ix

Introduction: Jan Kociumbas
Structure, Agency and Ownership in Aboriginal History 1

Section One: Richard Glover (1982)
Scientific Racism and the Australian Aboriginal (1865–1915) 67
  Acknowledgements 67
  Abbreviations 68
  1. Anthropology as a Social Phenomenon 68
  2. The Methods of Social Anthropology 81
  3. The Methods of Physical Anthropology 103
  4. Anthropology and the Australian Frontier 121
Illustration of Professor R.J.A. Berry 130-

Section Two: Noel Pearson (1986)
Guugu Yimidhirr History: Hope Vale Lutheran Mission (1900–1950) 131
  Acknowledgements 131
  Abbreviations 131
  Note on Orthography 132
  Note on the Use of Names 132
  1. Writing Black Mission History 133
  2. Guugu Yimidhirr Historiography 149
  3. Religious Authoritarianism in Guugu Yimidhirr History 163
  4. Identity in Guugu Yimidhirr History 186
  5. Guugu Yimidhirr History, 1942–1952 201
Oral History Supplement 225
Informants 227
Key to Maps 234
Maps following p.236
Section Three: Lucy O'Connor (1988)
The More Things Change: The Representation of Aborigines in NSW State Primary Schools (1940–1965) 237
   Acknowledgements 237
   Introduction 238
   1. Cannibals, Piccaninnies and the "Kindness that Killed" 249
   2. "Thank You. Big-Peller, Thank You" 274
   Conclusion: The More Things Change 309
   Illustrations following p.312

Section Four: Patty O'Brien (1992)
The Gaze of the "Ghosts": Images of Aboriginal Women in NSW and Port Phillip (1800–1850) 313
   Acknowledgements 313
   Introduction 314
   1. Friendly Intercourse 326
   2. God versus Bullets 354
   3. Sex, Skulls and the "Dying Race" 362
   Illustrations following p.400

Select Bibliographies
   1. Glover 401
   2. Pearson 415
   3. O'Connor 417
   4. O'Brien 424

Index 429

PREFACE

Students of history are too often unaware that during their formative, undergraduate and early post-graduate years, many of them make an immense contribution to their chosen field. This is the case especially for honours students who at the Department of History, University of Sydney, are required to submit a substantial, 20,000 word research thesis in their fourth and final year. Mindful of the quality of this work, this department now keeps and catalogues a copy of each of these dissertations, thus creating a valuable research archive which is consulted by students, staff and visitors.

This widespread interest in undergraduate work is nowhere more evident than in the politically volatile and often controversial area of Aboriginal history, where some key theses are constantly sought out by journalists, politicians and interstate researchers. This book seeks not only to improve access to these particular dissertations but in so doing to acknowledge the overall importance of undergraduate work and encourage future students in their research.

Few graduates have the time or the inclination to review their fourth-year studies and the four authors whose theses are reprinted here have not been asked to do so. Readers should therefore keep in mind that these are not works of mature reflection; nor were they researched under conditions which allowed time for detailed checking of sources or meticulous proof-reading. While every effort has been made to standardise style, correct errors and acknowledge sources, some discrepancies may remain.

It has not been our intention to formalise these works, for instance, by casting aside their personal acknowledgements or updating their historiography; rather the intention is to contextualise them. All cast significant light on the field of inquiry at the time when they were produced, displaying an exceptional range and insight which continues to be highly relevant today. They reveal a sensitivity to certain key issues in the production of indigenous people’s history which was by no means common in their time.

These issues centre on the question of Aboriginal people’s intellectual property rights. As indigenous writers in Australia and
SECTION FOUR

THE GAZE OF THE "GHOSTS"

Images of Aboriginal Women in New South Wales
and Port Phillip (1800–1850)

Patty O'Brien (1992)

Dedication
To my dearest aunt, Carmel O'Brien, 4 June 1933 – 25 August 1997

Acknowledgements
There are four people whose inspiration, faith and collective efforts in
educating me and enthralling me with history culminated in this thesis
that I wrote in 1992. Firstly, I acknowledge Sandra O'Brien —
teacher, friend and mother — who raised me to be intellectually
curious and who always supported my pursuit of an education
grounded in the humanities. Secondly, I thank Kay Cortesi who
taught me history in my final three years of school. Not only did she
exponentially expand my world by drawing me into the wonders of
India, she also offered me my first insights into British colonialism.
To Bob Hind I owe a great debt. He taught me for two years in the
Department of History at the University of Sydney. His unwavering
encouragement, generosity and belief in my academic potential have
been invaluable to me. He also expanded my knowledge of the
colonised world enormously, from my ancestral land of Éire to the
Congo. Last, but by no means least, I thank Jan Kociumbas. She

Figure 12: Illustration by Margaret Horder in P. Wrightson,
The Rocks of Honey, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1960, p.59;
reproduced with permission from Harper Collins Publishers, Australia
"That was ages ago. He's just the same as anyone else now" (p.149).
guided me along the journey of my honours year (and beyond) and moreover, on the journey into Australia’s past through examining the phenomena of colonialism at home. This thesis is a map of that journey into Australia’s past, about which I knew very little when I commenced this study. That journey proved to be a watershed in my life and in my conception of the Australian nation and its peoples.

Introduction

The features of many of these people were far from unpleasing, particularly that of the women ... in the women, that feminine delicacy which is to be found among white people was to be traced even upon their sable cheeks; and though entire strangers to the comforts and conveniences of clothing, yet they sought with a native modesty to conceal by attitude what the want of covering would otherwise have been revealed ... (David Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, 1798.)

"Native modesty", "feminine delicacy", physical appearance that was "far from unpleasing": the gaze of David Collins was loaded with notions and assumptions which shaped what he recorded of Aboriginal women at Port Jackson. These were a different race of women: mysterious and intriguing. They lived in a land and culture that were a world apart from that inhabited by women of Europe. Yet they were still women and were assessed by the same criteria as those with which women of Europe were evaluated.

The gaze of David Collins was also permeated with power: the power of a clothed man watching a naked woman; the power of an Englishman, the coloniser observing conquered women; the power of those who have the means and the ability to articulate their opinions and experiences, making themselves visible participants in the process of history, whilst relegating the observed to anonymity and objectification.

Previous works on the topic of European reflections of Aboriginal Australia have, with few exceptions, subsumed Aboriginal women within an analysis of Aboriginal men. This oversight, in the past, may have been justified by the assertion that Aboriginal women were viewed in the same way as Aboriginal men because they shared racial characteristics. However, it is argued in this dissertation that to fathom European reflections of Aboriginal women, an analysis of gender is just as essential as an analysis of race. Women, because of their sex, were seen and treated differently from the men and thus, it is argued, their experience of colonisation differed.

This thesis will attempt to show, through the use of written and visual images, that an analysis of European reflections of Aboriginal women requires a sexed dimension. Also to be examined is the influence that European constructions of woman, the female body, femininity, gender order and notions of race and class, had in fundamentally fashioning the "gaze of the ghosts". This dissertation will also investigate the power embedded in the European gaze, and examine how, with the ability and knowledge to articulate their particular attributes, a class of European men were able to create images of Aboriginal women. This reinforced their power over the colonised and simultaneously served their individual interests and those of their class and sex in colonial society.

This is not to say that the power of these male colonisers was total and unchanging. The fifty-year span of this thesis is intended to reveal and explain changes in European reflections of Aboriginal women. European images of Aboriginal women were contingent on the dynamic economic, political and ideological landscape of the time.

2 The term "ghosts" refers to the first impressions that Aboriginal people had of Europeans. Owing to the Europeans' pale skins they thought that Europeans were the spirits of their deceased ancestors, hence "ghosts". See Colin Johnson, Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for enduring the Ending of the World, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1983; Henry Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1982.

---

The period of 1800 to 1850 was shaped by intellectual, economic and political revolutions of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Out of this epoch, scientific race and scientific sex theories were developed to rationalize the suppression of women, non-Europeans and lower classes by a European, male, ruling-class hegemony. These theories had vast utility in the process of European occupation of the Australian continent, and were the axiom on which inveterate race, gender and class orders were justified.

This dissertation builds on a body of work on European reflections of indigenous peoples in the Pacific and in Australia and stems from the seminal work of Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, first published in 1950. Smith used European (chiefly French and English) written accounts and visual depictions to display the altering attitudes and images of these peoples. He traced the fate of the eighteenth-century ideal of the noble savage which, he argued, was eventually destroyed by Christianity and the "dry light of science". Smith's work, though still highly significant, gave Aboriginal women secondary importance in the analysis of European visions of Australian Aboriginals. Tahitian women were the only women of the South Pacific given special attention by Smith. In his sources, accounts of women of the South Seas were abundant, apparently filling the male European imagination with visions and expectations of sexual adventure. These images of Tahitian women as the most licentious, sensual women in existence, Smith unquestionably accepted. Moreover, Smith assumed that these images of Tahitian women were never extended to include the other groups of women of the South Pacific, who came to be viewed quite differently from the women of the "Society Islands".

The strength of Smith's book lies in the expanse of material that it encompasses. Also, though omitting a more women-conscious analysis (the book did prostitute second-wave feminism), Smith's study is not as dated as other works of its vintage, owing to his avoidance of racially and culturally superior language. Moreover, Smith successfully highlights the fusion between art and science in the Pacific, how the resultant picturesque tradition attempted to record people and scenery like a camera, with the same allegedly "neutral" gaze. Thus, while pre-dating gender analysis, he remains a pioneer in the field of "representation", casting valuable light on how European explorers, naturalists, artists and colonists constructed the region and its people as a measure of themselves and in terms of their own changing political, economic and cultural objectives.

Writing in 1964, four years after Smith, D.J. Mulvaney was also concerned with the social construction of ethnological knowledge. Focusing on the Australian Aborigines, he traced the growing field of anthropology across some three centuries. Owing to this expansive time frame, Mulvaney's analysis is necessarily superficial, and like Smith's, it deals scantily with Aboriginal women. This work, however, now seems much more problematical than Smith's because it is underpinned with eurocentric assumptions of the objectivity of European observers and an unquestioning acceptance of science, particularly evolutionary science, as a progressive field. Neglecting to link material context and power to "expert knowledge", he cannot sufficiently explain why new theories came into being, nor why they became popular and were accepted as objective fact. Despite these deficiencies, Mulvaney's article has been very influential, so much so that it was reprinted in 1990 in *Through White Eyes*.

Ten years later, art historian, Geoffrey Dutton, assembled a sample of visual depictions of Aboriginal people for his *White on

---

10 *Ibid*, p.8
Black: The Australian Aborigine Portrayed in Art.  Dutton's main concern was to discuss the art world of colonial Australia, that is the artists, the patrons and the artists' overall purpose. Again, in Dutton's work, women have only peripheral importance to his overall argument and are discussed only when depictions are seen as a good example of a prevailing attitude towards the "Aboriginal race". Dutton focuses on the Aboriginal in European art but not the Aboriginal women, which requires, I argue, quite a different analysis. Dutton's value judgements of elderly Aboriginal women render his work of questionable utility for a women-centred analysis. When commenting on eighteenth-century images of Aboriginal women he remarks, "Yet these women in all these early paintings do not look like miserable victims, ugly though they may be when older, like most women in primitive societies".

Seeing the First Australians, edited by Ian and Tasmin Donaldson, was published in 1985. This book claims it "explores and extends the intellectual territory mapped by Bernard Smith". As with Smith, Aboriginal women are lost in the male-centred analysis and are rarely mentioned in the text or depicted in the plates. This work focuses on the sensuous experience of Europeans' first interactions with Aboriginal people, that is, hearing and seeing them, but avoids discussion of the sensuous experience that European men had with Aboriginal women.

The Coming of the Strangers: Life in Australia 1788-1822 by Baiba Berzins was produced in 1988 as part of a bicentennial art exhibition. Despite the Aboriginal perspective embodied in the title, this work concentrates little on the Aboriginal people. In the first chapter, entitled "The Coming of the Strangers", the analysis of Aboriginals is androcentric, and this analysis is secondary to the chronology Berzins sets out of the European visitors to Van Diemen's Land and New Holland. The chapter entitled "The Lot Of Women" offers one paragraph on Aboriginal women and two consequences of their sexual relations with European men, children of mixed descent and antagonisms between Aboriginal and European men.

Ann McGrath's 1990 paper, "The White Man's Looking Glass: Aboriginal-Colonial Gender Relations at Port Jackson", signalled the beginning of new scholarship on Aboriginal women and the European male gaze. McGrath's paper is important as it displays the centrality of European visions of the women as a means to understand the culture and mind-set of the colonising male. She uses Virginia Woolf's remark:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

From this premise she argues that images of Aboriginal women at Port Jackson in the colony's earliest days reveal much about the British male culture of the time. Looking at the "faux" of the eighteenth century pertaining to women, such as the cult of Venus, eroticism and assumptions about European male sexuality, McGrath analyses how Aboriginal women were used to stimulate, reinforce and disseminate ideas about European social and sexual behaviour. McGrath shows how intrigued some early male observers of the colony were with this "new genre of female existence", notably Watkin Tench, George Worgan, Philip Gidley King and David Collins. She discusses the sexual interest the women aroused, and the way that they stimulated speculation about the sexual behaviour of Aboriginal men.

Despite these strengths, on reading McGrath's paper one could lose sight of the ugliness and destruction of colonisation and the hidden agenda behind the construction of images of women. McGrath concentrates on the courtly, romantic rituals and theatre that...
were supposedly acted out between the European men and the Aboriginal women. References to diseases, abuse of women by European men and the stress that the British presence placed on Aboriginal society and gender relations, expressed by violence, are scant in McGrath’s article. Though it is not her intention, McGrath leaves us with the same view as that of the European civil and military officials. It is as if the presence of the British affected only Aboriginal women who were young and perceived as sexually appealing, providing these women with an opportunity to exercise a form of "agency" by using their sexual attraction to avoid the worst consequences of colonisation and escape "domestic troubles". Through this choice women were empowered, according to McGrath. It is interesting to contrast McGrath’s view of interracial gender relations in the process of colonisation with the account of it provided by Roberta Sykes. Writing in 1975, Sykes qualifies the power of Aboriginal women to negotiate in the colonial process, calling them "the spoils of war". In this study, Sykes emphasises that the process of colonisation was extremely violent, particularly toward Aboriginal women.

McGrath’s article deals with only the first few years, when colonisation was restricted to Port Jackson and diplomacy required European men to take care with Aboriginal women. This thesis includes a much broader picture of colonisation. By expanding the scope of this analysis in time and location from that of McGrath’s, I will be tracing a more complex European reaction to, and interpretation of, Aboriginal women. Also, in utilising visual images I hope to show the power which art, moulded by and for Europeans, had in perpetuating denigratory attitudes to Aboriginal women.

Joanna de Groot’s post-structuralist work has been useful in this aspect of my analysis. Examining the intersection of sex and race in European written and visual images of women in the Middle East, de Groot gendered the intellectual terrain stemming from Edward Said’s influential work, Orientalism (1978). There are many parallels between the construction of the "Oriental" and the "Aboriginal" in the European mind, as they both form part of the category of the “other” and the colonised. De Groot argued that sexism and racism belong to the same “discursive universe” and were propagated by European men so they could universally assert colonial and sexual dominance over “oriental” men and women. However de Groot does not address the role of the ruling-class European women in the process of colonisation and the oppression of other women; nor can her emphasis on “discursive universe” explain where and why ideas of sexism and racism came about.

These twin problems of the complicity of white women in colonialism and the failure to contextualise and therefore explain racial stereotypes have been present also in local studies. For example, in the 1980s, studies by women historians concerned with Aboriginal women’s early nineteenth-century frontier experience tended to be judgemental of Aboriginal society, particularly of the men. These writers were influenced by a derogatory stereotype of the Aboriginal male which had been common in early colonial literature in Australia and was (and remains) a prominent colonial stereotype of the “black man” applied in many other theatres of colonisation across the globe. According to this image, the Aboriginal male was a brute who treated women with uncomplicated violence.

Modern writers such as Vivienne Rae Ellis, Lyndall Ryan and Heather Ridi used this evidence, without a critical analysis of the stereotype or the sources in which it was to be found. Rae Ellis

---

19 Ibid., p.205.

22 Vivienne Rae Ellis, Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981.
23 Lyndall Ryan, The Aboriginal Tasmanians, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1981.
and Ryan both dealt with Aboriginal women's experience of colonisation in Tasmania. Though Ryan's work was the more wide-ranging, both analyses were eurocentric, (Rae-Ellis explicitly so), and used the stereotype of the savage Aboriginal male as fundamental to their arguments. Radi's paper too was problematic. Exploring the feminist concept of a universal "patriarchy" and its application to Aboriginal men, she suggested that violence was endemic in Aboriginal gender relations after the invasion and also perhaps prior to it. This stereotyping of Aboriginal men as cruel and carnal was linked to the notion of indigenous women's "agency", a popular historical tool used by feminists, historians and anthropologists in the 1980s. According to Radi, this "agency" manifested itself in the decision by large numbers of Aboriginal women to move freely out of the Aboriginal world to live with European men, who she argues, provided Aboriginal women with a greatly improved lifestyle. Ryan, too, adopted the notion of "agency". She attempted to show that the Aboriginal women who lived with sealers in Bass Strait from early in the nineteenth century were in control both over the economy and their own destinies. Seeking to suggest that Aboriginal women were empowered in these new societies, Ryan's analysis inadvertently implies that their lives were enhanced by colonisation as were their economic opportunities. These included not only sealing and mutton-birding but also their role as sexual partners to the sealers and as reproducers of the sealers' children. Ryan also infers that the Aboriginal women received an increase in status relative to the blanket subordination and oppression under which they lived in pre-invasion society.

The colonial literature in which this image of the tyrannical, lustful, Aboriginal male originated was heavily tainted with a specific imperial purpose. Consciously or unconsciously, by portraying Aboriginal men in a "denigratory manner"\(^{26}\), early colonial writers

O'Brien: Images of Aboriginal Women

were attempting to justify colonisation. If European males could establish their superiority in all ways to Aboriginal men, especially in the treatment of women, this seemed to provide moral grounds for acquiring Aboriginal women as well as Aboriginal land. These accounts by white middle-class male Europeans cannot be used by modern historians without analysis of this agenda. The overall (though unintended) effect of the work of Ryan, Rae-Ellis and Radi is to portray colonisation as a positive phenomenon for Aboriginal women. Such an insidious notion could not be further from the reality of Aboriginal women's experience since 1788. More recently, Myrna Tonkinson has argued that Aboriginal women on the nineteenth-century frontiers were not able to exercise "agency" because the "power was monopolised by white men. White women, Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women and white women over Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women".\(^{27}\) An appreciation of this power relationship embedded in the colonial experience is essential for a realistic interpretation of Aboriginal women's "agency".

Other works by white women who claim to be authorities on Aboriginal gender relations and/or project white feminist ideals upon Aboriginal women have also been contentious. Diane Bell's 1989 article, co-authored by Aboriginal Topsy Nappurrula Nelson, "Speaking About Rape is Everyone's Business"\(^{28}\) is perhaps the most notable example of such work. It received strong criticism from Aboriginal commentators, most notably Jackie Huggins, who argued that Bell's article took intra-racial rape and violence against women, out of the context of colonisation and "solely blames Aboriginal men as the cause of the violence."\(^{29}\) Rather than adopting this problematic notion of "agency" or its oppositional position, which views

---


\(^{26}\) Jackie Huggins and Heather Goodall, "Aboriginal Women are Everywhere: Contemporary Struggles", in K. Saunders and R. Evans,

---


\(^{29}\) Jackie Huggins and Heather Goodall, op. cit., p.418.
Aboriginal women as passive "victims" of colonisation, it is hoped that this thesis will prompt a reassessment of these simplistic historical models. Instead, this thesis argues for an historical model that encompasses the complexities of colonisation and of Aboriginal women's experience within it, without perpetuating colonial conclusions about Aboriginal women, Aboriginal society or gender relations. What is recorded and interpreted here are European perceptions of Aboriginal women and how these perceptions were manipulated to suit certain interests. These representations of Aboriginal women tell a story about European and emerging Australian culture in which race and gender were axiomatic, rather than provide insights into Aboriginal culture.

By using European images of Aboriginal women over the first fifty years of the nineteenth century as a case study, it is hoped that the purpose of notions of race, gender and class will be elucidated. The time-period chosen allows for a close examination of how the interdependent ideologies of race, gender and class superiority were implanted permanently into the settler societies' cultural and political landscape, facilitating the seizure of lands and the other injustices that have been perpetrated against Aboriginal peoples since 1788.

To offer a woman-centred approach to this topic is difficult because the sources available were virtually all produced by men, and men, at that, from a particular class of European and Anglo-Australian society. For the period up to the arrival of the missionaries, the reminiscences and correspondences of civil and military officials, surgeons, pastoralists and traders make up the bulk of surviving observations of Aboriginal women. The sources used here include British Parliamentary Papers and New South Wales and Victorian Legislative Council Select Committee Reports that related to the Aboriginal question. Also included are British and French journals and artworks by explorers and travellers as well as those from the French scientific expeditions. To obtain a more "European" perspective, I have looked, where relevant, at Russian as well as Dutch images of Aboriginal women.

With the growing liberal humanitarian concern for indigenous peoples in the 1820s and 1830s, the accounts of the missionaries and of those of the Protectors of Port Phillip are key pieces of evidence in this dissertation. The missionaries had more prolonged contact with Aboriginal people. This did not mean however, that they relied less on the prevailing stereotypes. Rather, their own particular agenda meant that they developed selected aspects of existing ideas about indigenous women to justify their policies of "rescue" and conversion. As the nineteenth century progressed, Aboriginal people became an increasingly hushed topic in writings about Australia, as they had been relegated to a position of inconsequence.

Where possible, contemporary sources produced by ruling-class women will be utilised, for example Eliza Dunlop's poem, "To an Aboriginal Mother", and Louisa Meredith's Notes and Sketches of New South Wales during a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844. Apart from these two sources, ruling-class women's opinions and observations of Aboriginal people from this time are relatively rare. M.E. McGuire has argued that this lack of a "gentlewoman's" gaze was partly due to their lack of contact with Aboriginal people because their husbands, fathers and brothers mediated for them in the outside world, inhabited by the Aboriginal people, while they remained in the domestic interior.30

This dissertation will be divided into chapters according to three distinct phases in colonisation and therefore in European reflections on Aboriginal women. The first chapter will examine the noble and ignoble savage ideals. It will be argued that the standard way that historians understand these ideals excludes women, and that there existed, alongside the masculine ideals, a distinct female one, that had a specific political and social purpose to serve. Chapter Two explores the demise of these ideals, positing reasons for their decline and elucidating the images of Aboriginal women that replaced them. This chapter argues that these images of Aboriginal women fell into two distinct categories, missionary and pastoralist, which in some ways were diametrically opposed to each other. The former group, though paternalistic, emphasised the humanity of Aboriginal people and saw Aboriginal women as capable of attaining the Christian goal of womanhood, whilst the pastoralists down-played Aboriginal women's gender, instead portraying them often in the same scientifically racist terms as the men, that is, as less than human.

Chapter Three examines the Port Phillip Protectorate, its objectives and its problems. This chapter, by focusing on images of Aboriginal women will show how the Protectorate failed to ameliorate the endemic violence of European pastoralist expansion, and was terminated in 1849. This failure caused the missionaries to modify their views of women’s capacity to "improve", finding them instead largely responsible for Aboriginal demographic decline. This chapter will examine the missionary contribution to the ideology of "the dying race" and how this was first supported and later supplanted by the gaze of science that saw Aboriginal women as utterly degraded due to their race and their sex. By the 1850s Aboriginal women were no longer viewed as people, loving mothers or sex objects, but rather as skulls for investigation and vessels for reproduction because of the wide acceptance of scientific race and evolutionary theories in the Australian colonies.

Though varying in their degree of offensiveness, all of these stereotypes were powerful agents of colonisation, crucial to the processes by which Europeans attempted to remake the "new world" in their own image and rationalise dispossession. Many continue to be disseminated and reinforced, even presented as historical truths. This suggests the need for serious investigation of the historical potency of racial ideas. Yet conducting any such enquiry is difficult without reproducing offensive material and thus giving it further currency. Alternatively, if such material is omitted, the effect can be to present a rosier view of colonial race relations than was the case. This dissertation cannot pretend to have solved these problems. It has however sought a compromise. In striving not to become complicit in the very process it seeks to critique, it omits some particularly dubious visual images while emphasising that none of the images and allegations permitted to remain should be taken in isolation from the argument as a whole.

1 "Friendly Intercourse": Early Nineteenth Century Representations of Aboriginal Women 1800–1820

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the world of the European was in a great state of flux. Cataclysmic events such as the American

---

**O’BRIEN: IMAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN**

War of Independence, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars and the continuing process of industrialisation and colonisation had changed European attitudes profoundly. Sharpened social theories supported by "scientific evidence" were being developed in order to construct social, racial and gender hierarchies that assisted the transformation of Europe into the modern era of more "advanced" industrial capitalism, tighter governmental controls on populations, and vastly accelerated overseas territorial expansion. Growing worker radicalism demanded study of human behaviour and how to control it. Also, industrialisation required a ready work-force, and as infant death rates were high, theorists believed it was necessary to encourage women to reproduce and to devote their lives to child care. This need to streamline reproduction demanded greater control over European women.31

Colonisation of Australia included not only the domination of Europeans over Aboriginal people. It was also intrinsically based on the exploitation of the bodies of convict men for their labour and, in the case of convict and Aboriginal women, for both sexual purposes and labour. Growing contact with and exploitation of colonised people refined European perceptions of themselves and the "other", dividing the world into the occidental and oriental spheres.32

The voyages of Wallis, Bougainville, Cook and La Pérouse had unveiled the resources of the Pacific to western, colonising eyes. Like the Tahitians, the Australian Aboriginal people fascinated Europeans. Some were eager to discern if there were any marketable commodities that Aboriginal people used or made, or whether they would constitute a hardy, tractable overseas labour force. Others were captivated by the image of "primitive" man and woman living in a "natural state". Aspects of this imagined mode of living not only contrasted with the evolving modernity of Europe, but also appealed because of the need for escapism from the sordid reality of industrialisation and urbanisation. Whether positive or negative, clear or contradictory, all these images were highly political.

mirroring the changing needs of agendas of various groups of Europeans. Despite their variations and volatility, representations of Aboriginal people served at least three specific purposes. First, images were designed to cater for expectations of elite, leisureed and liberated people in a Europe which was fascinated by the exotica of "primitive" peoples and where art and literature on such subjects found ready sales. So as to satisfy the need for entertainment and the need for information, two broad categories of "observations" emerged. On the one hand there was the Gulliver's Travels genre of travel journal. Recording a curious world, this writing often served as satire, filled with the fantastic and all things defined as in opposition to Europe. The ideal people, however, were not "houyhnhmens", but rather Aboriginals (or "Natives of New Holland" as they were known), though equally fictitious. The other form of literature was the empirical, supposedly objective reflections of the scientist and the "genuine" observer. Despite the aim of these "observers" to be detached and like a modern camera, impartially capturing vignettes of Aboriginal people, the results were still highly subjective. In some instances the two streams seemed to mix, producing an uneven and bemusing account of Aboriginal people.

Second, these images served the changing political, economic, moral and ideological purposes of colonialism. Images of invertebrate savagery, particularly brutality perpetrated by Aboriginal men towards women and children, became a common tool used by Europeans to display the alleged inferiority of a people, sufficiently to justify their subjugation. The necessary, though invisible, other half to these images of colonised peoples, was the silence that was present.

34 Jonathan Swift borrowed heavily from William Dampier's infamous description of Aboriginal People in Western Australia in his characterisation of his most odious creatures, the yahoos.

O'BRIEN: IMAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

in European reflections. Images of Aboriginal men and women were easily manipulated so as to mask or excuse the uglier, less well-known or acknowledged side of British colonisation, particularly the endemically violent features of this process.

Third, certain idealised images of "natural woman" were used to prescribe behaviour to women in Europe, currently seen as dangerously breaking away from male control. On the one hand, impoverished, working-class women seemed too brazenly to display their sexuality and by this means exploit or rob the unwary male. On the other, educated women were attempting to apply the egalitarian ideals of the philosophers to improve the status and condition of European women. The "native modesty" and "feminine delicacy" which men like Judge-Advocate David Collins thought they discerned in Aboriginal women were part of a cluster of gender-specific attributes which male theorists sought to hold up as exemplary to white women at home.

These "feminine" attributes were both inegalitarian and ambivalent. In Europe in theory, all white women were supposed to be modest, married, obedient and procreative. All were supposed to be economically dependent on fathers, husbands or brothers and educated only in feminine arts, any higher skills being thought to interfere with their role as devoted wives. Also, while taking care to make themselves sexually alluring to men, women at the same time must be chaste and pure, virginal before marriage and faithful after it, thus ensuring the passing on of property to legitimate heirs. In practice, however, certain variations were allowed. Thus while white, working-class women were supposed to be full-time mothers, perpetuating the population of workers, they were also seen by men of all classes as suitable objects for recreational sexual encounters.

The inferior position of women existed in spite of the fact that Enlightenment theorists, voicing the need for modernisation of political and economic institutions, had celebrated individual.

36 For a critique, see Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, J. Johnson, London, 1792.
"liberty" as a supposedly universal "natural right". These claims however, that "all men are created equal" and "all men are born free", and that "all men have natural rights", referred only to men. This became clear when the feminist movement that arose out of the French Revolution, seeking women's share of the gains, was not only soundly defeated, but "gave rise to anti-feminism, a fear of women and political boundaries that engendered sexual boundaries to match". Women, unlike men, were born in chains and lived in chains.

This denial of women's rights was linked to the philosophes' ambivalent attitude to Nature. It has often been said that the Enlightenment rehabilitated Nature, attacking theological notions that the natural world was "fallen" and depraved, wholly separate from and opposed to the supernatural realm of Grace. Eighteenth-century science further elevated Nature by revealing in it order, design, rationality and law, "where hitherto there had been chaos". Far from a source of temptation or corruption, now the study of Nature revealed God's handiwork and advanced his plans for Man. Certainly this view of Nature was fundamental to the philosophes' attack on intellectual and political despotism. Society was perfectible, provided it was freed from the tyranny of feudal and ecclesiastical constraints on the market, free inquiry and learning. Indeed, it was the accumulation and application of knowledge, Enlightenment writers believed, along with more liberal systems of government, which were enabling the Western world to inherit and carry forward the torch of "civilisation" from its imagined cradle in classical Greece and Rome.

When it came to applying "natural rights" to women and to other groups, however, Nature remained debased. This was particularly evident in the Enlightenment-constructed dichotomy between body and mind. According to this theory, men were allocated superior qualities associated with the supposedly rational realm of the mind and the "body politic" while women were marooned in the supposedly anarchic world of the body, sexuality and reproduction. That is, women were "natural" and men were "cultural"; women were inert, like matter acted upon by the masculine rational mind; women were weak, passive and receptive; men were strong, active and assertive; women were subordinate and men were dominant. Therefore, it was argued, women had to be confined in the private sphere and men rightly belonged in the ruling public world of government and commerce.

This denigration of Nature, and of women by association with it, was also present in "social contract" theory. Here certain privileged men (principally owners of property and of Western countries) were theorised as choosing to leave the anarchic "state of nature" and come into society and obey the rule of law. Only these beings were seen as having been endowed with the natural attributes, private property and rational capacities necessary to enter contracts. This downgrading of the "state of nature" had negative implications also for colonised people, as will be shown below.

With respect to Enlightenment theory, historians have assumed that not only Nature, but also human nature was elevated. Again, however, this applied only to the male who, being deemed capable of self-government, was seen as entitled to numerous personal liberties formerly proscribed by a prudish church. For example, in sexual matters, the male right to pleasure was ratified in the medical theory that regular sexual "discharges" were necessary for male "health". In this area however, in spite of the rhetoric of freedom, new prohibitions arose, some of which applied even to men. This was deemed necessary because if male indulgence in carnal pleasures was

---


43 C. Pateman, *op. cit.*, pp.5-6.
defined as natural and good, then the imagined opposition of pure male mind and anarchic female body might be seriously blurred. That is, the male could be seen as the irrational creature of appetite. Logically this could then function as a case for downgrading the male and elevating the female, or even for the feminisation of men. To offset this departure, the sexual rights of men had to be defined as including only "healthy" heterosexual "discharges", masturbation was proscribed, being increasingly associated with effeminacy, even disease. This was not quite a licence, however, to rape and exploit women at will. Male sexual adventures were to be tempered by chivalrous courtship rituals in which "gentlemen" must display "sensibility" (and women the modesty and discretion so prized by the officers in early New South Wales). The growing influence of Romanticism assisted in the resolution of these various contradictions, enabling "manly" men to posture as saintly, rational and "civilised" while still remaining suitably aggressively male.44

These restrictions to and liberties allowed in male sexual behaviour meant that women's sexual relations with men had to be ever more rigorously monitored. In the late eighteenth century, science seemed to confirm this sexual usage of women's bodies, altering the notion of "the body" from being one general sex, that is male, to being two sexes, male and female. The female was then seen as the "opposite sex", her biology dictating specific social or "gender" roles.45

Many of these tensions and double standards in male prescriptions for "normal" female behaviour were present in assumptions about beauty, social organisation, sex roles and sexual politics in the imaginary "state of nature" itself. This became apparent in the influential debates about the noble and ignoble savage. Here the colonizing agenda of Enlightenment theory became apparent in respect not only of gender but also of race.

The notion of an ignoble savage coincided with the development of the slave trade and the expansion of European occupation of the North American continent, providing ready rationalisations for both. Theorists of ignobility postulated that certain "primitive" people had been cut off from the godly, dynamic, rational environment which enabled European "civilisation" to progress. This world of the savage was more than an absence of Christian belief; it was equated with treachery, brutishness, self-interest, dubious sexuality and lowliness on the imagined scale of humanity. Some theorists went so far as to argue that such savages had been created separately from Europeans; some imagined they had mated with or been reared by animals. The ignoble savage could even be a demon, monster or freak, especially if he dwelt in antipodean or astral regions where all of nature was imagined to be the antithesis of European "norms".46

These ideas were related to the Hobbesian equation of the "state of nature" with a state of war. The "state of nature" was a condition of constant insecurity, antagonism and conflict, and served as a perpetual reminder for the need for political cohesion of a society and the rule of law.47 The ignoble savage concept was perpetuated in the eighteenth century by the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, particularly Adam Ferguson, and French philosophes such as Turgot.48 The eighteenth-century notion of the ignoble savage relied on a "four stage theory" of human progress. This stressed agriculture, technology, commerce and material wealth as denoting advancement from the impoverished "savages" in the "state of nature". The highest stage of development had, of course, been achieved by Europeans.49

In contrast, the noble savage ideal conceptualised "primitive" societies as an embodiment of God's handiwork in creating rational man. Though "savage", these people were therefore idealised Europeans and as such, defined in terms of classical ideas of beauty, reason, harmony and truth. In particular they were thought to be free

---

45 Thomas Laqueur, op. cit., pp.5–8.
49 Ibid, p.5.
of materialism and other unwanted accretions thought to be developing in urban, industrialising society. This did not mean that Europeans wished necessarily to abandon their own imagined path of progress and return to earlier stages in its wondrous growth. They wished to study the "primitive" in order to borrow and incorporate any redemptive attributes which they believed might further advance or stimulate their already superior society. In particular, certain political and social ideals thought to be practised by "primitives" might be appropriated, replacing unwanted European ones which were thought to be corrupting and fettering citizens and making them perpetually unhappy.

This particular interpretation of the noble savage attained a climax in the eighteenth century. However, the provenance of the ideal reached back into antiquity with the notion of the lost Golden Race. This idealised race was described in one classical version as "... communistic; they live in a juristic state of nature; their life is simple and virtuous". Imposition of the noble savage ideal onto non-European peoples was evident with Columbus and his voyages of "discovery" in the Americas. Later voyagers such as Picaletta, who circumnavigated the globe with Magellan from 1519 to 1522, also viewed "natural people" through the lens of the ideal writing. According to this writer "Brazilians followed Nature, wore no clothes, lived to be one hundred and forty years of age" and were "free of civilised vices".

In the eighteenth-century, the concept of the noble savage became ever more entangled in European political and economic controversies where it could function as a philosophical tool either to defend or attack the political and religious establishment. Thus the noble savage could figure as a kind of aristocrat, living in an arrested, natural state prior to the turmoil of present-day challenges to such regimes. He could also be constructed as a secularist and a democrat. Either way he was always a member of an elite and in body and mind he was usually imagined as distinctly male. Uneducated yet knowledgeable and wise, the noble savage was strong, sovereign, free, happy and good. He lived a simple existence in small family units outside urban society and all its inhumanity. In the art of this period, he was depicted in archetypal Renaissance style. His physique was muscular, eternally youthful and his garb and postures often resembled that of classical antiquity, which was admired as a "golden age" before European man advanced to modern problems.

With the growth of Romanticism, this interest in the positive, redemptive potential of "primitivism" reached a new level. Romantics were less ambivalent about Nature than the earlier theorists, venerating the "natural", "nature" and "natives", and seeing these people as having access to higher forms of instinctive knowledge, sensibility and imagination temporarily lost by rational man. The political agenda of Romanticism, however, was equivocal. On the one hand it could be secular, utopian and radical, locating its ideals in on-going, egalitarian reform; on the other it could be backward-looking and reactionary, glorifying selected aspects of a mythical, national past and legitimising new forms of social control.

The work of William Blake demonstrated both the radical and conservative potential of Romanticism. Poems like "The Little Black Boy" in his "Songs of Innocence" (1789), attacked the inhumanity of slavery and urbanisation, while the figures in his engravings of Aboriginals in New South Wales were straightened up and given a noble profile. On the other hand, Blake’s emphasis on the child as having special intuitive knowledge and spirituality, later he
suggested, corroded by experience, 56 could be and was used to justify new and existing forms of oppression. Thus, with respect to the colonised male, childlike innocence was incorporated into the myth of the noble savage. This meant that this person now embodied the qualities of guileless warmth and generosity. 57 However, the savage could now also be conceptualised as a wayward child in need of guidance and surveillance. Similarly with respect to European women, Romanticism revered the idealised, "feminine" "childish" woman, but denied women's self-expression so that women were, like their political aspirations, tramelled.

These qualified and contradictory constructions of "the state of nature" meant that spectrum of political ideologies projected upon noble and ignoble savages had special meanings when applied to indigenous women. Previously, historians have tended to assume that these value-systems applied equally to both sexes. However, this thesis argues against this assumption. Female nobility, for example, was much more narrowly defined in terms of the body than was the case with the "typical" indigenous male. Certainly, the female noble savage had to share the ideal of youthfulness applied to the male, and her body was supposed to conform to the currently fashionable, classical, statusque aesthetic. However, unlike the male, she wielded no political power in the public sphere and questions of her wisdom or higher, intuitive knowledge were not at issue. What mattered was her sexuality, and this in turn was measured in terms of her age, sexual availability and reproductive capacity. For females, nobility meant nobility, fecundity and sexual allure. As with European women, this sexual role was fraught with contradictions. The female noble savage had to appear to be sexually innocent yet this in turn was seen to require a frank display of the body and the knowing promise of an exotic performance. Ignobility on the other hand was depicted as a more flagrant, "whorish" sexuality, (sometimes thought to be evident in deformed or enlarged sexual organs) 58 or an ageing, sagging, post-maternal body.

In so far as the female's supposed mental and moral characteristics were addressed, dependency and motherhood were seen as key issues. Rousseau and other philosophers felt that they had found in the accounts of the newer worlds, principally in the Americas, examples of "woman in nature" though she was not named as such but existed as the feminine complement to "man in nature". This ideal woman was pliant, naturally submissive, dutiful and accepting of her inferior status to her husband and her other "natural" roles. Women in "nature" were also mothers, though this role was restricted to a child's infancy when it required intensive nurturing and nursing, the most important role of education being left to the father. "Natural woman" did not exist for herself, she was born to "please men", 59 to reproduce and act as servant to her husband and children. Physically she was strong and healthy, though it could be assumed that her strength would not compare with the strength of the male noble savage, and her experience of "child-birth will be easy and will leave no ill-results" 60 Also she did not swaddle (that is, sexually repress) her sons, another positive quality for Rousseau and later Blake, who were preoccupied with men's emancipation from the fetters of society, including restrictions on their sexuality. 61 This ideal was applied to women in Europe, as seen in the character of Sophie in Emile, and in turn created a model of womanhood that was taken back to the Pacific and re-imposed on indigenous women.

The Rousseauian noble savage man and woman is epitomised by Dutch artist J. Kuyper in his illustration "Nieuw-Hollands" (Figure

56 See W. Blake, op. cit., "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience".
57 B. Smith, op. cit., p.326.

59 Maurice and Jean Bloch, op. cit., p.28.
61 Ibid, pp. 10–12 and W. Blake, op. cit., p.100 ('Infant Sorrow').
MAPS, DREAMS, HISTORY

1), published in M. Stuart's De Mensch of 1804. The fantasy and the inaccuracy of this image is flagrant, not being tempered by reality in the slightest. The difference between the state of "natural" man and "natural" woman is also easily discernible. The man embodies the affectations of culture, being covered in paint, clutching weapons and standing in both a defiant and protective posture. The young woman is seated, denoting submissiveness and vulnerability, cradling a whitish babe. The modesty of the painting conceals the genitalia of all the family, preventing the viewer being sure of the infant's sex, though as the male sex was considered typical, it is most likely that the child is also intended to be male. Gender specific spheres are designated also, the woman being placed inside the hut and the man outside, the artist thus ascribing the woman to the domestic sphere even in the primitive state. The overall impression given by Stuart and Kuyper is that the "natural woman" is to be admired for her obedience and devotion to her husband and children. She does not enjoy the freedom and sovereignty of the male noble savage; rather she is his vassal.

Of these twin criteria of female nobility, sexualised beauty and devoted motherhood, early male European travellers to the New World often paid most attention to the first. As mentioned previously, the first Pacific voyagers from Bougainville to Banks were effusive about the beauty and charms, particularly the sexual ones, of Tahitian women. Banks' testimony seemed especially telling, as he personally had witnessed the sexual opportunities that, he alleged, were freely presented to him. Native women across the Pacific were seen as an adornment of the trading relations that were established between European men and male Islanders. These women seemed desirable and therefore noble to the early male voyager and, despite their alleged promiscuity, they were not seen as degraded as European "whores", at least not at first.

The sexual exploitation of indigenous women was a major component of colonisation. Indeed one can see two manifestations of possession, the public one, of planting flags in the ground, claiming land, imposing laws that established control over indigenous men and women via the agents of the law, and the private process whereby the bodies of indigenous women were claimed, charted, used and owned. Prior to missionary influence, these two features of colonisation were often conflated, possession of indigenous women being accepted by imperial governments and administrators as an inevitable feature of colonisation and one which facilitated domination by one group of men over the other.

The logistics of enacting the male desire for sexual access to indigenous women were, however, complex, especially so in the early years of invasion. Colonists discovered early on in the Pacific, often at a high price, that acting upon the fantasy of free sex was fraught with risk. Indigenous men's violent objections were particularly feared by all; infection of crews with venereal disease weighed heavily on the minds of many a captain. The desertion of men so they could pursue the charms of the South Seas was also a problem, especially following the Bounty Mutiny in 1789 which William Bligh attributed to the "allurement of both luxury and ease" of Tahiti and the "delicate" and "handsome" women of that island.

In early Sydney, senior officials, mindful of the garrison's precarious strategic position and ignorance of Aboriginal numbers and technology, initially monitored sexual relations between European men and Aboriginal women, confining contact to tentative approaches and detailed observations, preferably conducted by themselves. As in Tahiti, they concluded that the women were libertine but somehow still genteel and, as Ann McGrath has

63 Kuyper's male noble savage is strongly reminiscent of the figure in the foreground of Sydney Parkinson's "Two Natives of New Holland Advancing to Combat" (see B. Smith, op. cit., p.117) published in London in 1784. The body paint and the Roman style weapons are almost identical to Parkinson's male Noble Savage.
highlighted, many of these early male observers were lavish in their praise of the women. For example, military officer, Watkin Tench was quite smitten by the "feminine innocence, softness and modesty" of Barangaroo (a woman of Sydney Cove), that he described her as a "natural aristocrat".

In addition to the initial need for diplomacy, this praise was founded on a view of these women as pristine and untainted by the ill-effects of lower-class existence that the convict women were thought to exhibit. Joanna de Groot has argued that the way that European men viewed women of other cultures was very different from the way that women of lower classes were regarded. Reflecting the duality present in all European notions of femininity (the categories of respectability and whoredom), this contrast in attitudes was certainly true of early New South Wales. David Collins revealed the severity with which the middle-class males viewed working-class and/or convict women by his cold-hearted recording of the death by drowning of a lower-class woman, Eleanor McCave and her two children.

In the convict colonies however, the elevation of Aboriginal women was much more ambivalent and ephemeral than de Groot suggests. When, because of their close contact with convict men, Aboriginal women ceased to be viewed as an ideal, they would be classed with convict women as "whores". That is, Aboriginal women were integrated into the European class system, through taking on the status of their sexual partner. Aboriginal women who were "tainted" by the lower classes of Sydney came to be seen as "unchaste and common prostitutes" and another group of "damned whores" like the convict women who were treated with great cruelty by male authoritarios.

As the opening quotation to this dissertation shows, even the early praise by the male officials was qualified and complex. Much depended upon whether the women manifested the childish, "feminine", decorative, nurturing qualities prescribed by writers such as Rousseau in Émile. Thus when Collins perceived Aboriginal women as exhibiting "feminine delicacy", he praised them as virtuous women of nature. Yet aberrations from the unattainable ideal of feminine perfection were remarked upon, and caused Collins to make exceptions to his ambitious claim about the status of Aboriginal women. Behaviour such as fighting amongst the women, the application of unpleasant smelling fish-oil and the scarring of both sexes, expected for men but not women, was mentioned for the inconsistency with the feminine image. The conduct of "Go-roo-bar-boo-lo", who:

on stepping out of her canoe... gave way to the pressure of certain necessity, without betraying any of the reserve which would have led another at least behind an adjoining bush...

affronted Collins for its flagrant disrespect for his status as an English man of importance and social standing. It was not so much her exhibition that offended Collins' sensibilities so greatly, but rather that "she blushed not", which prompted Collins to remark that hers "was the rude check of nature and not made for blushes".

Aboriginal women's obvious self-sufficiency, independence and industriousness in fishing and food-gathering was inconsistent with the European middle-class male view of "ladies", who were supposed to be ornamental. Their physical strength and the fancied ease of

---

67 Ibid., p.199.
68 See J. de Groot, op. cit.
70 A. McGrath, op. cit., p.206.
71 J. Kociumba, op. cit., Ch.1.
73 Ibid., p.457.
74 Ibid., p.488.
75 Ibid., p.457.
76 Ibid., p.493.
77 Ibid., p.493. See A. McGrath, op. cit., p.197 for the significance of "the blush".
child-birth astounded observers even though this was a characteristic popularised by the Rousseauian model of "natural woman". That Aboriginal women possessed important knowledge and engaged in medicinal practices was dismissed by Collins as "superstition",\(^{78}\) the underpinning assumption being that women could not manage the healing of others, as this was seen as a male role.\(^ {79}\)

Even so, early male observers like Collins persisted in their idealisation of the women for somewhat longer than they did for males. For instance, when they confronted such manifestations of Aboriginal women's knowledge and contribution to the economy, at first they did not revise their assumptions about the desired femininity of these women nor, initially, about their nobility. Rather, they concluded that their "princesses" must have been forced into such unladylike roles, a notion which neatly meshed with an increasingly derogatory view which they were developing of Aboriginal men.

Even prior to the First Fleet's arrival, the nobility of the indigenous male was being challenged as fallacy. The deaths of famed explorers such as Captain Cook, members of the La Pérouse crew, Marion du Fresne and Furneaux's men in the 1770s and 1780s at the hands of men of the South Seas, had mortally wounded the noble savage male.\(^ {80}\)

By the early nineteenth century there were other reasons too why the noble savage image of Aboriginal men was under threat. It was impossible to dispossess people of their land and exploit their labour and still believe in the noble savage. In order to justify colonisation, the peoples being subjugated had to be seen to possess an ethnic character that was lacking or deviated from the standard humans, the European man of property and his wife.\(^ {81}\) The colonised could not be upheld as the epitome of humanity, as in the noble savage ideal. Therefore the image had to change.

In New South Wales, venereal disease amongst the Aboriginal population was reported by Collins, as early as 1791, while "prostitution"\(^ {82}\) of Aboriginal women was said to be commonplace by 1796.\(^ {83}\) Governor Phillip and later Macquarie became concerned about the extent to which the men of the colony were engaging in "friendly intercourse" with the Aboriginal women. These early governors wanted peaceful co-existence with the indigenous landowners but, it seemed, sexual relations with Aboriginal women were a principal reason for the worsening conflicts which were occurring between the two groups of men.

The first response of the male administrators to these problems was to attack the men's role as partners of the still idealised women. In the first volume of his Account of the Colony of New South Wales (1798), Collins provided a melodramatic description of Aboriginal courtship that was akin to the stereotyped "caveman" courtship ritual in which the primitive man clubbed the object of his affection over the head and dragged her back to his habitation where he raped her and therefore made her his wife. This suggested that, far from "gallant" and "manly", Aboriginal men were prone to predatory and violent behaviour and unseemly possessiveness of "their women", not to mention inveterate "stone-age" habits.\(^ {84}\) Similarly, Collins' inclusion of the practice of mutilation of the finger joints of Aboriginal women (a favourite anecdote, found regularly in travel literature chapters on the "manners and customs of the natives"), was perhaps intended to show the oppression of Aboriginal women by the men to

---

\(^{78}\) Ibid., p.494.


\(^{80}\) B. Smith, op. cit., p.122.

\(^{81}\) J. de Groot, op. cit., p.96.

\(^{82}\) Caroline Ralston in her article "Polyandry, Pollution, Prostitution": The Problems of Eurocentrism and Androcentrism in Polynesian Studies" in B. Caine et. al., eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Feminisms and the Critique of Knowledges*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1986, argues against the use of the word "prostitution" to describe the sale of sexual services because of the judgemental and sexist connotations imbued in the word. This point is noted but to avoid confusion the word "prostitution" shall be used in this thesis.

\(^{83}\) A. McGrath, op. cit., p.195.

the extent of commonplace disfigurement. The men are cruel; however, the women suffer this practice unquestioningly, showing how admirably "noble" and "dutiful" they are to their menfolk.

It is this emphasis on the alleged remorseless brutality which Aboriginal men supposedly enacted on the Aboriginal women that displays very clearly that it is the men who are now ignoble, whilst the women, for the moment, remain elevated. The men are depicted as ravishers of women, "savage behaviour" in the extreme. Ronald Meek has argued it was the male paradigms of technology, commerce and modes of subsistence and property ownership that were assessed in order to determine where a race slotted into a stage of human development. Yet, on reading the early observations by European men of Aboriginal society, it appears that the treatment of women was also primary in the evaluation of the entire culture.

Illustrations from Collins' second volume, written after he had left New South Wales, "A Night Scene in the Neighbourhood of Sydney" and "Natives Under a Rock in Bad Weather" (Figures 2 and 3) show his continued adherence to the notion of the noble savage woman. In Figure 2, the woman in the centre of the group, as well as the woman nursing the baby in the foreground, continue to manifest the desirable feminine qualities of the noble savage tradition as they are young, not black-skinned, firmly within European conventions of female beauty and, for the woman in the foreground, a mother. Similarly, in Figure 3, the mother, though here much darker and more "primitive", is, like the woman in Kuyper's depiction of the noble savage family, nevertheless dutifully nursing an infant and seated in a submissive position. It is her husband who has undergone the most obvious change. Though he still stands protectively over her, his body has become spindly and he seems to shrink in fear of the storm, even, to the point of being cowardly and inefficient. These images are obviously exaggerated and inaccurate, but they were nevertheless influential, as Collins' work had a wide readership.

85 Ibid., p.458. Collins accounts for this fascinating and exotic practice as aiding in the winding in of fishing lines, though others found an assortment of explanations for it.
86 R. Meek, op. cit., p.11.
87 Ibid., p.5.
O'BRIEN: IMAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

this illustration, though in the text "Barrington" claims that the adults often "go in a state of nature". However, Aboriginal girls wore "a little apron made from the skin of the opossum or kangaroo cut into slips" which was removed when they grew up and were taken by men, (the apron being presumably a metaphor for virginity). This, wrote "Barrington", "is truly savage". The choice of the word "apron", is perhaps also intended to emphasise the universality of the female's "natural" domesticity. The instinctual behaviour of the women of New Holland to submit, serve and remain the private property of their husband was an overt message to the female readership in Europe.

Equally partial and perhaps even more influential were the numerous "scientific" studies then being made of indigenous people. The growing need of governments and industry to control and educate populations propelled many scientists and observers to the Antipodes in order to determine the nature of "human behaviour". It was believed that "primitive minds exhibited mental processes in their lowest form of biological development, a stage where the mind's most elementary laws - and tendencies could be most easily discerned". The findings of scientists created and entrenched images of Aboriginal people in rigid and "proven" beds of "objective" knowledge and data. However, "objectivity" was drowned by subjectivity, prescription and agenda, as is most blatantly displayed in images of Aboriginal women.

François Péron, the only man appointed to the Baudin scientific expedition (1800–1804) for his knowledge of anthropology, was particularly interested in making contact with Aboriginal People.

---

92 The bikini style of pants that the woman wears in this illustration resembles the attire worn by the dancing woman in "Night scene in the Neighbourhood of Sydney" (Figure 2).
93 V. Woodthorpe, "Courtship" in G. Barrington, op. cit., opposite p.35.
94 Ibid., pp.23–24.
95 Ibid., pp.23–24.
96 Ibid., pp.23–24.
97 Ibid., pp.23–24.
98 Ibid., pp.23–24.
99 J. Kociumbas, op. cit., p.269.
100 George Stocking, cited in ibid., p.270.
MAPS, DREAMS, HISTORY

Though taught by infamous "comparative anatomist" Georges Cuvier, whose theories were imbued with and helped to disseminate the racist and sexist assumptions of the time, Pérón nevertheless was (and often still is) assumed to have accurately described the physical characteristics of selected individuals. Yet as George Stocking points out, Pérón’s data was often highly dubious and always culturally-loaded, much of it focusing on the "typical" specimen, that is, on the indigenous male, "his bodily strength, movements, health, longevity, etc."[102]

Nor did women escape the prejudiced perusal of "science". According to Stocking, women did not come into the anthropological gaze unless "domestic society" was being observed,[103] the "state of women" being categorised only under general headings: modesty, love, marriage and the moral education of infants.[104] However, a closer reading of the observations that Pérón made of Aboriginal society reveals that male European obsessions with female sexual attractiveness and beauty resulted in a much more intense interest in the women than Stocking suggests. Indeed it could be said that the French scientists were just as obsessed with classifying the women in terms of physical appearance, sexual aesthetics and age as the earlier, "amateur" observers had been and that these sexualised judgements profoundly coloured their images of Aboriginal women.

Pérón’s description of his party’s encounter with a "heavily pregnant" woman exemplifies this point. The Frenchman’s alleged scientific detachment is no more than an excuse both for detailed inspection of the female body "in the field" and for prurient, mocking description of it in print. The woman, terrified by these strangers’ probing of her, is said to have remained sitting on her heels and hiding her face in her hands for the duration of her ordeal. She was, Pérón arrogantly asserted, as if "stupefied and overcome with fear and astonishment".[105] At the first opportunity she escaped, leaving

behind the trinkets the Frenchman had offered her, and Pérón snidely adds, a "spontaneous evacuation."[106] Pérón's concentration on her physical appearance similarly shows how his evaluation of and obsession with sexual attractiveness influenced his overall assessment of this anonymous woman:

The colour of the skin, the nature of the hair, the proportion of the body, of this woman, perfectly resembled that of the other savages of New Holland, as we shall have occasion to discuss hereafter. In other respects she was horribly ugly and disgusting. She was uncommonly lean and scraggy and her breasts hung almost to her thighs. The most extreme dirtiness added to her natural deformity and was enough to disgust the most depraved among our sailors.[107]

Similar prejudices influenced Pérón’s description of a young woman from Van Diemen’s Land called Oure-Ouré. Unlike the pregnant woman whom he judged "a miserable child of nature",[108] Oure-Ouré was the epitome of the sexualised female noble savage. She was, he declares, affectionate, sincere, frank in her manners, happy and friendly and she "accompanied her discourse with so many winning gestures and gracious smiles that her coquetry was very expressive".[109] Pérón and the other men on the voyage were immensely pleased with Oure-Ouré, especially the officer of the Géographe, Henri de Freycinet, who was the particular object of her attention.[110]

This "scientific" concern to judge the physiognomy of the "specimen" not only suited existing prejudices and obsessions; it appears to have extended the range and intrusiveness of inter-racial.

---

[103] Stocking, op. cit., p.140.
[104] Ibid., p.140.
[106] Ibid., p.68.
[107] Ibid., pp.68-67.
[108] F. Pérón, op. cit., p.68. Anne Digby has argued that pregnancy was considered a disease by the beginning of the nineteenth century, which might further explain Pérón's strong reaction to the sight of the pregnant body, apart from the sexual turn-off. See Digby, "Women's Biological Straitjacket" in Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall, op. cit., p.196.
[110] Ibid., p.178.
sexual comparison, helping to create and legitimise a sexual basis for the construction of racial difference. This can be seen in three portraits of Aboriginal women by the artist on the Baudin voyage, Nicholas Petit. Though ostensibly creating visual images of Aboriginal women in the mannerist style that pretended to be removed and disinterested, what Petit's images in fact presented to the viewer was the stark power relationship between the objectified, the naked, indigenous woman, and the male artist in full control. The subjects of these portraits were portrayed as types, not as individuals. The nursing mother was not sentimentalised as in the earlier images of the noble savage mother; rather this mother was now viewed in sexual terms.

Despite the current emphasis on women as mothers and the demographic significance of reproduction, these artists revealed little sympathy for the physical effects of mothering on women's bodies. Viewed as a series, Petit's pictures seemed to constitute a male-centred, voyeuristic comment on the effects of breast-feeding, from the young woman without the experience, to the mother in the process of lactation, and the last, the post-lactation breasts. Former artist on the Beagle, Augustus Earle, (Figure 5) and artist with the Russian Navy's Bellinghausen Voyage of 1820, Pavil Mikhaylov, (Figure 6) also showed the focus of the male gaze on the breasts, particularly those of younger women. Judgements about breasts had of course long been an indicator of "nobility" or its absence as applied to Aboriginal women. Earlier however, it had been assumed that somehow these women had managed to become mothers and suckle their children yet sustain the required "undamaged" profile. Now, it seems, as with pregnancy there was a new, clinical interest in these matters, demanding that even women perceived as less than beautiful should be brought under male perusal. The critical evaluation of women's bodies had been elevated into a science, not merely unveiling mystery but quantifying fecundity and satisfying the erotic fascination with the varied aesthetics and functions of breasts.

The Frenchmen of the Baudin expedition also displayed an overtly intrusive and prurient interest in the sexual act itself. Nicholas Petit even went so far as to produce two sketches both entitled "A scene showing Aborigines copulating". In these images the Aboriginal woman and man are unequivocally sexualised. This sexual curiosity about people copulating reduced them to specimens on the level of animals. Whilst the invasion of privacy was shrouded in the "scientific purpose" of observing sexual intercourse in nature, the whole idea of it was imbued with sadistic titillation for the observer. Geoffrey Dutton's praise of the French for their "uninhibited and gay approach to the Aborigines" and the claim that they "responded to them as human beings" is baseless, as this evidence shows.

The nudity of the female subjects in Petit's images raises the issue of the different conventions applied to representations of non-European women. If European women had been portrayed in a similar way to the "natives" women, the material would have been considered pornographic. A white female "nude" and a naked black woman evoke quite different responses from the viewer, à la National Geographic.

The images of naked women represented by convict artist, Richard Browne (dating from 1809 to about 1815) propelled the derogatory image of the "savage" even further from the Enlightenment and Romantic conventions. In Browne's silhouetted images of Aboriginal people wandering the streets of Sydney, the nobility of Aboriginal women is gone and in its place comes a representation that seems to depart from European intellectual notions entirely. Instead these images seem peculiar to the New South Wales colony, following in the tradition of the silhouetted, one-dimensional figures of the anonymous "Port Jackson Painter", as Bernard Smith noted.

111 These images are reproduced in J. Bonnemains et al., eds., Baudin in Australian Waters, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, pp.169-71.
112 Joan Kerr, Lecture, Fine Arts Department, University of Sydney, 5 August 1992.
113 Nicholas Petit, "A Scene Showing Aborigines Copulating" (c.1801), repr. in J. Bonnemains, op. cit., pp.98, 99.
him. Yet Browne’s women are different from those of the "Port Jackson Painter". Browne’s portraits of "Waramella" (Figure 7) and "Humpback’d Maria", also known as "Pussy Cat", depict these women as absurd objects, worthy only of ridicule. "Humpback’d Maria", as a disfigured woman, is fashioned by Browne as if she were an object of contempt. Also, it is difficult to detect sympathy in the portrayal of Waramella and her child. Their grins lend an almost idiotic quality to their characterisation.

It has been suggested by Joan Kerr that Browne did not intend to create cruel caricatures, or "mockeries" as Dutton referred to them in 1794. Contrarily, Kerr argues that his style was a result of his lack of skill as an artist and his lack of training in portraiture. Yet the popularity of these portraits in the colony and in England is significant. The nature of the colony in New South Wales was changing dramatically at the time of these images.

The growing number of pastoralists who then wished to occupy land had a vested interest in perpetuating negative images of Aboriginal people. In Sydney, dispossessed Aboriginal people became a source of honour and derision among those whites who occupied their land. The status of the Aboriginal women was lowered in the eyes of the middle-class observers in the Sydney region owing to their increased contact with the convicts and other lower-class men. The introduction of diseases and alcohol and the obvious misery of their colonised existence made them a group that was easily targeted as the new low-life of the colony, as Browne’s portraits seem to suggest.

This ever more contemptuous attitudinal tide, reflected in Browne’s works, became increasingly prevalent during the congestations in the Hawkesbury District on the northern edge of the colony. Erupting in the mid-1790s, isolated skirmishes swiftly escalated. By 1796 there was open warfare between Aboriginal people and farmers, who were aided by the military. The practices of kidnapping, raping and murdering Aboriginal women and children lay behind this frontier violence as even Governor Hunter acknowledged. This appalling situation was highlighted in 1800 through evidence given at the trial of five men accused of the murders of two Aboriginal boys, Little George, who was about eleven or twelve years old, and Jimmy who was fifteen or sixteen. The five men were found guilty but no punishment was meted out, the issue of how to define Aboriginal people’s legal status being for the moment deferred.

This decision reflected the fact that the early policies of diplomacy and reconnaissance applied by the British had now been abandoned. The administrators were now reasonably sure of their ability to survive on the coastal fringes of this new land and deal with local Aboriginal resistance. They had seen graphic evidence of Aboriginal people’s susceptibility to smallpox and other European diseases; supplementary supplies of food and manpower had arrived from Britain and local crops were flourishing. Moreover their main trading activities were on the maritime frontier so that, as yet, they required relatively little Aboriginal land. Therefore, as the new Judge-Advocate, Richard Atkins, pragmatically pointed out in 1805, the only problem with letting farmers pursue and punish Aboriginal occupants was that for the most part these men were or had been convicts and might, like the Irish prisoners, prove disloyal.

This legal equivocation accompanied the decline in attempts to find and negotiate with Aboriginal leaders and monitor relations with "noble" Aboriginal women. The resultant suffering by Aboriginal women sometimes disturbed governors, yet was, in this period, accepted as inevitable. As Governor Hunter reported to the Duke of

---

116 T.R. Browne, "Pussy Cat" (c.1810), No.3 (in five water colour drawings of Australian Aborigines), Dixon Library, State Library of NSW, repr. in Geoffrey Dutton, op. cit., plate 20.
117 G. Dutton, op. cit., p.27; Joan Kerr, op. cit.
Portland, the Aboriginal retaliation on the Hawkesbury against the military and settlers which eventually led to the 1800 trial had:

proceeded from a soldier having in a most shameful and wanton manner kill'd a native woman and child, a circumstance which had not come to my knowledge until long after the fact had been committed.\textsuperscript{120}

It was no coincidence that adherence to dehumanising archetypes was often related to economic advantage enjoyed by those in the process of seizing land from indigenees. Commercial and political interests now over-rode feminine beauty as a determinant for evaluating Aboriginal women for those in the forefront of the invasion of Aboriginal lands.

Nevertheless images of the female noble savage would remain of utility and be further developed by certain groups of colonists. Often signalling battlelines for supremacy between different kinds of personal and political agenda, the twin stereotypes of Aboriginal women remained a constant presence throughout the nineteenth century, as they have up to the present day.

2 God versus Bullets: Missionary and Pastoralist Images of Aboriginal Women 1820–1838

By the 1820s, two dominant philosophies of colonisation had emerged which, for the next thirty years, would vie for ascendency in the Australian colonies. These two views had a marked influence on representations of Aboriginal women which by 1820 were deeply imbued with local race and gender politics as well as the contemporary European philosophies on race, gender and colonialism. This polarisation of viewpoints derived from challenges which missionaries and secular reformers offered to the existing, punitive, \textit{ad hoc} policies developed first by administrators and farmers and now by the nascent pastoral industry. Reformers wanted to achieve a less bloody, more structured and protective form of colonisation, using law, assimilation and with some semblance of respect for the rights and the well-being of the indigenous inhabitants. In contrast, most pastoralists were not interested in the preservation of Aboriginal souls, lives or rights. For this section of colonial society, colonisation was about economic and social betterment at the expense of indigenous inhabitants.

Unlike the early trading ventures and farms, the pastoral industry required vast expanses of Aboriginal land. Growing rapidly from 1815, its hungry, hard-footed flocks and herds soon destroyed large acreages, triggering a constant trek by investors and their servants to remote areas in search of fresh pasture. Thomas Mitchell, (Surveyor-General of New South Wales from 1828 to 1855), remarked in his journal that he "blushed inwardly at the realisation of what the cloven hoofed animals were doing to the land".\textsuperscript{121} That is, these imported animals were churning up soil and destroying vegetation, chasing away native game and fouling water holes, thus disrupting, if not destroying, every aspect of the Aboriginal dietary source.

Aboriginal people attempted to turn back this invasion by attacking isolated hut-keepers and shepherds and by cattle-spearling and sheep-stealing, strategies which they adopted both to gain food and arrest the inland incursion of the white men.\textsuperscript{122} Pastoralists responded by seeking to eradicate the tormenting "blacks", including women and children, from a landscape they wanted to make exclusively their own.

By the mid–1820s, with further advances in the mechanisation of British wool manufacture, pastoralists were aware that they stood to reap enormous wealth and fortune, provided they could both suppress Aboriginal resistance and maintain their predominantly male, convict workforce. These two issues were seen as integrally linked. To the pastoralist, it made sense to place male convicts on the lonely frontier. They were single and "unencumbered"; their lives were seen

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{120} Hunter to Portland, 2 Jan., 1800, \textit{HRA}, Series I, Vol. 1, p.403.


as cheap and easily replaced. While this labour system continued, pastoralists need not concern themselves about the protection of Aboriginal lives and certainly not the fate of Aboriginal women. In order to make their collective objectives of landed wealth a rapidly realised reality, pastoralists for the most part adopted violence as the surest method to depopulate the land of Aboriginal people.

Such views were diametrically opposed by the diverse but increasingly influential groups of liberal reformers. Comprising a mixture of missionaries and churchmen and secular humanitarians, these people found allies in the colonies among urban lawyers, and in Britain among powerful philanthropic groups. Sarcastically labelled as "Saints" by their detractors, many of these people were part of that wave of evangelism which had spread across the Pacific from 1796 when the London Missionary Society had peopled several Pacific islands with its first shipload of proselytising personnel. By the 1820s missionary importance was bolstered by the increasing political influence in Britain of the Clapham Sect who formed the backbone of the Abolitionist Movement. This sparked a surge of philanthropic and evangelical fervour that focused attention not only on slaves but also on the fate of convict labourers and "savages" all around the Empire.123

In these concerns, the religious reformers had found common ground with Utilitarian and other theorists currently arguing that existing colonial policies and practice were not only inhumane but also costly, chaotic, short-sighted and inefficient.124 These writers, like the religious reformers, often reflected the interests of the expanding industrial sector in Britain, being anxious to find ways to replace the archaic, bloody coercion of capital punishment, convictism and slavery with a mobile, educated and willing colonial labour force.

Both groups of reformers took the view that the solution to these problems lay in changing colonial society, both from above and below. Pastoralists, they believed, were being corrupted by their despotic exploitation of their convict "slaves", while the convicts were neither being punished nor reformed. Indeed, to these reformers, it seemed that frontier flare-ups were largely caused by the sexual imbalance of the population. This in turn was caused by the inept convict system. Most convicts were male who, dispatched up the country, were not subjected to any moral tutelage by their employers. The result was rivalry between them and male Aborigines over access to Aboriginal women and, it was suspected, a host of other moral crimes as well. Colonisation was thus a moral rather than a purely economic issue.

This ideology of "systematic", bloodless and godly colonisation seriously challenged the immediate interests of pastoralists, proposing to end their access both to cheap land and convict "slaves" while also monitoring their treatment of Aboriginal people. Thus, instead of free land grants and illegal "squatting", pastoralists would now be compelled to purchase their land and pay for surveyed leaseholds. The result, the theorists hoped, would be orderly, closer settlement where workers and employers would be brought under the eye of church and law. At the same time, the revenue derived from the sale of Aboriginal land would be put towards shipping out destitute emigrants from Britain, preferably females who, replacing convict women, would marry and domesticate convict men and hopefully help produce a prolific "free" labour force.125

Aboriginal men and women, too, were to be brought under discipline. This entailed clarifying their legal position, partly so as to improve policing and punishment of resistance, and partly to prevent them selling their land by private treaty to squatters slyly seeking cheap, large holdings. By the 1830s reformers had come round to the view that Australia's indigenes should be recognised as prior occupants of the land, in return for which hopefully they would voluntarily abandon armed resistance and obligingly hand over all

---


125 J. Kocumbas, ibid., Ch.7.
their land to the "crown". In return they would receive the priceless gift of Christianity and be "protected" on allocated missions and reserves.126 Here, the missionary would ply his trade, converting Aboriginal people both to Christianity and settled habits ready for incorporation into colonial society. Godly education127 and marriage were two of the keynotes in this ambitious ideal.

Pastoralists responded to the challenge of the reformers by adopting the harshest and most cruel stereotypes of Aboriginal people. The result was a cluster of arguments propounding that Aboriginal people were devoid of all humanity and implying that therefore they must not be allowed to stand in the way of a superior type. Directly or indirectly, such theories argued that Aboriginal resistance should be severely punished and gave licence to frontier violence in all its forms.

Pastoralists were aided in the construction of these arguments by concurrent developments in Darwinist "science" which seemed to offer the logic to carry out their genocidal activities.128 For example, pastoralists relied on the extremely influential scientific race theories created initially by men such as James Bennett Monboddo (Of The Origin And Progress Of Language, 1773–6), German J.F. Blumenbach (On The Natural History Of Mankind, 1781) and the ubiquitous Georges Cuvier.129 These theories seemed to transform long-held European feelings of superiority into natural "laws" supported by an alleged wealth of empirical evidence. Inferiority of the non-European was no longer to be merely a subjective abstraction, as in the ignoble savage stereotype, but rather a biologically determined inevitability.

The new "scientific" disciplines of craniology and phrenology were developed in response to this demand for "concrete evidence" of racial inferiority, similar to the way scientific expertise "proved" women's inferiority after the rise of feminism in the late eighteenth century.130 The axiom upon which these disciplines rested was that the skull was moulded upon the brain, and thus the shape of the skull could be "read ... as an open book" in order to ascertain inherent characteristics of a racial group, sex, criminal and so on.131 Predictably, the skulls of savages, especially New Hollanders, were said to be the smallest in size and to display characteristics similar to those of an orang-outang's skull, thus reinforcing their alleged inhumanity and unimportance and holding vast utility for the pastoralists, intent on establishing the myth of terra nullius.132 As well as making Aboriginal people the objects of such offensive ideas, these "sciences" resulted in a search for material evidence which caused great anguish amongst Aboriginal communities who, as early as the 1820s, feared raids on grave sites.

Pastoralists borrowed freely from such theories, using them to denigrate Aboriginal people in general and in particular the women. In this ideology, women of every age were stereotyped as ignoble, and very often as "whores", though there were some exceptions, as we shall see. Such labels ignored the fact that the sexual services of Aboriginal women were one of the few commodities that Aboriginal people could exchange in return for food.133

129 J. Kosciusko, op. cit., p.88.
131 George Coombe, Outlines of Phrenology, Macachelan, Stewart & Co., Edinburgh, 1844, p.49.
Aboriginal women were left with few alternatives but to engage in "prostitution", which profoundly affected the way they were viewed by European men. Raymond Evans argues that this desperate situation of Aboriginal women caused their position to plummet in the eyes of European men "to that of degraded and diseased sex objects".  

Pastoralists also portrayed women as unfeminine child-killers and cannibals, signifying an immense shift in perspective away from the noble savage "princesses" that Aboriginal women had been at the turn of the century. The construction of this degraded image of Aboriginal women, combined with the ruthless race theories, was used to justify the rampant ill-usage of them by European men. E.M. Forster described Indian people as so morally debased that he argued, "what relationship beyond carnality could one establish with such people?" A similar logic was applied in Australia, even if it was not always articulated so blatantly in print.

Hunter Valley pastoralist and ex-surgeon, Peter Cunningham, author of *Two Years in New South Wales*, was an infamous voice of pastoralism. The picture he painted of the Aboriginal world was a litany of the ugliest stereotypes so far invented. Women were treated poorly by their men, he alleged:

the husbands disposing of the favours of their wives to the convict servants for a slice of bread or a pipe of tobacco. The children produced by this intercourse are generally sacrificed, as is also one of the children in twins cases...

According to Cunningham, the "natural filthiness" of the women was the reason for their contracting venereal diseases which they then propagated among the convict-servants who cohabited with them.

---

Biblical authority and values. Lancelot Thrkelld of Lake Macquarie mission (founded 1824) argued that the practice that examined people's heads for innate deficiencies instead of their hearts was fundamentally opposed to Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{142} Thrkelld was also in no doubt that genocidal policies adopted by squatters were contrary to divine ordinance. He had no hesitation in reporting and attacking views such as that said to have been expressed by William Cox, "one of the largest holders of sheep in the colony" at a meeting in Bathurst in 1824. Reputedly, Cox had argued that:

the best thing that could be done, would be to shoot all Blacks and manure the ground with their carcasses, which was all they were good for. It was recommended likewise that the women and children should especially be shot as the most certain method of getting rid of the race.\textsuperscript{143}

Despite the role of men like Thrkelld in helping to expose and oppose such views, the liberal reformers' own agenda and methods were themselves extremely problematic. Though designed both to prevent murder and refine colonisation, alternative policies advised by the liberal reformers were often concerned primarily with the legalities of who should be allowed to suppress Aboriginal resistance. Sometimes these concerns with legality succeeded only in authorising and intensifying massacre by white pastoralists, stockmen and soldiers. For example, when in 1824, on the advice of liberal Attorney-General Saxe Bannister, Governor Brisbane declared martial law for inland areas west of Mt York, the effect was merely to compound the number of Aboriginal deaths in the undeclared war

\textsuperscript{142} N. Gunson, ed., \textit{Australian Reminiscences and Papers of L.E. Thrkelld: Missionary To Aborigines, 1824–1839}, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1974, p.91.


\textsuperscript{144} J. Miller, \textit{Koori: A Will to Win}, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1985, p.38.


\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Ibid.}, Col. 854.
missionary image of female perfection, femininity was almost wholly defined in terms of preparation for and fulfillment of motherhood. This meant that the virtuous female was supposed to be a-sexual, modest and self-controlled. Early and lawful wedlock was also her lot, along with chastity, sobriety, self-denial, regularity and industriousness. In the missionary view, innocence meant sexual ignorance, not the coquettish performance so fervently sought by the earlier male observers.

The result was that under the missionary gaze, indigenous women, even if young and assessed as attractive, were likely to stand condemned. This was a judgement which often reflected the missionaries' failure to come to terms with their own sexual desire. Determined to define themselves as godly males who did not behave like lesser men, most missionaries and their secular brethren would assess the indigenous women as over-sexed and depraved, lacking modesty (especially in the form of clothing), faithfulness, cleanliness and godliness — a liturgy of sins which meant they would be automatically ranked below the male. This meant that the women would be tutored in a particularly complex range of ideals, centred around femininity, obedience, self-control, providence and regularity, plus chastity and abundant reproduction. It was a formula in which benevolent "protection" would be replete with notions of punishment, aversion, discipline and control.

Most missionaries were of course also doubtful about the nobility of the indigenous male. Though as with the women, they as yet knew little about the men's economic, religious and social roles, they nevertheless set out to undermine male authority and replace it with their own. Sometimes they shared Collins' view that the women were victims of the savagery of the males who predictably, were seen as indulging in cruel courtship and infliction of brutality on Aboriginal women. In addition, as liberals, the missionaries projected their abhorrence of despotism and slavery onto the indigenous male, laziness and greed being now added to the cluster of bad attributes he was thought to exhibit. Thus, according to Threlkeld, the women had to contend both with the tyranny and the indolence of Aboriginal men. Like his predecessors in the construction of stereotypes, Threlkeld did not consider how Aboriginal customs and law were being challenged and changed by colonisation, including the missionary agenda, but assumed such alleged behaviour was an innate fault in Aboriginal culture. He also viewed women's "nonfeminine" and therefore "unnatural" gender roles (such as grave-digging, fishing and pipe-smoking) as overt signs of Aboriginal women's degraded status. On one occasion he went so far as to state that white shepherds in isolated areas were far more humane to their Aboriginal "concubines" than Aboriginal women's "sable lords". However, such an assertion from a missionary was unusual for most were strong critics of both Aboriginal and European working-class men. (Threlkeld was often unsure which men were worse.) Moreover, missionaries were opposed to all "licentious" relationships by Aboriginal women with white men.

German artist, Gerhard Kreß summed up the stereotype of Aboriginal women as chattels to their husbands in his watercolour "Aboriginal Woman Cleaning Fish" (circa 1857–1866) (Figure 8). The woman is employed at her task whilst, in the background, four men sit idle. Visiting observer, Colonel Godfrey Mundy, also put this view. According to Mundy, Aboriginal women were "mere drudges", "sumpter-animals" and slaves to their men.

---

147 N. Gunson, op. cit., p.47.


149 N. Gunson, op. cit., p.49.


Catholic Archbishop Bede Polding revealed the utility of this image to the reformers when he suggested Aboriginal women needed to be given less active and more delicate tasks in order to civilise them, the "ideal woman" being sedentary, quiet and homely. However, he added:

... it is natural that man in an uncivilised state, untaught, should make the weak woman subservient to his wants, and she being employed in digging roots and obtaining food in a way he deems ignoble, the man has naturally a dislike to anything (ie. work) of this kind.\textsuperscript{152}

Christianity would nonetheless rectify this problem, he argued. Despite the fact that missionaries generally viewed Aboriginal women as oppressed by Aboriginal men, first-hand experience often contradicted this assumption. In a candid reflection Threlkeld admitted that the "blacks":

...do love their wives. I have seen McGill and Patty his wife, in all playfulness of pure affection, like Abraham sporting with Sarah in the even-tide.\textsuperscript{153}

Even though there was this evidence that challenged Threlkeld's theory, it did not alter the Aboriginal women's need for Christianity. He concluded that:

in general the wives are what we call degraded, though themselves had no idea of such degradation.\textsuperscript{154}

The solution he offered was very predictable:

it is the gospel alone which raises woman, not only in her own estimation, but that of the other sex, to her proper sphere, one with her husband.\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{152} NSW Select Committee on the Conditions of the Aborigines, 1845, p.18.
\textsuperscript{153} N. Gunson, \textit{op. cit.}, p.56.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Ibid.}, p.56.
\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Ibid.}, p.56.

\textbf{O'BRIEN: IMAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN}

Although he believed Aboriginal men treated women badly, Threlkeld was worried by the level of violence inflicted upon women and their families by Englishmen seeking sexual gratification. He was also well aware of the more insidious, long-term effects of sexual contact with European men. Entries in his diary of 1825 and 1826 tell of the brutality inflicted, he felt, mainly by the convicts,\textsuperscript{156} upon the Aboriginal people under his "care". Threlkeld found from censuses he carried out through the duration of the mission that there was a dramatic decrease in the population of women and girls (fifteen per cent) in just two years, accompanied by a fall in the birthrate.\textsuperscript{157} Threlkeld's evidence points toward abduction and murder of young females by squatters and shepherds as well as the decision by women to live with white men, as the cause of this decrease which indicated immeasurable stress in the Aboriginal communities.

Missionaries, however, were not above using such evidence of the women's sufferings in order to heighten their religious rationalisations for colonisation. In such cases, sympathy or pity was almost always combined with condescension. Thus, according to Rev. William Watson of the Wellington Valley Mission, the condition of Aboriginal women was so dire that to neglect their needs would have been a gross failure on the part of the British.\textsuperscript{158} Aboriginal women were, he alleged, the most "wretched and pitiable" creatures amongst a group which formed "the least instructed portion of the human race in all arts and social life".\textsuperscript{159}

The missionaries' concern for the women also took the form of a self-serving interest in their sexuality. This was ostensibly rationalised by the fact that the women were supposedly in the frontline of being contaminated with the vices of working-class men,\textsuperscript{160} usually the convicts or ticket-of-leave men operating the anarchic

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Ibid.}, p.91.
\textsuperscript{158} Minutes of Evidence before the House of Commons Select Committee on the Condition of Aborigines in the Empire, 1836, p.489.
\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Ibid.}, p.489.
\textsuperscript{160} Jean Woolmington, \textit{Aborigines in Colonial Society 1788–1850}, Cassell Australia, Melbourne, 1973, p.64.
pastoral industry. Sometimes the women were seen as unwitting victims of this process; in other cases their sexuality was seen as so rampant and uncontrolled that they invited the attentions of depraved white men. In 1837, one witness at the House of Commons enquiry declared that “illicit intercourse” was occurring “on a scale so enormous” that it appeared a “moral obligation on the local Government to take any practicable measures to put an end to it.”

Despite these allegations, in order to secure financial and moral support from missionary societies and the British government, missionaries had to show that Aboriginal people were not beyond hope of reform. This was the more important given that pastoralists opposed the notion that Aboriginal people, whether male or female, could “improve”. Instead they argued that a range of “ignoble” racial features (such as stupidity, depravity, worthlessness and the like), were hereditary and fixed. Missionaries in contrast took the view that though “abject creatures” they still had souls, and thus were amenable to Christian teaching.

In this project, it was again the women who became the focus of missionary attention, as Threlkeld’s remarks showed, in missionary thinking, the status of women, though precarious, was seen as redeemable. Being weaker and “softer”, women were more malleable than men, with greater potential both to fall and to be corrected. Accordingly, some missionaries, such as丹森 Coates from the Church Missionary Society, declared that there was great hope for Aboriginal women, especially those already under missionary surveillance at the Wellington Valley Mission. In a letter to Lord Glenelg of the Colonial Office, Coates wrote that:

161 House of Commons Select Committee on ... Aborigines, 1837, pp. 487–490.
162 Report from the House of Commons Select Committee on ... Aborigines, 1837, pp.11–12.
165 J. Woolminton, op. cit., p.64.

O’BRIEN: IMAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

There is perhaps amongst no Aboriginal females a more general willingness to be instructed than is found amongst these...[with] the constant care and instruction [of the female members of the Mission], under the Divine Blessing, there is no doubt they would become faithful wives, tender mothers, and useful members of society.166

When the Aboriginal women’s activities concurred with the "proper" gender roles as a result of exposure to Christian influence, the missionaries were most warmed by their progress. William Thomas, Assistant Protector in Port Phillip Protectorate, was delighted when the women reminded him of dutiful English wives. When they prepared for the return of the men in the evening, they were:

like carefully domesticated wives of England, getting a clean hearth and good fire for their husband’s return from labour.167

James Backhouse was similarly thrilled by the progress he witnessed in Aboriginal women who had been exposed to the benefits of missionary instruction. On his earlier tour of the colony of New South Wales in the 1830s he remarked:

the women now wash (in spring) their own clothes as well as their husbands as well as any white woman would do.168

Given their ingrained convictions regarding the weakness of women, missionaries were slow to be influenced by growing feminist notions which proposed that the qualities defined in the "universal woman" meant that she was actually superior to the carnal, weaker male. This concept was being advanced by middle-class women both in Britain and the colonies. Forced into the role of wives and mothers yet now being permitted to play a widening role in the "public sphere" of philanthropic work, these ladies were proposing that their

special, self-sacrificing, nurturing qualities and womanly knowledge meant that they knew best how to reform "fallen" women and destitute children. Indeed, if allowed a greater role in the public, political "sphere" in general, they might tidy up some of the grave social problems now causing concern to reformers both in the colonies and in Britain. In this philosophy, massacre, crime, destitution and disease arose less from colonisation or industrialisation than from the sexual double standard, particularly the sexual exploitation of vulnerable women by the inferior, male sex.  

This notion of women as moral police was present in the reformers' programme of using single, emigrant women as marriage partners to civilise convict and ex-convict men. Overall however, these ideas were of limited utility to missionaries. Preoccupied with the Aboriginal women's sexuality, they readily assumed that Aboriginal men must be the custodians of law, religion and culture. Therefore it was the men who must be used to order and uplift the women, not the other way round. Certainly they suspected it was going to be particularly difficult both to "overthrow" the men's law and beliefs and keep them in the missionary fold. Even so in this period they were reluctant to put the view that perhaps the women, once re-educated in proper Christian ideals, could be used as moral police, helping to gain control over the men. Rather they saw themselves as taking over much of the men's assumed authority in policing and ordering the women.

Consequently, though missionaries did take it upon themselves to arrange marriages between Aboriginal men and women, it was the men rather than the women who were to be the moral police. The extent to which Aboriginal women were thought to be "improved" by marriage to white men was much less clear and may have varied according to the particular religious denomination. The Anglican Church when headed by W.G. Broughton, would not allow marriages between white men and black women because of the "spiritual illegality" of the union. Similarly the notion that Aboriginal men might marry white women was not on the agenda. "Will you ... keep me company: or will any white man or woman keep me company?" one Aboriginal man is said to have asked when, returning to the colony after working as a sailor, he was asked why he preferred to rejoin his own people. "White women will marry white men; but no white woman will have me."  

Despite the apparent conflicts between the reformers' and the pastoralists' tactics and stereotypes, there were points where their ideas met. Both ideologies were profoundly shaped by sex and race politics and both were committed to the project of colonisation which meant the acquisition of Aboriginal lands for the pastoral industry. The difference was one of method and degree: the liberals simply maintained that some land should be spared for missions and reserves and opposed the bloody seizure of every inch of it. There were

---


170 For the reformers' notion that it was going to be very difficult to break Aboriginal (men's) tenacious attachment to their law, see G. Grey, Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia, T. & W. Boone, London, 1841, Vol.2, pp.217–23.


172 The role of missionaries in arranging marriages grew with their empowerment during the later "Protection" era; for example, see B. Attwood, "In the name of all my coloured brethren and Sisters...: A Biography of Bessy Cameron", Hecate, Vol.12, Nos.1–2, 1986, pp.13–33 (Ramahyuck, 1860s).


additional areas of consensus in the images and the rhetoric which the two groups used. Certainly the pastoralists had no use for the concept of Aboriginal women as mothers or moral police. They did, however, share the missionary image of the over-exerted Aboriginal woman, though for different reasons. Pastoralists used this stereotype of female slavery to allegé the lack of advancement of Aboriginal gender relationships past a 'naturalistic' stage. Such instances suggest that though science and religion were at odds in many aspects of racial theory, in the case of women they often worked together to define the female sphere. 175

Similarly, though missionaries rejected the pastoralists' notion that women were innately and forever debased, they nevertheless used the same frame of reference. That is, both pastoralists and missionaries judged women in terms of their potential to reach an abstract, feminine ideal, which was where their human worth was seen to lie. For example, the values which the missionaries sought to instil were identical to those which in craniometry, the skull of the 'normal', 'universal' woman was supposed to exhibit. According to phrenologists, women's skulls were less firm than men's, and this meant that they had less fortitude, were less reasonable and more emotional than men. 176 Also female skulls exhibited greater compassion which meant that it was instinctual for them to support helpless offspring, whereas it was not for men. 177 The faculty 'for feeling of duty, obligation, incumbency, right and wrong' was also larger in women. 178

Overlap between the missionary and pastoralist views was also possible because the images constructed by the missionaries were ambivalent. Sympathy co-existed with a racist paternalism; a concern to protect Aboriginal women co-existed with a fear that they were too dangerous and depraved to be left outside missionary control. Certainly in theory, black and white were equal in God's eyes, but always it was the black who must change. 179

Images painted by Augustus Earle seem to express some of these dualities in humanitarian attitudes to Aboriginal women. In his portrait "Native of New South Wales" (Figure 9), a woman is shown to be despondent, impoverished and alone. She is not accompanied by family and children as in the noble savage ideal and her body is not exposed to the viewer. Other images by Earle however show more overt humanitarian appraisal. In Earle's "Native Woman of Australia", c.1820, an older woman sits alone in a space entirely empty except for a somewhat jagged rock to which one hand clings. Though her lined face seems to tell of the ravages of colonisation, her blanket is allowed to slip, revealing the much-maligned, post-maternal breast. Similarly, though her distorted hip and bony, elongated limbs are perhaps meant to show the effects of starvation, they could also could be interpreted as hinting at a primeval animality. As previously stated, Earle had been an artist with the Beagle scientific expedition and was thus in touch with Darwinist ideas. Certainly current "scientific" caricatures of racial difference seem to be emphasised here. 180

One exception to the allegiance of scientists to simian images of elderly women was painted by George French Angas. This artist was a naturalist and ethnologist, author of Savage Life and Scenes in Australia and New Zealand and a future Organiser of scientific specimens in the Australian Museum. However, his "Old Queen Gooseberry Widow of Bungaree" (Figure 10), seems to acknowledge the respect with which, in Aboriginal society, old women were and are treated, being seen not in terms of their sexuality, but as custodians of knowledge and wisdom. Despite his use of her derogatory name, to Angas "Gooseberry" is still a "queen" and as such is treated with some respect. Her stance is dignified and quite defiant, despite the bandages on her feet that perhaps symbolise the hardships of colonisation. Her position in the foreground of the

177 George Coombe, op. cit., p.8.
178 Ibid., p.15.
179 J. Miller, op. cit., p.56.
180 Augustus Earle, "Woman of New South Wales" [1825?], Watercolour; 24.8 x 18.7 cm., Rex Nan Kivell Collection (NK 12/35), National Library of Australia.
painting, with no visible signs of the English presence, bar her blanket, denotes ownership and affiliation with the land. She is in no way made to resemble an orang-outang. Perhaps this artist was influenced by the fact that his father, George Fife Angas, was a classic liberal reformer. One of the founders of the godly and systematic colony of South Australia, Angas (senior) included Aboriginal welfare among his bevy of charitable and uplifting projects which ranged from education and free immigration to temperance ideals.

Thomas Mitchell’s visual depictions of Aboriginal women also avoided caricature, though his actual encounters with them were much more problematic. Given his role in land exploration, road survey and the designation of pastoral districts, not surprisingly Mitchell was no supporter of Aboriginal men. On his expedition in 1835 along the Darling River, and also in 1836 at Mount Dispersion, he shot and killed a number of men whom he considered bollicose and a threat to his party. Like the early navigators and officials, he also sought out young and apparently available Aboriginal women, praising them while denigrating Aboriginal men. His description of one such encounter is strongly reminiscent of the female noble savage, in that her appearance fulfilled a male fantasy. She was:

181 See Deborah Malor, "Dressed to Kill: the Language of European Dress in some early images of Australian Aborigines", Honours Essay, Fine Arts Department, University of Sydney, 1989.
182 Compare French Angas’ treatment of “Queen Gooseberry” with that of Charles Rodius in "One-eyed Poll, Wife of King Bongary" (1844), repr. in J. Kerr, op. cit., p.680.

the handsomest female I had ever seen amongst the natives. She was so far from being black, that the red colour was very apparent in her cheeks. She sat before me in a corner of the group nearby in the attitude of Mr Bailey’s fine statue of Eve at the fountain, apparently equally unconscious that she was naked. As my eye lingered on her for a moment... the brother of the dead chief begged me to accept of her in exchange for a tomahawk.

And there the paragraph ended.

Mitchell also subscribed to the celebration of the noble savage as mother, as illustrated in his image of Turundurey and Ballandella (Figure 11), an Aboriginal woman and her daughter, whom he met in the Murrumbidgee area of New South Wales in September 1836. Mitchell admired the affection and courage of the mother who went to enormous lengths to protect her daughter and for this Mitchell gives her credit. Yet his greatest praise is reserved for her wisdom in "entrusting me with the care of this infant". The reason that Mitchell gave for this decision by the mother, (there is doubt as to whether this arrangement was instigated by Turundurey) is that:

188 Ibid, p.69.
When Truganini was young, she had been packed raped by whalers\textsuperscript{190} as were many of her female relatives, who were often either abducted\textsuperscript{191} or murdered. The rapid and almost complete destruction of the Aboriginal world in Van Diemen’s Land by pastoralism, supported by military campaigns to break Aboriginal resistance, had fostered images of Aboriginal women that were debased in the extremes. Yet Truganini was among a number of women singled out by colonists as an exception. Perhaps the most studied woman in the colonies, many men who knew Truganini were reputedly captivated by her, even the moralistic Robinson, who, it is said, secretly had a sexual relationship with her. She was seen by European men as salacious, high-spirited and irresistibly attractive. Like Péron’s Ouré Ouré and Mitchell’s unnamed beauty, Truganini was Princess Lallah Rook — the fictional personification of the Near East princess — in Robinson’s eyes (at least while youthful and politically useful to him) and other European men called her a “queen”.\textsuperscript{192}

Despite these areas of commonality between the two ideologies, in New South Wales, the year of 1838 saw the views of Aboriginal people locked into battle. In the Myall Creek Trial held in June, seven convict and ex-convict workers who had been accused of murdering at least twenty-eight peaceful Aboriginal people, most of whom were women and children, were retried in Sydney.\textsuperscript{193} Humanitarian voices had had little impact on colonial policy until the ascendancy of the British Evangelicals in the Colonial Office and in Parliament. After achieving the abolition of slavery in 1833

\textsuperscript{190} When Truganini went to Port Phillip with Robinson, in 1841, she was involved in the murder of the whalers whom she alleged had raped her. She was not hanged for this offence, as her two male companions were. See Colin Johnson, \textit{op. cit.}, p.20.
\textsuperscript{191} See Lynell Ryan, \textit{Aboriginal Tasmanians}, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1981, for a positive interpretation of Aboriginal women’s encounters with European men.
\textsuperscript{192} See Vivienne Ras-Ellis, \textit{Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?}, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981.
\textsuperscript{193} For a detailed account of the massacre, the trials and their aftermath, see R. Milliss, \textit{Waterloo Creek}, McPherson Gribble, Ringwood, 1992.

Evangelicals turned their attention to the condition of Aborigines in the British colonies. This precipitated the Select Committee hearings and the establishment of the Aboriginal Protection Society in 1836. The Colonial Office attempted to effect real change in the Australian colonies through clarifying the rule of law as well as through the increase in missionary activity.

For the reformers, the fundamental issues revolved around how Aboriginal people could be fitted into this new more godly society. Their questions ranged over issues like how the original inhabitants were to be afforded the protection of British law as well as being subject to its punitive powers. The pattern of colonising the continent could not be permitted to continue in the same anarchic vein as it had since 1788. How were the basic rights of the continent’s indigenes — their rights to their land, their very lives — going to be incorporated into Christian society?

The battle that ensued between Christian spokesmen and the mainly malevolent media, could thus be seen as another stage of the on-going debate about the mechanics of dispossession and land alienation between opposing powerful groups of whites. Reformers voiced the view that Aboriginal people were the prior occupants of the land, not mere animals to be hunted from it. Pastoralist interests argued the opposite.

These complex issues about land and legitimacy, the very heart of the foundation of the Australian colonies, were the underlying subtext of the bitter political split provoked by the Myall Creek trials. However, in the media and in legal debate the focus was simplified. On this level, the burning issue of the trial was whether British courts should consider the murder of any Aboriginal people a crime. The battle lines were drawn over proving or disproving the humanity of Aboriginal people.

The trial produced vitriolic anti-Aboriginal invective, both in the court and within the newspaper campaigns that vehemently opposed the notion of white men being brought to trial for the murder of Aboriginal people. The stridently anti-Aboriginal media did not consider it a criminal offence, let alone an offence for which white men might be hanged. Atrocities such as this one had occurred many times before; they were part of the frontier existence, in which the law need not intervene. As Reece argues:
despite the inconvenient fact that the Aborigines killed were mostly women and children who had no connection with the attacks.

The Sydnei Gazette and the Sydney Herald savaged the missionary claim of Aboriginal humanity, dismissing the victims as "a few black cannibals". Squatter John Henderson wrote that the support was so strongly behind the seven convicts that "subscriptions were raised to defray the defence counsel".

The vocal opponents of Aboriginal people purposefully avoided reference to the victims' sex (and all the connotations that went with it, such as women being hopeless, non-predatory and mothers). The victims were not women and children in these people's eyes but animalistic, rural pests. On the missionary side, the rhetoric was equally as emotive. Reverend J.D. Lang preached an apocalyptic vision of national sin, saying:

all the people of New South Wales would suffer the crimes of the squatters and their convict servants [unless this crime was punished].

The transcripts of evidence at the trial allow rare convict workers' perceptions of Aboriginal women to be heard. Three people were spared from the slaughter: a small boy and two young women who were taken captive and raped until they managed to escape from the house in which they had been imprisoned. This occurrence was discussed during the trial. According to the evidence, the women on the frontier were like currency between the white men, and were offered around in return for favours and such like. Using the derogatory language now applied to Aboriginal women, assigned servant, Robert Sexton reported in his statement that:

... one of the men had a black gin with him. She seemed to be a prisoner, he offered to give her to me ... He asked me if I would keep the gin 'till he came back again.

Similar viewpoints on Aboriginal women were expressed by other convict witnesses. As the humanitarians feared, it was apparent that assigned servants had assumed a position of some power on the frontier and felt that they could exercise control over Aboriginal women, whom they viewed as pawns. The treatment of the two women was frowned upon, but it was not dealt with as a crime in itself. Punishing white men for murdering Aboriginal people was one thing, but convicting them of rape was another, outside the scope of humanitarian reformers' agendas. Rape laws, because of the powerful preconceptions about race and class and their impact on women's sexuality, were rarely, if ever, enacted to protect Aboriginal women.

Newcomers to the pastoral industry could be slow to grasp the politics of this debate. Artist James Wilson who arrived from Scotland in 1837, actually chose to paint an Aboriginal woman at Braidwood in 1838 with oils and in the grand eighteenth-century portrait convention (Figure 12, "Gunbal"). A new variant of the noble savage "princess", here the female subject appeared as an elegantly-clad, European lady of fashion, her large, solemn eyes perhaps offering a reproach to the current treatment of her people.

References:

195 Ibid, p.159.
197 R.H.W. Reece, op. cit., p.163. Other major events of 1838 that inflamed pastoralist opinion against Aboriginal people were the Faithful Massacre that occurred in the Port Phillip District in which seven white men were killed by Aboriginal people and the killing of three white men in the Gwydir region in that year.
198 The Push From the Bush: A Bulletin of Social History (Special Myall Creek Issue), No.20, Apr. 1985, p.77.
199 The intention here is not to argue for or against Aboriginal woman's agency, but rather to ascertain the attitude held towards these women by the men who worked in the pastoral industry.
201 Nigel Parbury, op. cit. Tim Bonyhady argues that Gunbal could not have been a "half-caste", but rather that Wilson unwittingly
The title too, might be taken as a commentary on the racial views expressed by pastoralists during the Myall Creek trials: "Portrait of Gunbal (... alias ... Third Gin of Moravany, Chief of Wig Wigly Tribe, County St Vincent, NSW, September, 1838)". Yet Wilson's relatives were themselves members of the pastoral elite. According to the diary of his daughter (Anne Chapman), during his time with them at Braidwood, Wilson may have been involved in "blackfellow" shooting parties. Any antipathy towards Aboriginal people, however, is not evident in this portrait.

One white woman who publicly commented on Myall Creek also looked back to Enlightenment and Romantic ideology. She was Eliza Dunlop, wife of the Wollombi Police Magistrate. Closely associated with the legal fraternity who had successfully challenged the pastoral ascendancy at the trials, Mrs. Dunlop preferred to offer a version of the female noble savage as a suffering mother rather than stately princess or queen. Her poem entitled "The Aboriginal Mother" appeared in the Australian on 13 December, 1838. Here the Aboriginal woman is not a "black gin", a concubine or diseased and ugly. She is a loving wife and mother, trying to protect her child from the murderous "pale-faced men". Strongly affirming the importance of women as mothers, Mrs. Dunlop's savage to some extent suggests the new feminist notion that this role empowered women: after all her noble savage mother has saved her infant and escaped from the massacre site. However, the anguished mother is also shown as heavily dependent on classic male warrior figures as Europeanised her face. See Tim Bowisdays, Australian Colonial Paintings in the Australian National Gallery, OUP, Melbourne, 1986, p.209.

202 This elongated title is the inscription on the back of the painting that conveyed ethnographical detail of the woman. Nothing else is known of her.

203 See Nigel Parbury, op. cit.

204 Mrs. Dunlop's husband David gave evidence to the New South Wales Select Committee on the Conditions of the Aborigines, 1845. He stated that "the female aborigines are modest in demeanour, and quite as morally conducted as the native, or otherwise free woman" and also that the Aboriginal people of his area were "friendly and obliging in the extreme". (p.964).

represented by her murdered husband and older son, thus affirming the ideals of wedded womanhood and nuclear family life. As well, the mother appeals to male Christian figures for protection and redress.

The poem received considerable acclaim. Sentimental and gruesome simultaneously, it was set to music by Isaac Nathan, "whose daughter's rendition of the song brought tears to the eyes of her audience". The poem rekindled the medieval Latin poetry theme ubi sunt (or "where are they now?") and mourned the disappearance of the Aboriginal people, a style of verse that was in fashion in some newspapers. Dunlop's poem was attacked by the pastoralist lobby in the Sydney press. The Herald denied that Aboriginal women could possess the strong sentiments that the poem conveyed. Also she was criticised as her Aboriginal mother sounded too much like an American "Indian", to which she replied that her intention was the "awakening of sympathies of the English nation for a people rendered desperate and revengeful by continued acts of outrage". Her sex, she felt, gave her the privilege to express such compassion and empathy towards an Aboriginal woman, and she "denounced attempts to 'shade with ridicule ties stronger than death, which bind the heart of woman, be she Christian or savage'.

While intellectuals in the two groups of colonists debated these issues, the Myall Creek decision did nothing to improve the lot of Aboriginal people. It was not concerned to arrest dispossession and

---

205 The poem is reproduced in full in Push from the Bush, op. cit., pp.33–34. See also E. Webby, "Reactions to the Myall Creek Massacre", ibid., No.8, Dec. 1980.


207 Ibid., p.126.


209 Ibid., p.126.

210 Ibid., p.126.
signalled little more than the clash of the two colonising ideals with shared outcome. Moreover, after the hangings, frontier massacres by police became more common and those by pastoralists more covert. The year 1838 thus marked the pinnacle of missionary power in the colony with the hangings in Sydney of the seven men found guilty of carrying out the massacre. After this, much of the ideological battle between the missionaries and the pastoralists (backed by the increasingly powerful voice of race and evolutionary science) shifted to the newly formed Port Phillip Protectorate. This conflict occurred against a background of mass destruction of the Aboriginal world that was strongly mirrored in the images of Aboriginal women.

3 Sex, Skulls and the "Dying Race": The Failure of the Port Phillip Protectorate and the Triumph of Science 1839–1850

In 1837, the House of Commons Select Committee Report on the condition of Aborigines in British Settlements declared that a Protectorate was to be established at the new colony recently founded at Port Phillip. This rapidly advancing settlement was of special concern to missionaries and liberals, both in Britain and the older colonies. Began informally by pastoralists who had introduced flocks, herds and convict servants primarily from Van Diemen's Land and also New South Wales, the land acquisition had been initiated by direct "treaty" with the Aboriginal inhabitants and without state permission or control. Not only had this action failed to raise revenue from the sale of "crown" land, but also, humanitarian feared, it meant that the slaughter and suffering that had been inflicted on Aboriginal people of Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales would surely be repeated. However, it was assumed, such a vigorous process of imperial expansion, could not be impeded. Therefore the only way to prevent it becoming another infamous chapter in British colonisation was to emphasise that Aboriginal people were British citizens, entitled to state assistance to ensure their "protection", conversion and incorporation into the colonial labour force.

New forms of protection were also seen as important because it was now thought that Australian Aboriginal people were especially demographically vulnerable. According to Sydney's Bishop Broughton, giving evidence at this inquiry, in the face of colonisation, the Australian Aborigines "appear actually to vanish from the face of the earth". He added:

I am led to apprehend that within a very limited period, a few years, those who are most in contact with Europeans will be utterly extinct - I will not say exterminated - but they will be extinct.\(^{212}\)

This ideology of a "dying race" had profound implications for Aboriginal women, rationalising even more clinical and savage denunciations of their alleged "fitness" for motherhood. Where once indigenous women had been taken as a model of the "universal woman" as mother, now they would be judged as largely responsible for the decline of an "inferior race".

The new Protectorate was a most ambitious scheme. Modelled around policies and practices already tried in Van Diemen's Land by Governor Arthur and George Robinson, it entailed appointing five state "Protectors". The Chief Protector was to be Robinson himself; the other four were to travel with various Aboriginal groups across designated districts, keeping the peace with pastoralists and stockmen and eventually persuading the Aboriginal people to leave their land and settle down under missionary supervision on allocated reserves.

In practice however, this was not so easy. Not only were Port Phillip Aboriginal people resistant to the missionary agenda, but also the Protectors came into direct opposition to the pastoralists and their workers, both with respect to land use and the treatment of Aboriginal women. The prevailing practice of regarding Aboriginal women as the droit de seigneur of European men became one of the

\(^{211}\) M.F. Christie, op. cit., p.46; J. Kociumbas, op. cit.

\(^{212}\) Minutes of Evidence before the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines in British Settlements, 1837, pp.10–11. Missionary fears of extermination dated from at least the 1820s. See Scott to Darling (27 Mar. 1828), HRA, Series 1, Vol.14, p.57.

Thus, despite the humanitarians' apparent victory at the Myall Creek trials, the Port Phillip Protectors would be no more effective than the earlier missionaries in preventing violence and sexual exploitation of women. Indeed, the Protectors' reports from the "frontier" would increase debate about the women and especially their sexuality. Moreover, in order to excuse their defeat, by the 1840s, missionaries and liberals would themselves begin to adopt the language and the rationalisations of science. Though few descended to the Darwinian objectification of women, they did begin, like Broughton, to accept the view that depopulation of Aboriginal Australia was a scientific inevitability, a notion which tended to blame the Aboriginal people for their own demise. It followed that the humanitarians, despite their godly intentions, actually contributed to the process by which further stereotypes of ignobility were developed and disseminated.

Two images of Aboriginal women produced by John Herder Wedge 1835 at Port Phillip illustrate the degraded level to which pastoralist images of Aboriginal women were descending.\footnote{John Herder Wedge, "Native Woman Sitting, Port Phillip, 1835", Fieldbook, MS9302, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.} Wedge was a surveyor, explorer and one of the Van Diemen's Land pastoralists and investors who formed the Port Phillip Association.\footnote{See Joan Kerr, ed., The Dictionary of Australian Artists, Painters, Sketchers, Photographers and Engravers to 1870, OUP, Melbourne, 1992, p.847.} Entitled "Native Woman Sitting", in the first of these sketches, Wedge's gaze is fixed on the subject's genitals. The outline of her face is rudimentary in the extreme and her breasts have been omitted entirely. The effect is to infer not merely that Aboriginal women are available, sexual and wanton, but that sexual exploitation was their raison d'etre. This is a much more dehumanising form of sexualisation than in the earlier noble or ignoble images. Face, figure and age are now irrelevant and the possibility of motherhood dubious.

Many of the images of female ignobility produced in this period were focused around such notions of Aboriginal women as not only lascivious but polluted, diseased and unfit for motherhood. That is, far from just vanishing, as Broughton suggested, Aboriginal people were in fact being made the subject of a highly visible, grotesque imagery centred upon deformity, inadequate mothering and sexually transmitted disease. This potent imagery was of immense utility to Europeans, helping to suggest the inevitability of extinction and freeing them from responsibility for problems such as alcoholism and syphilis. For pastoralists in particular, dying race ideology further distracted attention from their personal role in massacre and dispossession.

Some of the purposes of the inhuman images that pastoralists perpetrated were well understood by the Protectors. The ugly stereotypes furnished European men on the frontier "with an excuse for taking away their [Aboriginal people's] lives."\footnote{Lieutenant W.H. Breton, cited in R.H.W. Reece, Aborigines and Colonists, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1974, p.102.} What the Protectors were less able to address, however, were their own biases and the indirect but powerful role they themselves were playing in the production and dissemination of dying race ideology.

Even before the Protectorate was established in 1839, irreversible damage had been done to Aboriginal demography and health. Though smallpox was not reported in Bass Strait and Van Diemen's Land, venereal disease was rife and whalers and sealers had been making visits to the mainland to "obtain" native women since Hobart was settled in 1804. Rapid pastoral expansion raised levels of syphilis amongst Aboriginal people of Port Phillip to epidemic proportions. Assistant Protector, William Thomas, writing in 1839 was struck that "venereal disease" was not confined to age or sex: "the infant at the breast as well as the aged and infirm" were infected with it.\footnote{HR Vic, Vol.2B, pp.523-24.} Whereas undoubtedly the abduction and infection of women and girls had catastrophic consequences for Aboriginal lifeways, the inference in such reports was that Aboriginal people had
become a centre of infection, dangerous to innocent Europeans and unable to produce healthy offspring.

As John Herder Wedge's sketches suggest, the ideas about how Aboriginal women were to be treated in this new colony were clear from the outset. Like Wedge's visual rendition of this mentality, Edward Henty's Portland journal entry for 29 March, 1835, adds weight to the argument that these notions were central to the operation of this latest frontier:

Thos. [sic.] Clerk-Brown-Jones and Page left the Fishery without permission on the 27th inst. [sic.] at daybreak with a fortnight supply of Provisions for the supposed Purpose of getting Native women ...218

In pastoral circles the extent of sexual interaction with Aboriginal women was often downplayed, not the least because it severely contradicted the image of the Aboriginal people as an inhuman, rural menace. The obvious presence of European sexual diseases was argued away by claims that these pre-existed European contact.219 Even so, Police Magistrate of Melbourne, Foster Fyans, a forceful voice of pastoralism, estimated that by 1840 two-thirds of the Aboriginal population of Port Phillip were infected by venereal diseases, as well as every shepherd.220

Among pastoralists, the existence of "half-caste" children was also denied. Foster Fyans, though prepared to admit that venereal disease was out of control, flatly refused to acknowledge any intercourse that may have resulted in children of mixed descent. When giving evidence at the 1845 New South Wales Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines, he stated:

O'BRIEN: IMAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Half-castes I have never heard of in this country. I should not think any European would brutalise himself so much!221

While silence generally prevailed in pastoralist accounts of interracial sexual relations, missionary accounts abounded with detail of the destruction that this insidious contact was having on the Aboriginal world. Such reports however were of little assistance to Aboriginal people. Though the missionaries were endowed with magisterial powers to prosecute offenders, and their very presence was supposed to act as a deterrent to white men having sexual contact with Aboriginal women, neither was effectual. The reports they submitted could be and were used to blame and denigrate Aboriginal society, and "prove" that extinction was not only inevitable but richly deserved.

As in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, massacre, abduction, kidnapping and the destruction of their land left the women little choice but to engage in sexual relations with white men. The Protectors constantly bemoaned the perpetuation of what they saw as a vicious cycle of prostitution. Though they recognised the impoverishment of the women, they still saw them as easily seduced by the white men's offers of material comforts. As E.S. Parker, Assistant Protector of Loddon region, wrote to Robinson on 1 April, 1840:

I cannot persuade the younger females to resist the importunities of the white man, while I am unable to offer a counter-inducement in the shape of food, clothing or shelter ...222

The publicity given to these issues by the Protectors tended to shift attention away from the pastoralists' economic stake in occupying Aboriginal land and to place the focus squarely on the behaviour of their workers. Thus James Dredge, in charge of the Goulburn Region, reported in September 1839 that the "prostituting system" was "traceable to ... the depraved portion of the white population" (that is convicts and emancipists), even though the

219 P.H.W. Reece, op. cit., p.54.
221 New South Wales Select Committee Report on the Condition of the Aborigines, 1845, p.986.
women's "clients" on this occasion were actually the Mounted Police. On another occasion, Dredge did acknowledge that the Border Police (who were established in 1839 with the express purpose of enforcing order) were among the worst offenders in "bribing Aboriginal women to sleep with them".223

In their desire to monitor sexual relationships on the unruly frontier, Protectors perpetuated the view that Aboriginal people were incapable of managing their own sexuality. Protectors attempted to impose their will in this regard, but often to little avail. Protector William Thomas, appointed to oversee the Melbourne and Westernport areas, put this view when he told how on the night of 13 November 1839, two sailors from a visiting ship came to the camp, "expecting to have a regular jollification with the natives". Here he also revealed the currency of the label "lubras" for young Aboriginal women, a term which Europeans used derogatively and which he himself employed:

Just as I was getting to bed, I was interrupted by another apparent gentleman who came boldly up to one miam saying, "I want a lubra, here's white money!" I dispatched him, who said that a black lubra had a right to be a whore as well as a white one, and I am sorry to state that the blacks were willing to accommodate him. What can be done with these people under such circumstances and what power have I? None.224

The desire of Protectors to monitor frontier behaviour in general was not assisted by the fact that it had been decided that Aboriginal people's testimony could not be heard in the court unless they understood the meaning of the Christian oath. Two nights after the incident described by Thomas, a woman was abducted from the camp and the following night a white drunk came into the camp and physically assaulted two women. One of the women holding a baby was knocked to the ground. Thomas had the man locked up, but two days later he was acquitted by the magistrate as only Aboriginal people had witnessed the attack. The white offender was fined five shillings for being drunk.225 Similar attacks on women were recorded regularly by other Protectors, with the perpetrators seldom being brought to justice. There were rare exceptions, such as the case of two convicts found guilty of abducting Aboriginal women in September 1839 in the Western District and who were given fifty lashes as punishment.226

Despite the fact that Governor Bourke had made a hollow decree in September 1837 that made the forcible detention of Aboriginal women by squatters and their servants unlawful, there was little reflection of this in the frontier courts which treated attacks on Aboriginal women lightly. As Niel Black, a squatter in the Port Phillip District admitted, shepherds and hutkeepers would "sleep all night with a lubra and if she poxes him or in any way offends him perhaps shoot her before 12 the next day".227 While rape charges could not be brought against men because of the ruling on Aboriginal evidence, murder of women was treated as indifferently as that of Aboriginal men by the most Aboriginal-hating pastoralists228 who often dominated the juries in the new colony.229

The records of the Protectors chronicled the devastation being caused to Aboriginal health. Apart from the venereal diseases that caused untold agony and distress, malnutrition and lack of fresh water also brought on attacks of dysentery which had tragic effects on the ravaged Aboriginal people. Sickness, suffering, starvation, death and mourning were among the commonest images of Aboriginal people, especially women, recorded by the Protectors after only five years of official settlement.

Some of the most harrowing sights were those of women caring for the sick and mourning the dead. Witnessing such trauma caused

---

224 Ibid., p.560.
225 Ibid., p.574.
226 Ibid., p.607.
227 Michael Christie, op. cit., p.47.
228 See Edmund Finn, The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852, Melbourne, 1888, p.360.
229 See the evidence of squatter John Malcolm at the New South Wales Select Committee on the Condition of Aborigines, 1845, regarding the law, juries and the attitudes to killing of Aboriginal people (pp.954–957).
discomfort to Protectors because of the intensity of emotion these women displayed in grief which was quite foreign to them as Englishmen. Also, remarks about mourning women were laced with the realisation of how profoundly these people were suffering in the wake of the pastoral invasion. Thomas records one woman keening for her son (the cause of death is not revealed):

His mother making a horrid picture of herself, her face scratched till her temples and cheeks were nearly raw, six burns on each breast, her belly, thighs and legs were also burned till she was a perfect cripple, could hardly crawl, which with her head dreadfully plastered with mud of clay and daubs on her bloody forehead, made her appear labouring under pain of body as well as mind.230

Protector Thomas, despite his incredulity and distinct unease with grieving women, did allow his fettered emotions, in some instances, to colour his images of women. On one such occasion he recorded the anguish of a woman caring for an old man and a small child. He wrote that she was:

sitting tearing at her face and crying. She had a child about three years of age carefully wrapped in skin. I said "Bad?" She said "Plenty bad" ... The affection of this lubra had an effect on my mind. 231

The sight of Aboriginal women in mourning was often mistaken for illness, so great was the physical manifestation of their grief. W.A. Cawthorne’s “A Native Woman Mourning for the Dead” (1844) is a case in point.232 This image was initially entitled “Native Woman Diseased” but the artist altered the title with the realisation that this woman was not afflicted with syphilis, but rather sorrow. Cawthorne’s rendering of this woman was not, however, sympathetic. He represented her as a defeated being, symbolised by the aged female body unclad with pendulous breasts. Such a derogatory image suggests that mourning had been added to the cluster of stereotypes now associated with the female ignoble savage.

Even more than mourning, allegations of infanticide as publicised by the Protectors were used both by them and by their opponents to condemn Aboriginal society and explain its demographic decline. Despite the fact they had no first-hand information on this issue, missionaries and pastoralists believed infanticide was routinely practised and that this was a habit that pre-dated invasion. Thus Thomas alleged:

… is, I fear a growing evil; they were even accustomed to destroy the fruit of the womb till a male was born, but now, I have reason to believe that male and female are alike destroyed; one chief has acknowledged to me that he has no power to stop it; the blacks say “no country; no good have it pickainnoys” [sic].233

At the same time, politics demanded that the Protectors show that the Protectorate was “civilising” Aboriginal people. This meant that sometimes they were prepared to down-play the prevalence of this alleged practice. Where pastoralists, having no vested interest in proving Aboriginal ability to “reform”, were ever ready to allege that infanticide was common,234 at the 1845 Select Committee Robinson stated:

Infanticide to a limited extent exists, half-caste children have been invariably its victim; of late some tribes have spared this portion of their offspring.235

Likewise, Parker falsely claimed at the same inquiry that the health of the women was so improved in the Loddon area that there had been an increase in their fecundity.236 However, for the ten years to 1849 he recorded only 20 births amongst the seven tribes of Melbourne.237

---

231 Ibid., p.525.
233 NSW Select Committee on ... Aborigines, 1845, p.986.
234 NSW Select Committee on ... Aborigines, 1845, p.984.
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 R. Broome, op. cit., p.61.
MAPS, DREAMS, HISTORY

The extensive reportage by missionaries and Protectors of inter-tribal fighting similarly contributed to the prevailing image of "savagey" and was used to suggest that Aboriginal people were engineering their own destruction. Such allegations were of special utility to pastoralists when, following the Myall Creek judgement, they had special need to divert the blame from themselves for the depletion of Aboriginal numbers. Inter-tribal warfare, they argued, made the "friction" between white and black pale by comparison.

Allegations of cannibalism too became a political football used by both groups. Foster Fyans was adamant in his evidence to the 1845 New South Wales Select Committee that Aboriginal people killed and ate children as an act of revenge on other tribes. Some missionaries shared the belief that Aboriginal people were cannibals, thus contributing to the way this stereotype, like infanticide, was endorsed as a core feature of colonisers' images of "primitive" peoples.

Some pastoralists' wives also perpetuated these stereotypes. Louisa Meredith, married to a squatter who resided in the Swan Port District of Tasmania, had no hesitation in alleging that Aboriginal women were not to be trusted to care for their own infants. Where

238 Though Protectors also reported conflicts between white and black, and recognised that inter-tribal clashes were exacerbated by invasion, they also believed this behaviour was evidence of "degradation" and contributing to "extinction". See HR Vic., Vol.2A, pp.128, 146. See Beverly Nance for a perpetuation of this argument in "The Level Of Violence: Europeans and Aborigines in Port Phillip, 1835-1850", Historical Studies, Oct. 1981, Vol.19, No.77, especially the appendix, pp. 550-52.


242 Louisa Anne Meredith, Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844, London, 1844, p.95.

243 See J. Kerr, op. cit., p.824. "W.T." sketched 35 pictures of "Natives of Portland Bay District"; all are dated 1843. Figures 24 and 25 are part of that series that are held at the Mitchell Library.

244 Ibid., p.824.


O'BRIEN: IMAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Eliza Dunlop had used the ideal of women as naturally good mothers to attack the pastoral lobby. Mrs. Meredith described Aboriginal women as careless child-killers. In her Notes and Sketches of New South Wales (1844), she treated one Aboriginal woman's excuse for the absence of her child with incredulous contempt. When asked by Meredith's husband of the whereabouts of the baby:

she replied with perfect nonchalance, "I believe the Dingo pattat!" – She believed the dog had eaten it! Numbers of the hapless little beings are no doubt disposed of by their unnatural mothers in a similar way ...

Despite the further development of stereotypes of ignobility to explain and excuse genocide, some male pastoralists still found use for the noble savage ideal. The artist called "W.T.", who has recently been identified as Thomas Le Mesurier Winter, was a pastoralist who owned or controlled property in Tasmania and also ran an unprofitable sheep station on the Glenelg River in the Portland Bay district from 1840 to 1843.

Like the earlier explorers and officials, Winter seems to have idealised and sexualised certain young women while denigrating everyone else. Indeed, in a letter written in 1837, he referred to the Aboriginal people of Port Phillip as:

numerous and troublesome; indeed, they are the greatest drawback to the colony, since they cannot be trusted. Several murders have been committed by them, but not lately, and they seem to fear white man's revenge.

392
MAPS, DREAMS, HISTORY

Yet his drawings of Aboriginal women were relatively empathetic. Two in particular showed the cleanness of two solitary women to the observer. The inscription of a name in one, "Yer-werrimone-Kitty", showed that the artist was quite familiar with her. The subjects’ eye contact with the artist gave them a seductive appearance, especially in one picture where the reclining posture of the unnamed woman and the exposure of her breasts suggested sexual availability. Like the young woman drawn by Earle and Mitchell, these subjects were shown as separated from Aboriginal men, a fact which seems to give the artist more liberty to sexualise them.

The Protectors, like the earlier missionaries, sought to mould Aboriginal women into the ideal Christian woman. However, the conversion of Aboriginal women into submissive wives and mothers was not as simple as it was thought at the outset. The status of Aboriginal women within the tribal world often confused the Protectors, who could not understand the dynamics within Aboriginal culture. The spectacle of intertribal fighting involving women shocked Thomas, who recorded one incident with severe disapproval:

They always fight naked with fires lit around them ... they looked disgusting ... The sister in the fray got her head cut dreadfully and two Port Phillip lubras, one seriously. Sent my daughter from the encampment for safety, as I find these people are lustfully savage as ever, and cannot be depended on ... 246

Women’s mysterious power over men in inter-tribal rivalry also contradicted the ideal that European men had of women. Again, Thomas apparently witnessed a group of women seeking revenge against men of the Goulburn Tribe:

To my utter surprise, as soon as the lubras surrounded the miam and got hold of the hair of one, the whole of the men seemed powerless, and in a moment they were all as if dead men, speechless. The lubras without uttering a word cut off a lock of each of their hair and went their way. The blacks all surrounded

O'BRIEN: IMAGES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

the young men to comfort them, telling me "that soon die" and "no more handle spear". 247

Such behaviour frustrated the Protectors who had pinned their hopes on Aboriginal women complying with the Christian ideal of woman, as the means through which "civilisation" of the Aboriginal world might be achieved. Pastoralists took this failure to change and "improve" Aboriginal women, as well as Aboriginal men, as another reason why the Protectorate was inept and therefore useless. The vast expense of the project was continually reiterated by its opponents. Superintendent of Port Phillip, Charles La Trobe, estimated that the cost of the Protectorate to 1849 was "a sum of no less than forty-two thousand two hundred pounds". 248 The expense of the Protectorate was blamed for the financial crisis which befall the colony in the 1840s and which was exacerbated by the severe drought that lasted from 1837 to 1845. The drought also worsened relations between pastoralists and Aboriginal people through the effects of increased hunger and thirst. 249

The effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people, in all its horrific manifestations — disease, sexual violence, severe disruption to tribal life, massive loss of life and alcohol — by the 1840s seemed only to reinforce the ignoble images evoked by the scientific race theories. The Protectors began to see the failure of their mission in terms of the innate hopelessness of the Aboriginal people which the increasingly popular evolutionary theories espoused. However they also blamed the pastoralists whose deliberate efforts to obstruct the Protectors' work in investigating massacres and other crimes had rendered the Protectorate moribund from its earliest days. 250

With the cessation of the Protectorate in 1849, the Christian/philanthropic method of dealing with the "Aboriginal problem" fell temporarily into disrepute. Only gradually would the process of

250 See *HR Vic*, Vol.2B, p.639, for an account of pastoralist obstruction to Assistant Protector Siewewright in his attempts to investigate a massacre of 20–30 Aboriginals in Nov. and Dec. 1839.
reserve-formation be resumed, and only in areas where the dispossession of Aboriginal people from land of immediate use to Europeans was largely complete. Already scientists and government administrators were becoming the new "experts" on Aboriginal policy and it was their images of Aboriginal people as the "missing link" between humanity and the animal world which were becoming commonplace. Missionaries however continued to contribute their version of racist theory, papers by them being read, for example, at the Ethnological Society of London, a new body formed in 1843 when members of the old Aborigines' Protection Society broke away to study anthropological theory and how it might be applied to "native welfare".

The discovery of gold near Bathurst in 1851 and the subsequent gold rushes in New South Wales and Victoria brought a much larger wave of Europeans, again mostly men, onto Aboriginal lands. Like the pastoralists, the men seeking gold adopted scientific race-images of Aboriginal people to justify their invasion. Cruel stereotypes became the order of the day, as Charles Abbold's 1854 sketch from near the Bendigo goldfields, "Colonial Gin and Water", displayed.251 Here a woman of indeterminate age huddled over a small fire, warming her hands. Though her body was wrapped in a cloak, her face, staring back at the viewer, lacked the human qualities of Augustus Earle's otherwise similar "Native of New South Wales" (Figure 9). Even worse, the title chosen by Abbold contained the derogatory label, "gin". Abbold's crude joke that made Aboriginal women synonymous with cheap alcohol, perhaps also inferred that she was herself alcoholic. The intention was to suggest she is not to be pitied but despised because, inherently inferior, she has brought about her own decline.

A parade of eminent scientists toured Australia between 1835 and 1850, including John Gould, Charles Darwin, Count Strzelecki, Joseph Dalton Hooker, Thomas Henry Huxley. Their gaze further excluded Aboriginal women from any relationship to the ideal of every woman as a fruitful, nurturing mother. What these scientists were interested in was gathering evidence and observing that group of beings who were assumed to be the lowest on the evolutionary ladder, Aboriginal women.

In 1845, Count Strzelecki used Aboriginal women's bodies as the basis for his postulation that the Aboriginal race was destined for extinction. After an Aboriginal woman had given birth to a "half-caste" child, Strzelecki posited that Aboriginal women could no longer have "full-blooded" children, owing to the fact that their bodies became infecund to Aboriginal men. Nature, he thought, took its course and selected and differentiated between superior and inferior races in the wombs of Aboriginal women.252

This view was disputed by naval surgeon, T.R. Heywood Thomson, who visited New South Wales in 1849. Unlike Strzelecki, Thomson was prepared to admit to the role of the white man's alcohol, tobacco and diseases, including small-pox, in Aboriginal demography. However, he also believed that infanticide was a factor, alleging that Aboriginal women practised this after leaving the white man's household to return to what he saw as their harsh "native" partners and more strenuous lifestyle.253

These debates followed on from other "scientific" views such as that put forward by a "phrenologist" who wrote to the Colonist, in October 1838, suggesting that:

600 white female convicts should be distributed among the tribes and an equal number of Aboriginal women be placed among the white stockmen and shepherds,254

as the skulls of "half-castes" showed definite signs of racial improvement.

By the 1850s, the white male interest in finding "liberal" justifications for retaining patriarchy meant that in scientific circles,


\[252\] R.H.W. Reece, op. cit., p.91.


women in general were being discussed largely in terms of their success or failure as reproductive vessels for the race. This made Aboriginal women particularly interesting to theorists of miscegenation and of imperial demography. In addition, because they equated mental ability with physical strength, scientists saw all women's mental powers as less than men's. Thus, Aboriginal women, being both women and Aboriginal (that is, the lowest form of human existence), were now denigrated because of their gender as well as their race.

These "scientific" images were absorbed into governmental attitudes to Aboriginal people by the 1830s. A comparison of the questions asked of witnesses at the 1845 Select Committee on the Conditions of Aborigines and those of the 1859 Victorian Legislative Council Select Committee on the Aborigines illustrate how widespread the acceptance of scientific information was. Witnesses were now asked to describe the Aboriginal people of their area in terms of any prevailing disproportions between different parts of the body and to describe the shape of the head:

Is it round or elongated in either direction, and what is the shape of the face -- broad, oval, lozenge-shaped, or any other marked form?257

Aboriginal women were now assessed as mothers according to the shape of their skull. Witnesses answered questions about whether Aboriginal women loved their children, or as phrenological language phrased it, "did their skulls display phallogenitiveness?"258 (love of offspring, of children or pets), determined by a large bump at the back of the skull. One witness, Mr Hull, went so far as to allege that Aboriginal women couldn't really distinguish between children and animals. "I have seen a woman suckling a puppy [whilst] her coolie waddled the newborn child", he claimed.259 This allegation had become a stock image by the 1840s among Van Diemen's Land "scientists" like Mr Hull.260

Thus, Aboriginal women who, at the beginning of the century, were seen by Romantics and others as ideal wives and mothers, a model which European women should emulate, were now being viewed by evolutionary theorists as unfit to carry out the vast responsibility of parenthood. "Scientific" evidence and "proof" of innate inferiority also buried the more recent philanthropic belief in the "improvability" of Aboriginal women.

These processes had been aided by the fact that the philanthropists' notion that Aboriginal people shared a common humanity with Europeans had always been highly qualified. Their arrogant belief in the women's "improvability" was itself testimony of this, and reflected the fact that they were not opposed to dispossession but merely wished to achieve it through what they perceived as peaceful, educative and lawful means.

As well, missionaries and Protectors had manipulated for their own purposes evidence of Aboriginal people suffering the ravages of colonisation. In so doing they had helped give currency to the image of a diseased and dying race, doomed to extinction largely because of the behaviour of its women. It was no coincidence that missionary images of women allegedly unfit for motherhood and in need of "protection" would soon fuse with the "dry light of science"261 to


258 Ibid., p.47.

259 Ibid., p.50.


justify ever more coercive government policies to control and change survivors. In particular, the insidious missionary and scientific images that denigrated Aboriginal women because of race and gender, would come to underpin the twentieth-century child-removal policy, which would see thousands of Aboriginal children taken from their mothers.

This thesis has covered only a minute part of the vast area of European visions of Aboriginal women. It has been limited to a narrow geographical area and also to a time that predated the camera, which would add another dimension to the visual images created of Aboriginal women. By narrowing the focus however, one is better able to highlight how the invention and perpetuation of stereotypes can only be explained by reference to the political and economic landscape in which such ideas were constructed. That is, though images of Aboriginal women were profoundly influential in determining racial policies and practices, they were neither autonomous nor primary, being in their turn determined by the personal agendas of various groups of colonisers. This approach further explains why images of Aboriginal women must be given a special analysis, distinguishing them both from Aboriginal men (owing to the sex-dimension), and from European women, both of the ruling and working-class (because of the assumptions, distortions and categories added by racial theory). Though images of Aboriginal women shared many common features both with those of Aboriginal men and European women, the "gaze of the ghosts" upon Aboriginal women was unique.

Figure 1: "Nieuw-Hollanders", J. Kuyper in M. Stuart, De Mensch, J. Allart, Amsterdam, 1802–1807, Vol.3, opposite p.34; Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

The differences between the female noble savage and the male noble savage are clearly displayed in this Dutch image. The male is strong, protective and active whilst the young female ideal sits submissively inside the hut, cradling her infant. The male ideal embodies the trappings of culture whilst the female is subsumed within the realm of nature.
Collins claimed that this engraving presented "a correct view" of Aboriginal people, here said to be engaged in "the softer amusements of singing and dancing".

In fact the two prominent female figures are shaped by the dual ideals of complacent motherhood and fetching femininity dictated by the noble savage ideal.

Figure 2: "A Night Scene in the Neighbourhood of Sydney" (1802), engraved by T. Powell after William Alexander, in David Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, reproduced with permission from A.H. & A.W. Reed, Sydney, 1975, Vol. 2, p.150

Figure 3: "Natives Under a Rock in Bad Weather" (1802), engraved by T. Powell after William Alexander, in David Collins, An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, reproduced with permission from A.H. & A.W. Reed, Sydney, 1975, Vol. 2, p.215

Though this domestic trio is outwardly the same as in the Kuyper image (Figure 1), and the message to European women equally pronounced, here the ideal of savages living happily in "nature" is significantly diminished. In posture and physique, these people are no longer seen as desirable human specimens. Their skin is also noticeably darker than in Kuyper's image. Yet Collins again claimed this was an authentic picture "sketched on the spot".

Figure 4: (next page) V. Woodthorpe, "A Male and Female Native", in George Barrington, The History of New South Wales including Botany Bay, Port Jackson, Parramatta and Sydney, M. Jones Publishers, London, 1802, opposite p.9; Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

This image captures the romance that Barrington claimed was to be found in marriages in "nature", where wives, though roughly courted, were loyal, dutiful and submissive. Reflecting the fact that the people in these images were not individuals but set moral and political types, artists had no compunction in inserting figures freely cut from each other's work. Here the male head-dress and female attire seem closely modelled on those used by the artist in Figure 2.
Figure 5: Augustus Earle, 1793–1838, "Native Woman, Australia", [1825?]. Watercolour; 15.9 x 17.5 cm; Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK 12/55, National Library of Australia

When Augustus Earle painted this image, virulent racist ideas about Aboriginal people had great currency, yet the ideal of nobility in women could persist if the subject was young and classified as sexually attractive by the male viewer.

This image is unusual by the 1820s in that it continues to idealise Aboriginal people. While the picture places the classical, muscular bodies of the men in the foreground, the exaggerated breasts of the women attract the gaze of the observer, as if these were the most distinguishing feature of their bodies.

Figure 7: T.R. Browne, "Warambella", (c.1813). No.5, in Five Water Colour Drawings of Australian Aborigines; Dixson Library, State Library of New South Wales

The idealised image of Aboriginal motherhood is notably absent from this image. The caricatured representation of the Aboriginal mother and child contrasts strongly with the noble savage mother in Figure 1 (and the image of Turandurey in Figure 11).
This artist may have subscribed to the prevailing stereotype of the Aboriginal woman as over-worked by her allegedly lazy husband. Alternatively, Krefft may have intended to depict the clearly delineated gender divisions of labour in Aboriginal society. To an Aboriginal viewer, this image may have other meanings again.

Dejected, alone and therefore vulnerable, the image of the unidentified Aboriginal woman conveys the misery of colonisation. By the mid-1820s, the Aboriginal people of New South Wales had endured nearly forty years of relentless invasion of their lands and their lives.
Figure 10: George French Angas, "Old Queen Gooseberry, Widow of Bungaree", Sydney, 1845, repr. in John Tregenza, George French Angas; Art Gallery Board SA, 1980 (Figure 32, Aco.1596 a); reproduced with permission from the South Australian Museum

The choice of an older Aboriginal woman as a subject for the colonial artist was unusual, as was also the dignity evident in this image. This woman is clothed and through her regal stance a sense of the power and custodianship to which she would have been accustomed amongst her own people is conveyed.

Figure 11: Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, "Turandurey and her daughter Ballandella" in his collection Sketches of Expedition into Australian Felix, London, 1838; Dixon Library, State Library of New South Wales

Here the Aboriginal mother and child appear as lonely figures in a landscape (Lachlan River, New South Wales). Mitchell's image also suggests the affection of the mother for her daughter which he admired, and which stood in opposition to the racist theories then so powerful in the Australian colonies.
Figure 12: James Wilson, Scotland/Australia, "Gunbal", 1838; oil on canvas, 35.2 x 30.4 cm; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

This image was highly unusual as it displayed the subject as an elegant, upper-class lady of fashion. Also it was painted in oils, a rare choice for colonial images of Aboriginal people. Like Mitchell's Turandurey, it was produced when anti-Aboriginal feelings were at their height among pastoralists, including those with whom Wilson associated in the Braidwood district of New South Wales. On the back of the image there is a less sympathetic annotation: "... alias ... Third Gin of Moravany, Chief of Wig Wigly Tribe of County St Vincent, New South Wales".

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Owing to constraints on space and the problem of duplication, only the primary sources used in the four theses are listed here, together with Glover's bibliographic discussion. Most of the secondary sources are acknowledged either in the theses' footnotes or in the introduction to this volume.

To sort these primary sources alphabetically and combine them into a single document seems counter-productive. They are therefore arranged as four discrete sections in the same chronological sequence as the theses themselves.

1. GLOVER (1982)

Note on Major Sources


In Australia, anthropology has been more reluctant to face its founders. The historiography is slender, and often uncritical. John Greenway, Anthropology in Australia, MA Thesis, Colorado, 1958, is one of the few lengthy surveys. Yet the author states that he was drawn to this area of study after reading Ashley Montagu's claim that Aboriginals could be fine chess players. Greenway felt his research confirmed his initial response: such a thing was an impossibility (p.5). His thesis implicitly supports the value structure of early anthropology and spends much space liberally dispensing superlatives. The "fabulous" Daisy Bates might, in other climes,
MAPS, DREAMS, HISTORY


Williams, A.P. and James, W.E., *Note-Book of Social Studies for First Year Classes, Book I*, Brooks, Sydney, 1945


Wonderful Australia in Pictures, Colorgravure Publications, Melbourne, 1950

4. O'BRIEN (1992)

1. Government Papers


Minutes of Evidence before the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines in British Settlements, 1836

New South Wales Legislative Council Select Committee Report on the Condition of Aborigines, 1845

New South Wales Legislative Council Select Committee Report on Aborigines and the Protectorate, 1849

Report from the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines in British Settlements, 1837

Victorian Legislative Council Select Committee Report on the Aborigines, 1858–59

2. Other Printed Sources


SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Arden, G., *Recent Information Respecting Port Phillip*, London, 1841


Breton, W.H., *Excursions in New South Wales, Western Australia and Van Diemen's Land in 1832 and 1833*, Richard Bentley, London, 1833


Cunningham, P.M., *Two Years in New South Wales*, Colburn, London, 1827


Dredge, J., *Brief Notices of the Aborigines of New South Wales*, Geelong, 1845

Dunlop, Eliza, "The Aboriginal Mother", repr. in *The Push From the Bush: A Bulletin of Social History*, Special Myall Creek Issue, No.20, Apr., 1985

Eyre, E.J., *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia and Overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound 1840–1*, T. & W. Boone, London, 1845
Finn, E., *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852*, Melbourne, 1888
Henty, R., *Australiana or My Early Life*, Sampson Low, London, 1886
Lawrence, W., *Lectures on Phrenology, Zoology and the Natural History of Man*, Griffin, London, 1822
Meredith, L., *Notes and Sketches of New South Wales During a Residence in that Colony from 1839 to 1844*, London, 1844

Tench, W., *Sydney’s First Four Years*, ed. L.F. Fitzhardinge, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1961
*The Spanish at Port Jackson: The Visits of the Corvettes Descubierta and Atrevida 1793*, The Australian Documentary Facsimile Society, Sydney, 1967
Thompson, J., *Curious and Interesting Account of the Original Natives of New South Wales*, London, 1803
Wedge, J.H., *Expedition from Van Diemen’s Land to Port Phillip in 1835*, Parliament of Tasmania, 1885

3. Film

*Nice Coloured Girls*, directed by T. Moffatt, 1987
*Women of the Sun*, Episode 1, "Alinta the Flame 1824", directed by James Ricketson, 1982