

THE GLORIFIED FLOWER

RACE, GENDER AND ASSIMILATION IN
AUSTRALIA, 1937-1977



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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This is a gendered history of the period which spans, what was known popularly, and in official government documents, as the era of Aboriginal 'assimilation', from the late 1930s until the early 1970s. This study considers the ways in which public representations of 'gender' interacted with the administration, and discourse, of 'race' in a historical period, when biological solutions to the Aboriginal 'problem' were replaced with a cultural model. The first part of this thesis, through a series of historical case studies based on the archives and official records of the Aborigines Protection Board (1909-1939) and the Aborigines Welfare Board (1940-1969) in New South Wales, focuses on how the policy of biological and cultural assimilation drew on ideas about femininity and sexuality to inform policy, administration, personnel, and imagery sponsored by the state during the assimilation era. The thesis shows how particular representations of femininity and masculinity were central to administrative attempts to biologically 'absorb', and later culturally, 'assimilate' Aboriginal women and their children into 'White' Australia.

The second part of the thesis explores the way that negative definitions of Aboriginal culture in New South Wales in the post-War period were influenced by ideas about Aboriginal women as the primary reproducers, and producers of that culture. This section argues that official attitudes and policies directed at Aboriginal women, influenced on-going attitudes towards Aboriginal culture and identity in the apparently 'enlightened' 1960s and 1970s when new Federal legislation promised an era of equality and 'self-determination' for Aboriginal people. Overall this thesis traces the disciplinary regimens operating in New South Wales from the late 1930s to early 1970s, and the gendered identities performed in relation to them. A central purpose of this work is to make race, gender and sexuality the basis for cultural and historical analysis, rather than 'adding on' women and race to the historical narrative.

INTRODUCTION

To tell the history of another is to be pressed against the limits of your own.

Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*¹

Several related areas in Australian scholarship have had a major impact on the conceptualisation of this thesis. These include feminist engagements with the politics of 'race'² during the 1980s and early 1990s, and debates around what became known as the 'politics of identity', in the context of Aboriginal studies of the late 1980s and 1990s.³ In the first case, since the 1980s feminist historians and anthropologists in particular, had sought new ways to understand the relationship, broadly, between racism and sexism in Australian society.⁴ Some of this work was driven by criticisms of the Women's Liberation

¹ Extract in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, (eds) *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995, p. 111

² Some important contributions to this field include Kay Saunders, 'All the Women were White? Some thoughts on Analysing Race, Class and Gender in Australian History?', *Hecate*, vol. 17, no 1, 1991, pp. 157-160; Ann Curthoys, 'Identity Crisis: Colonialism, Nation and Gender in Australian History', *Gender And History*, vol 5, no. 2 (Summer), 1993, pp.165-176; Jan Pettman, 'Gendered Knowledges: Aboriginal Women and the Politics of Feminism', *Journal of Australian Studies: Power Knowledge and Aborigines*, no. 35, La Trobe University Press with the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash, Melbourne, 1992, pp. 120-131; Marilyn Lake, 'Colonised and Colonising: the White Australian Feminist Subject', *Women's History Review*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1993, pp. 377-386; Heather Goodall & Jackie Huggins, 'Aboriginal Women are Everywhere. Contemporary Struggles', in Kay Saunders & Raymond Evans, (ed) *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, University of Queensland, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New South Wales, 1992; Diane Bell, 'Intraracial Rape Revisited: On Forging a Feminist Future beyond factions and frightening politics', *Women's International Studies Forum*, vol. 1, no. 5, 1991, pp. 385-412; Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman, *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales, 1993; Lyn Riddett, 'Watch the White women Fade': Aboriginal and White Women in the Northern Territory 1870-1940', *Hecate*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1993; Kalpana Ram, 'Too Traditional Once Again: Some Poststructuralists on the Aspirations of the Immigrant/Third World Female Subject', in *Australian Feminist Studies*, 17, 1993, pp. 12-22

³ David Hollinsworth, 'Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia', and Mudrooroo Nyoongah, Bain Attwood, Andrew Lattas, Jeremy Beckett, 'Comments on Hollinsworth', *Oceania*, vol. 63, no. 2, December, 1992, pp. 137-156; Johanna Kijas, 'When does Aboriginal History become Australian History? Questions of Inclusivity and marginalisation for Aboriginal Studies', in Robert Craven & Nigel Parbury, (eds), *Aboriginal Studies in the 90's: Where to now?*, St George Campus, University of New South Wales, 1992, pp. 80-87; Bain Attwood & Jay Arnold, *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines. Special edition of Journal of Australian Studies*, La Trobe University Press in association with the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1992; Gillian Cowlshaw, 'The Materials for Identity Construction', in Jeremy Beckett (ed) *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, pp. 87-107; Stephen Muecke, 'Dialogue with a Postgraduate student wanting to study Aboriginal Culture', in Muecke, *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies*, University of New South Wales Press, Kensington, 1992, pp. 197-206; Sylvia Lawson, Roger Millis, Peter Spearitt and Don Watson, 'Why Write White History?', *Australian Book Review*, May, 1988, pp. 21-26; Jennifer Sabbioni, 'Aboriginal Studies', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 1, 1993, pp. 89-94; Colin Johnson, 'White Forms, Aboriginal Content', in J. Davis & B.Hodge, (eds), *Aboriginal Writing Today*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1985

⁴ Jan Larbalestier, 'Feminism as Myth: Aboriginal Women and the Feminist Encounter', *Refractory Girl*, October, 1980, pp. 31-39; Myrna Tonkinson, 'Sisterhood or Aboriginal Servitude? Black Women and White Women on the Australian Frontier', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1988, pp. 27-39; Annette Hamilton, 'Aboriginal Women the Means of Production', in Jan Mercer (ed), *The Other Half. Women in Australian Society*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, pp. 167-79; Annette Hamilton, 'A Complex Strategical Situation: Gender and Power in Aboriginal Australia', in Norma Grieve and Pat Grimshaw (eds), *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1981, pp. 69-85; Ann McGrath *Born in the Cattle. Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Susan Hunt, *Spinifex and Hessian: Women's Lives in North-Western Australia*, University of Western

Movement of the 1970s made by indigenous Australian writers and activists, who argued that the category 'Woman' had been taken for granted as white and essentially middle-class.⁵ The 'second wave' women's movement in Australia had been reluctant to notice its own investment in Australia's racist past, they argued, and racism, not sexism, was the primary expression affecting Aboriginal women.⁶

These writers and activists suggested that non-Aboriginal women had pursued feminist theoretical and political issues, which, because of indigenous and non-indigenous women's differing experiences of colonisation, were inappropriate for Aboriginal women. In particular, differences had arisen around issues of family, sexuality and approaches to domestic violence.⁷ For example, whilst white women of the 1970s had called for abortion rights and liberation from maternal definitions of identity, Aboriginal women fought enforced sterilisation and the denigration of their maternal role via the wide-spread removal of Aboriginal children from their families.⁸ Also, whilst white women fought for the right to sexual freedom, Aboriginal women had fought derogatory stereotypes of promiscuous 'black velvet'.⁹

In 1987, Aboriginal historian and writer, Jackie Huggins wrote an article arguing the irrelevance of feminism for Aboriginal women. She argued that implicit racism fuelled much feminist thought and politics:

Australia Press, Nedlands, 1986; Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, McPhee Gribble & Allen & Unwin, Melbourne and Sydney, 1983; Pat Grimshaw, 'Aboriginal Women: A Study of Culture Contact', in Grieve & Grimshaw (eds), *Australian Women*, 1981, pp. 69-85

⁵Pat O'Shane, 'Is there any Relevance in the Women's Movement for Aboriginal Women?', in *Refractory Girl. A Journal of Radical Feminist Thought*, September 1976, pp. 31-36; Roberta Sykes in Robyn Rowland (ed), *Women who Do and Women who Don't join the Women's Liberation Movement*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, pp. 63-69; Elaine Williams, 'Aboriginal First, Woman Second', in Jocelyn Scutt, (ed) *Different Lives: Reflections on the Women's Movement and Visions of the Future*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1987, pp 66-73; Jackie Huggins, 'Black Women and Women's Liberation', *Hecate*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1987, pp. 77-83, Jackie Huggins et al, 'Letter to the Editor', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 1992 in response to Diane Bell and Topsy Napurrula Nelson, 'Speaking About Rape is Everybody's Business', *Women's International Forum*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1989; Wendy Brady, 'On the Relationship of Aboriginal Women Academics to Universities', paper given at *Women, Culture and Universities*, 1995; Dr Roberta Sykes' chapter in *Women who Do and Women who Don't Join the Women's Movement*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London & Melbourne 1984, p. 68

⁶E. Williams in J. Scutt (ed), *Different Lives: Reflections on the Women's Movement and Visions of its Future*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1987, pp. 66-73; Maureen Watson, papers of *The Socialist Feminist Conference, University of New South Wales, 1987*, pp. 3-5; Hudson Hawthorn, 1989

⁷ Williams, 'Aboriginal First', Huggins, 'Black Women and Women's Liberation', Goodall, & Huggins, 'Aboriginal Women are Everywhere'

⁸Williams, Huggins, Goodall & Huggins, 'Aboriginal Women are Everywhere', p. 402

⁹ibid

If the white women who organised the contemporary movement toward feminism were at all aware of racial politics in Australian history, they would have known that overcoming barriers that separate women from one another would entail confronting the reality of racism; not just racism as a general evil in society, but the race hatred they might harbour in their own psyches.¹⁰

Two years later, a controversy surrounding the publication of an article co-authored by anthropologist Diane Bell and 'informant' Topsy Napurrula Nelson, in an international women's studies journal, highlighted the extent to which, at the end of the 1980s, the question of racism had disrupted feminist agendas both in Australia and internationally.¹¹ First presented at a 'Colloquium on the Rights of Subordinate Peoples' in 1988, the paper entitled 'Speaking about Rape is Everybody's Business' linked the damage done to the Australian Aboriginal social, political and physical environment, with an increase in the rape of black women by men in their own communities, *as well* as by white men. Bell argued that intra-racial rape, a 'fraught area' had become a 'taboo topic' for 'those who advocate self-determination and self-management' and as such, what she perceived as an increasing level of sexual abuse of Aboriginal women by Aboriginal men in the Northern Territory, was being ignored.¹² She wrote:

I hold to the position that, no matter how unpleasant, feminist social scientists do have a responsibility to identify and analyse those factors which render women vulnerable to violence. The fact that this is happening to women of another ethnic or racial group can not be a reason for ignoring the abuse.¹³

Aboriginal co-author of the text, Napurrula Nelson argued that a break-down in gender relations in Aboriginal communities had seriously reduced the prestige of women, and their role as reproducers of the next generation and that this was an issue that needed to be openly discussed:

In old generations, between mother and father... mother is carrier and she make it and she's important. Man only got seed. Woman is really important. You don't damage your body. Something happen to woman's insides, its really terrible. But you know now when man calling

¹⁰Jackie Huggins, 'Black Women and Women's Liberation'. *Hecate*, 13:1, 1987, pp.77-83

¹¹*Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1989

¹² Bell, *ibid*, p. 406

¹³ *ibid*

and grabs 'em, that's not right... Start with the old generation and come to the trouble now. Everyone can read that story.¹⁴

A response written by Jackie Huggins with Jo Willmot, Isabel Tarrago, Kathy Willets, Liz Bond, Lillian Holt, Eleanor Bourke, Maryann Bin-Salik, Pat Fowell, Joanne Schmidt, Valerie Craigie and Linda McBride-Levi disagreed with Naparulla Nelson's assertion that '[e]veryone can read that story'. Rather Huggins *et al* argued that the paper by Bell and Nelson reflected 'white imperialist' thinking amongst feminism, which took the cultures of 'others' as 'theirs to appropriate, criticise and castigate'.¹⁵ They argued that Napurrula Nelson was not really co-author of the article; that she spoke English as a second language and therefore could not have written such a 'highly academic' analysis, but had been used by Bell to present herself as an expert at 'documenting and transposing an alien culture into western patriarchal and feminist interpretations'. In conclusion Huggins wrote:

It is our business how we deal with rape and have done so for the last 202 years quite well. We don't need white anthropologists reporting business which can be abused and misinterpreted by racists in the white community.¹⁶

The result of the paper, according to the twelve Aboriginal women who responded to Bell and Napurrula's original article was to further the divisions between traditional and urban Aboriginal groups, and to make 'us not want to work with white women'.¹⁷ This debate highlighted some of the difficult arguments current at the end of the 1980s in Australia, about the involvement of non-Aboriginal women, in what some hoped could be a 'common struggle', in both theory and practice, against male patriarchy.

Who speaks for whom? Late 1980s–1990s

Intersecting with these debates in feminist theory and politics, the dialogue on race and racism in Australia in the late 1980s and 1990s became marked with a question about the appropriateness of non-Aboriginal people being involved at all in the area of Aboriginal

¹⁴ibid

¹⁵Response, *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol 12, 1989

¹⁶ibid, p. 4

¹⁷ibid

studies.¹⁸ Arguments such as those made by the Working Party of Aboriginal Historians for the Bicentenary, for example, explored the epistemological challenge that Aboriginal perspectives posed to the writing of history and anthropology in Australia, and questioned broadly: who is legitimated to speak about whom?¹⁹ In a project entitled 'A Celebration of Resistance to Colonialism', the Working Party of Aboriginal Historians posed the question: '[w]hy can't white historians write Aboriginal history?' and went on to give a number of reasons:²⁰

Whilst white historians have debated such issues as 'objectivity' and 'standpoints in history'...our approach to history is not a point of view but a world view...White historians debate the nature of the historical fact. Our ways of establishing fact are distinctively our own. Our history is legend, tradition, story, myth-making, song, painting, dance.²¹

The Working Party asserted that the Aboriginal technique of telling history was a particular cultural form, as valid as any other, including white historiography. The features of this particular cultural form were its orality which was not just about content, ie. *what* is being said, but is about form and structure, ie. *how* it is being said. According to the Working Party white people cannot recognise the Aboriginality of a piece of work: the cues, the repetitions, the language, and the distinctively Aboriginal evocations of 'our' people. When

¹⁸ Wayne Atkinson, Marcia Langton, Doreen Wanganeen & Michael Williams, Aboriginal Historians for the Bicentennial history, 'Aboriginal History and the Bicentennial Volumes', AAW Martin (ed) *Australia 1939-1988: A Bicentennial History Bulletin*, no. 3, Australian National University, Canberra, May 1981, pp. 21-25; Eve Fesl, 'Why Aborigines Should Teach Aboriginal Studies', *Study of Society*, August, vol. 14, 1984; Ros Langford, 'Our Heritage, Your Playground', *Australian Archaeology*, vol. 16, 1983, pp. 2-6; Gordon Briscoe, 'Aboriginal Australian Identity; the historiography of relations between indigenous ethnic groups and other Australians, 1788-1988', *History Workshop Journal: Colonial and Postcolonial History*, 36, Autumn, 1993, pp. 133-161; Henrietta Formille, 'Who Owns the Past? - Aborigines as Captive of the Archives', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 1-8; Adrian Marrie, 'Museums and Aborigines: A Case Study in Scientific Colonialism', *Australian Canadian Studies*, vol. 7, vol. 1, no. 2, 1990, pp. 63-80; David Hollinsworth, 'Discourses on Aboriginality and the Politics of Identity in Urban Australia', and Mudrooroo Nyoongah, Bain Attwood, Andrew Lattas, Jeremy Beckett, 'Comments on Hollinsworth', *Oceania*, vol. 63, no. 2, December, 1992, pp. 137-156; Marcia Langton, 'Urbanising Aborigines: The Social Scientists' Great Deception', *Social Alternatives*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1981, pp. 16-22; Colin Johnson, 'Captured Discourse: Captured Lives', *Aboriginal History*, 1987, pp. 27-32; Bain Attwood, 'Aborigines and Academic Historians: Some Recent Encounters', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 94, 1990, pp. 123-135

¹⁹ Eve Fesl, 'Why Aborigines Should Teach Aboriginal Studies', *Study of Society*, August, vol. 14, 1984; Eve Fesl, 'How the English Language is used to put Koories down and deny us our Rights', *Social Alternatives*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 35-37; Ros Langford, 'Our Heritage, Your Playground', *Australian Archaeology*, vol. 16, 1983, pp. 2-6; Gordon Briscoe, 'Aboriginal Australian Identity; the historiography of relations between indigenous ethnic groups and other Australians, 1788-1988', *History Workshop Journal: Colonial and Postcolonial History*, 36, Autumn, 1993, pp. 133-161; Adrian Marrie, 'Museums and Aborigines: A Case Study in Scientific Colonialism', *Australian Canadian Studies*, vol. 7, vol. 1, no. 2, 1990, pp. 63-80; Pat O'Shane, 'Rewriting History', paper given at the *Third William Merrylees Memorial Lecture*, Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education, Wagga Wagga, 1988, pp. 1-14

²⁰ Atkinson, Langton, Wanganeen & Williams, 'Introduction - a celebration of resistance to colonialism', p. 38

²¹ Working Party, p. 38.

these are not recognised by the white interpreter or historian, argued the Working Party, 'the truth is lost forever'.²²

In sum, they argued that Aboriginal people had remained 'a separate people since the British invasion despite institutionalisation, enforced assimilation and domination by the white presence'.²³ These arguments challenged eurocentric history writing and raised questions about the relationship between scholarship and politics. For example, one of the main criticisms was that despite the massive recent increase in Aboriginal studies it was rare that research and publications are returned to the relevant Aboriginal people or communities. Their arguments also raised the issue of 'essentialist' identity, that is, whether the fact that one was Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal would impact on the way history and theory was written.

Feminist writers, and historians in particular, responded in different ways to the challenges posed by these criticisms of Aboriginal studies. A collection called *Feminism and the Politics of Difference* published in 1993, edited by Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman, argued against what they saw as an increasing stress on 'essential' identities.²⁴ Contributors to the collection argued that much of the identity politics of the late 1980s early 1990s had acted to return the 'essential sovereign subject' as guarantor of meaning, putting authors in the 'realm of truth claims which regulated the authority to speak'.²⁵ Gunew and Yeatman in their introduction to the collection argued that this position created the kind of binary politics that left no room for other kinds of differences other than those determined between coloniser and colonised.²⁶ In a binary positioning of an argument along 'race' lines, they argued, gender and class dimensions to identity are often ignored. A problem of the essentialist position was that it cut across more nuanced and critical understandings of just who constitutes the coloniser and the colonised. Further, 'static' notions of identity evoked by the essentialist position can work to project the burden of authenticity onto the minority.²⁷

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ see in particular Sneja Gunew & Anna Yeatman, 'Introduction', and Sneja Gunew, 'Feminism and the politics of irreducible differences: Multiculturalism/ethnicity/race'; and Anna Yeatman, 'Voice and Representation in the politics of Difference', in *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales, 1993, p. xxii

²⁵ Gunew & Yeatman, p. xxi-xxiii

²⁶ Gunew & Yeatman, *Feminism and the Politics*, p. xxii.

²⁷ Gunew & Yeatman, 'Introduction', in *Feminism and the Politics*, p. xviii

Other criticisms of what was seen as essentialist notions of identity argued these had often been used to construct individual Aboriginal spokespersons as representative of a homogeneous 'race' position or group.²⁸ Popular notions of what is *an* Aboriginal, they argued, had been used strategically against communities of Aboriginal people.²⁹ The American feminist theorist bell hooks³⁰ was influential in debates around identity at this time, in the North American context. She noted, ironically, it was often white, avant garde 'left wingers' who reinforced stereotypes of what was 'truly Black'.³¹ Writing about race debates in North America at the start of the 1990s, she described how recent critical reflections on static notions of black identity 'urge transformation of our sense of who we can be and still be black'.³²

Feminist History and Race

At the same time as the question of identity became a crucial area of debate, other scholars of the early 1990s were suggesting that white authors had failed to fully integrate Aboriginal perspectives into their frameworks of analysis.³³ Feminist history in particular, argued Kay Saunders in 1993, had 'lagged behind mainstream historiography in its ability to take account of issues of ethnicity'.³⁴ Saunders noted that, except for the work of white feminist historians who emerged out of studying race relations history, Aboriginal women had largely been 'ignored' in history.³⁵ Saunders argued that many well-known feminist histories did not acknowledge Aboriginal women, made wide generalisations from data from the South East

²⁸Hollinsworth, 'Discourses on Aboriginality', M de Lepervanche and Gill Bottomley (eds), *The Cultural Construction of Race*, Association for Studies in Society and Culture, Sydney, 1988; Muecke, *Textual Spaces*, Bain Attwood & Jay Arnold, *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*; Cowlshaw, 'The Materials for Identity Construction'

²⁹ In a paper entitled 'Rewriting History', presented in 1988, Pat O'Shane argued:

'The same people who can be heard arguing that Aborigines are no different to all Australians, and are entitled to no different from all other Australians when the issue of Land Rights is raised, experience no difficulty in accepting the existence and vigorous enforcement of legislation such as still exists in Queensland, for example, whereby Aborigines continue to be institutionalised in reserves, disenfranchised, subject to extensive and brutal bureaucratic and police control', *Third William Merylees Memorial Lecture*, Riverina-Murray Institute of Higher Education, Wagga Wagga, 18 Nov. 1988, copy in authors possession

³⁰ bell hooks deliberately used lower case letters for her pseudonym

³¹ hooks, *Yearning. Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, South End Press, Boston, MA, 1990,

³² *ibid*, p.20

³³ Saunders, 'All the Women were White?', Curthoys, 'Identity Crisis: Colonialism, Nation and Gender in Australian History', Pettman, 'Gendered Knowledges', Lake, 'Colonised and Colonising', Goodall, 'Aboriginal History'

³⁴ Kay Saunders, 'All the Women'

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 158

Corner of Australia, and concentrated on urban white women almost exclusively.³⁶ As a result, she concluded 'femininity' was often considered a 'purely white ideology for the consumption of white subjects'.³⁷

In 1993 Ann Curthoys argued that a 'victimology' stemming from feminist thinking and methodology had worked against non-Aboriginal women's engagement with the issues raised by a consideration of gender *and* race in Australia. Curthoys argued that women's history and the history of gender relations had until very recently, been a field of study quite distinct from the history of Aboriginal-European relations and, with a 'few notable exceptions', there was still relatively little real interchange between 'feminist' and 'post-colonial' discourses.³⁸ She noted that within Australian historical writing, 'feminist history' and 'Aboriginal history' remained two distinct fields, 'still remarkably rarely brought together'. This was because, argued Curthoys, feminists had experienced what she called 'epistemological vertigo' in understanding their own complicity, historically and in the present, in the racist context in which Aboriginal people live. This was partly because of an enduring feminist self-conception of themselves as the 'colonised' of white men, as in the subtitle of Anne Summers' seminal book, *Damned Whores and God's Police. The Colonisation of Women in Australia*.³⁹ Where they took up Aboriginal causes, Curthoys argued 'they did so on the basis of their sense of shared sisterhood against a common oppressor, a male-dominated patriarchal world, thus neatly aligning themselves with the objects rather than the agents of a racist society'.⁴⁰

In an essay entitled 'The Three Body Problem: Feminism and Chaos Theory', Curthoys drew a parallel between the impact on Newtonian physics of the 'three body problem' with the impact on feminism of its own three body problem - the interaction of race (ethnicity), class and sex (gender).⁴¹ Curthoys argued that feminism's inadequate response to the 'three body problem' had been to 'add on' the different forms of social asymmetry. She argued for

³⁶ For example, Kereen Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernising the Australian Family, 1880-1940*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985; Judith Allen, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes involving Australian Women since 1880*; and Jill Julius Matthew, *Good and Mad Women*

³⁷ Saunders, 'All the Women', p. 158

³⁸ Curthoys, 'Identity Crisis', p. 15

³⁹ Penguin Books, Sydney, 1975

⁴⁰ Curthoys, 'Identity Crisis'

⁴¹ 'Women/Australia/Theory' special issue of *Hecate*, vol 17, Number 1, 1991, pp. 14-21

[N]ew theoretical work which theorises how each cultural experience and relationship influences and transforms the meaning of each...We can no longer write as if there were an Anglo-Celtic norm, or untouched centre, with black or non-British exceptions operating ineffectively on the margins, though we need to recognise that a great deal of literature and history has been written as if there were.⁴²

Ien Ang similarly called for a new approach in feminist writing to the questions of ethnicity and race in Australia. Her article 'I'm a feminist but...'⁴³, published in 1995, argued that in dealing with difference

[F]eminism had resembled the multi-cultural nation, which when faced with cultural differences within its borders, simultaneously recognises and controls those differences among its population by containing them in a grid of pluralist diversity.⁴⁴

The reduction of difference to diversity in this manner, argued Ang, was tantamount to a more sophisticated and complex form of assimilation. She argued that 'we would gain more from acknowledging and confronting the stubborn solidity of communication barriers than from rushing to break them down in the name of an idealised unity'.⁴⁵ Ang argued for a 'politics of partiality' where feminism emphasised and consciously constructed the *limits* of its own field of political intervention:

While a politics of inclusion is driven by an ambition for universal representation (of all women's interests), a politics of partiality does away with that ambition and accepts the principle that feminism can never be an encompassing political home for all women, not just because different groups of women have different and sometimes conflicting interests, but, more radically, because for many groups of 'other' women other interests, other identifications, are sometimes more important and politically pressing than, or even incompatible with, those related to their being women.⁴⁶

⁴²Curthoys, 'The Three body problem', p. 17

⁴³'I'm a feminist but...'Other' women and postnational feminism', in *Transitions*, 1995, pp. 57-73

⁴⁴ Bhabha, H, 'The third space', in J. Rutherford, (ed) *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1991, cf Aen, 'I'm a feminist but...', 1995

⁴⁵In the Realm of Uncertainty: The Global Village in the Age of Capitalist Postmodernity' in D. Crowley & D. Mitchell, (eds), *Communication Theory Today*, Polity Press, Oxford

⁴⁶Ang, *ibid*, p 73

In summary, at this time feminist scholars, and historians in particular, were arguing for the need to engage in a new kind of theoretical and historical work which 'de-segregated' work on race and gender. Simultaneously, the debates around identity suggested the necessity of examining questions of subjectivity and identity, and their impact on scholarship especially in the area of Aboriginal 'race-relations' history.

Against these debates this thesis seeks to examine the ways in which gendered identity was constructed during the historical period of 'assimilation' (late 1930s-1970s), a period when Aboriginal identity was seen as essentially malleable. It aims to write a history that is neither 'Aboriginal' nor 'white', but a history that examines how on-going efforts to control Aboriginal people reflected white efforts to order their own gendered sense of self. Drawing on both the literature discussed above and the questions raised in the debates over identity in Australia and internationally, this thesis seeks to produce a gendered reading of the New South Wales history of Aboriginal assimilation. This gendered history considers the material and ideological production and performance of identity via political, representational and Aboriginal cultural texts in the context of the Aborigines Protection (1909-1939) and later, Aborigines Welfare Board (1940-1969) in the state of New South Wales. It is situated within the area of Australian feminist and international post-colonial writing on gender and colonialism. This project was thus shaped by the series of debates within Australia, and its central questions around identity and gender were fed and informed by international Post-colonial literature.

Gendered Identity

Significant contributions to the debates around essential and non-essential identity, and the relationship between race and gender, in the early 1990s came from the areas of Queer⁴⁷

⁴⁷Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York, 1990; Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in Diane Fuss (ed), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, Routledge, New York, 1991, pp. 13-31; Kwok Wei Leng & Kaz Ross, 'Theorising Corporeality: Bodies, Sexuality and the Feminist Academy (an interview with Elizabeth Grosz)', *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, vol. 22, 1994, pp. 3-29; Annamarie Jagose, 'Limits of Identity', in *Queer Theory*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 1996; Elizabeth Grosz, 'Experimental Desire: Rethinking Queer Subjectivity', in Joan Copjec (ed), *Supposing the Subject*, Verso, London, 1994, pp. 133-157; Teresa de Lauretis, 'Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1991, pp. iii-xvii; Rosemary Hennessy, 'Queer Theory: A Review of the *differences* Special Issue and Wittig's *The Straight Mind*', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, no. 18, 1993, pp. 964-973; Cathy Schwichtenberg (ed), *The Madonna Connection: Representational Politics, Subcultural Identities, and Cultural Theory*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1993, pp. 1-16; Steven Seidman, 'Identity and Politics in a 'Postmodern' Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes', in

and Post-colonial studies.⁴⁸ Queer Theory in particular took up the questions around essential versus strategic identities and in its 'debunking of stable sexes, gender and sexualities' re-worked approaches to identity as a 'constellation of multiple and unstable positions'.⁴⁹ Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, for example, argued that it was 'no longer clear' that feminist theory ought to try to settle the questions of primary identity in order to get on with the task of politics:

Instead we ought to ask, what political possibilities are the consequence of a radical critique of the categories of identity? What new shape of politics emerges when identity as a common ground no longer constrains the discourse on feminist politics? And to what extent does the effort to locate a common identity as the foundation for a feminist politics preclude a radical inquiry into the political construction of the regulation of identity itself?⁵⁰

Butler's work and her concept of the 'performance' are useful for understanding the otherwise paradoxical expressions of identity (such as we see in Chapter Six, the Aboriginal Debutante). The idea of 'performance' of race or gender seeks to analyse the way one perceives and lives 'within' race and gender identity as ambiguous, shifting and in process. It accepts that there are strategic ways of 'performing' identity.⁵¹ Trinh T. Minh ha, contributing to the debates around identity in 1996 argued gracefully that 'the question of when we should mark ourselves, and then refuse, adamantly to mark ourselves remains a difficult one', concluding that what is required is 'the accurate tuning or one's many selves'.⁵²

In Australia, Aboriginal writer and theorist Darlene Johnson made a major contribution to the debates around identity in her essay 'Ab/originality: Playing and Passing versus

Michael Warner (ed), *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 105-142

⁴⁸Key works relevant to this thesis, in this large body of literature are discussed below

⁴⁹Jagose, *Queer Theory*, p. 3

⁵⁰Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*:p. 148

⁵¹For work in this area see for example Lisa Appigianesi, 'Editors note. The Real Me: Postmodernism and the Question of Identity', *ICA Documents*, #6, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987, p. 2; Stuart Hall, 'Minimal Selves', *The Real Me: Postmodernism and the Question of Identity*, *ICA Documents*, #6, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987, p. 37; Ien Ang, 'Beyond Self-Reflexivity', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, Vol. 13, #2, pp. 27-29, 1991

⁵²Arts Space address, XCrossings launch, Woolloomooloo, Sydney, 19th November, 1996, notes in possession of author

Assimilation', published in 1993.⁵³ Writing about her mother's experience as the daughter of a 'full-blood' mother and 'half-caste' father who could 'pass' as white in order to get into the local swimming pool, forbidden to blacks, in the town she grew up in Johnson argued: 'I have always known that identity was something you had to learn, to perform to enact over and over again. It became clear to me that being Ab/original was not about returning to some essentialist identity fixed in the past, but involves practicing different subject positions'. Johnson argued for a sense of identity as something that you 'learn to negotiate and re-negotiate - a cultural and social way of doing things'.⁵⁴ In the context of colonial relations in Australia, the production of Aboriginal identities has been 'contingent on a negotiation, a dependence and an enduring subjugation'. Johnson argues that Aboriginal identities are produced 'through both strategies of resisting and of succumbing to the terms of institutional discourses'.⁵⁵ Within this process the possibility of multiple identities co-existing emerges. In other words, writes Johnson, 'some of us play at passing'. 'Passing' for white, or 'masquerading' thus becomes one strategy for attaining the 'necessary distance between oneself and one's image'.⁵⁶ In creating this distance through the masquerade of whiteness, a rejection of assimilationist discourses of Aboriginality as 'internal to some real self' is achieved. In this sense, she argues, 'the question of passing for white is a cultural strategy for survival'.⁵⁷ 'Passing', destroys any fixed or singular notion of Aboriginality and re-invents it as strategic and performative. Earlier indigenous writing on the question of identity and history written in the 1980s and early 1990s which had stressed a more static notion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal identity, were also challenged by the body of work known broadly as 'Postcolonial'

Post-colonial Perspectives

Postcolonial scholarship is centrally concerned with finding new ways to fruitfully explore the question of identity under colonialism.⁵⁸ In the field of postcolonial theory the

⁵³Darlene Johnson, 'Ab/originality: Playing and passing versus assimilation', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2, December, 1993, pp. 19-23

⁵⁴Johnson, 'Ab-originality', p. 23

⁵⁵Johnson, 'Ab/originality', p. 21

⁵⁶Johnson, 'Ab/originality', p. 52

⁵⁷Johnson, 'Ab/originality', p. 21

⁵⁸ Edward Said, *Orientalisms*; Said, 'Foucault and the Imagination of Power', in David Hoy (ed), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, Basil and Blackwell, London, 1986; Williams and Chrisman (1993:5)'Orientalism Re-considered', F.Barker et al, (ed) *Europe and its Others*, Essex University Press, Colchester, 1985; Said, 'Representing the Colonised: Anthropology's Interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry*, no. 15, Winter, 1989; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1993

experiences of the African diasporas and the people of the Indian subcontinent have, in the main, provided the spatial/historical focus for theoretical work, largely through the efforts of diasporic intellectuals such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhaba,⁵⁹ while the specificities of white settler colonialism in Australia and New Zealand and the relationship with 'first peoples' continue to be peripheral within the field.⁶⁰ Much of this scholarship has drawn on Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism*, which, in turn had drawn its theoretical base from the influential writings of Michel Foucault, particularly his notion of discourse as outlined in *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Said's work, which examined colonial representations of the Islamic 'Orient', is credited with consolidating a burgeoning field of writers inspired by the anti-colonial liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and establishing a template for post-colonial studies alert to the 'culture' of imperialism.⁶¹ Said's key argument was that the 'Orient' was a cultural and intellectual creation of the Occidental world, a creation that existed in a range of discourses and contexts from popular literature, to the museum, to the academy. Focusing on discursive formations Said argued that colonial culture creates a 'complex field of values, meanings and practices through which the European Self is positioned as superior, and non-Europeans are placed as an inferior, but necessary other to the constitution of that self.

On the question of identity, Said argued in his afterward to the 1995 edition of *Orientalism* that identity, whether of 'Orient or Occident, France or Britain', while obviously a repository of distinct collective identities, is finally a construction - involves establishing opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us':

Each age and society re-creates its 'others'. Far from being a static thing then, identity of self and of 'other' is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies.⁶²

⁵⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 1995 (1978), *The Postcolonial Critic*, London Routledge, 1990; *Nation and Narration*, London Routledge, 1990 & *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994

⁶⁰ Lynda Dyson, 'The Return of the Repressed? Whiteness, Femininity and Colonisation in The Piano', in Felicity Coombs and Suzanne Gemmel (eds) *Piano Lessons. Approaches to the Piano*, Southern Screen Classic, no. 1, John Libbey, Sydney, London, Montrouge, 1999

⁶¹ Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*, Pantheon, New York, 1972

⁶² Said, p. 332

In his later work Said emphasised that processes of social construction of identity are not simply 'mental exercises', but also 'urgent social contests involving...concrete political issues', such as land, law and policy.⁶³

Homi K Bhabha developed his ideas on discourse analysis in the colonial context. Bhabha's ideas, drawing on feminist, psychoanalytic and discursive methods to understand colonial power inform both the methodology and material of this thesis. Representations of femininity and Aboriginality are discussed throughout this thesis and colonial stereotypes are considered in both their 'material' and 'ideological' manifestations. Bhabha's work on the idea of the Colonial Stereotype, and the notion of mimicry have been important in dealing with empirical material in this thesis. The idea of the colonial stereotype as a 'major discursive strategy' which is culturally pervasive because it operates externally and internally in a 'political place', a 'theoretic space' and in the mind is useful here.⁶⁴ 'Arbitrary use of paradoxical colonial stereotypes', argues Bhabha, 'enhances colonial power'.⁶⁵

As the work on the nexus of power and identity within the imperial process has been elaborated, many of the conceptual binaries that were seen as fundamental both to scholarship and to the colonial 'architecture of power' have been problematised.⁶⁶ Binary oppositions such as self/other, core/periphery, first world/third world and colonised/coloniser, have given way to discussions about the concepts of hybridity, diaspora, creolisation and border.⁶⁷ The postcolonial critique has introduced a new conceptual framework which, drawing from the work of theorists such as Derrida, sees the 'self' and 'other' are always 'solicited' by each other.⁶⁸ Helen Gilbert argues that coloniser/colonised dialectic can be seen as 'a process which to some extent, hybridises the identity of both dominating and subordinated groups'.⁶⁹ In this vein Jane Jacobs argues that 'it is a revisionary form of imperialist nostalgia that defines the colonised as always engaged

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Homi K Bhabha Reconsiders the Colonial Stereotype and Colonial Discourses', *Screen*, vol. 26, no. 6, 1983, pp. 18-19

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p. 18

⁶⁶ See Jane Jacobs, 'Postcolonial Spaces', in Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, Routledge, UK, 1996, p. 13

⁶⁷ James Clifford, 1994 et al

⁶⁸ For example, Jacques Derrida, 'The Double Session', in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981

⁶⁹ Helen Gilbert, 'The Dance as Text in Contemporary Australian Drama: Movement and Resistance Politics', *Ariel*, 23(1), 1992

in conscious work against the 'core'.⁷⁰ Thus a defining feature of post-colonial studies is that they seek to register the various ways in which colonised groups subvert power, not simply through 'stark opposition' but also through, what Jacobs calls, 'disruptive inhabitations of colonial constructs'.⁷¹ Postcolonial studies, as Jacobs argues,

[R]each into the ambivalent cultural politics of [colonial] domination so that the necessity of its tenacious and adaptive power can be better understood. Much postcolonial scholarship recognise that the colonised engage not only in resistance but also in complicity, conciliation, even blithe regard.⁷²

The other area of Postcolonial studies which has been formative in the conceptualisation of this thesis, is new theorising about the nature and practice of post-colonial resistance which is central to both international and Australian post-colonial debates. Postcolonial writers such as Sara Suleri, Homi K Bhabha, and Kwame Appiah, have helped move postcolonial theory away from theorisations of resistance based upon a foundation of 'undislocatable binaries' such as centre/margin, coloniser/colonised.⁷³ Said's later work on the culture of imperialism was again influential in arguing that the sphere of 'culture' is a good place to undertake an analysis of resistance. The new direction is one that Sara Suleri calls the 'peculiar intimacy' of colonisers and colonised.⁷⁴ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that theorising this complex 'intimacy', without giving away the fact of persisting and historical inequalities within those relations and structures, is perhaps *the* major focus of contemporary post-colonial theory.

⁷⁰Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, p. 15

⁷¹ibid, p. 14

⁷²ibid

⁷³Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992; Sara Suleri, 'Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition', *Critical Inquiry*, 1992, vol. 18, no. 4, Summer, pp. 759-69; Homi Bhabha, 'The Other Question...Homi Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse', in Barker, Franci (ed), *The Politics of Theory*, University of Essex Press, Colchester, 1983; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Methuen, London, 1992; Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 2, Winter, 1991, pp. 336-357

⁷⁴Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric*, p. 6

Post-colonialism and Gender

The most important works in post-colonial scholarship for this thesis are those which examine the 'intimate relationship' between sexuality, gender and colonialism.⁷⁵ Work by feminist scholars in the international arena have shaped its central preoccupations. Much of this recent feminist scholarship has been concerned with the gender politics of Dutch, French and British imperial cultures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, showing that the positioning of European women in the colonies has facilitated racial distinctions and efforts to modernise colonial control.⁷⁶ Work in this area shows how ideas about, representations of, and administrative 'solutions' to the colonised, in various colonial settings, relied crucially on gender and sexuality.⁷⁷ In different ways these studies raise a

⁷⁵ Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather. Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Routledge, New York, London, 1995; Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria*, MacMillan, London, 1987, p. 237; Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji, 1835-1930: The Ruin of Empire?*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston, 1986; Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan*; Vron Ware, 'The White Woman's Burden? Race and Gender in Historical Memory', *Beyond the Pale. White women, Racism and History*, Verso, London, New York, 1992, pp. 3-45; Ann Laura Stoler, 'Making Empire respectable: the politics of race and sexual morality in 20th-century colonial cultures', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 16, no. 4, November, 1989, pp. 634-660; Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire. Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, London, 1995; Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1991; Jane Haggis, 'Gendering Colonialism or Colonising Gender: Some recent Women's Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 13, no. 1/2, 1990, pp. 105-116; Jane Haggis, 'Good wives and mothers' or 'dedicated workers'? Contradictions of domesticity in the 'mission of sisterhood', Travancore, south India', in Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly, *Maternities and Modernities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998; Margaret Jolly, 'Colonising Women: The maternal body and empire', in Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly, *Maternities and Modernities*; Sneja Gunew & Anna Yeatman, (eds), *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1993, pp. 103-127; theoretical work in this field includes Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Harvester, Wheatsheaf, New York, 1993; Spivak, *The postcolonial critic: interviews, strategies and dialogues*, Routledge, London, 1990; C. T. Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', in Williams and Chrisman; Trinh T. Minh Ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989; Minh Ha, *When the moon waxes red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*, Routledge, New York, 1991; Minh Ha (ed) 'She, The Inappropriate/d Other' special edition of *Discourse*, 8, Fall-Winter, 1986-1987; Nickie Charles & Helen Hintjens, *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies*, Routledge, London & New York, 1998; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, Sage, 1997; Barlow 1994; Chatterjee 1993; Jayawardena 1986; Kandiyoti 1994; Yuval-Davis & Anthias 1989; Radakrishnan 1992; Anne Mager, 'Girls' Wars: Gender and the Reproduction of the Educated Elite in the Eastern Cape, 1945-1959', *Perspectives in Education*, 14, 1 (Summer 1992/1993), pp. 3-20; Jacklyn Cock, 'Domestic Service and Education for Domesticity: The Incorporation of Xhosa Women into Colonial Society', in Cheryl Walker, ed, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, Cape Town & London, David Phillip and James Currey, 1990, pp. 76-96; 'New Histories of the Memsahib and Missus: The case of Papua New Guinea', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Fall 1991), pp. 82-105

⁷⁶ Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable', p. 634

⁷⁷ Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria*, MacMillan, London, 1987, p. 237; Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji, 1835-1930: The Ruin of Empire?*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston, 1986; Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan*; Vron Ware, 'The White Woman's Burden? Race and Gender in Historical Memory', *Beyond the Pale. White women, Racism and History*, Verso, London, New York, 1992, pp. 3-45; Ann Laura Stoler, 'Making Empire respectable: the politics of race and sexual morality in 20th-century colonial cultures', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 16, no. 4, November, 1989, pp. 634-660; Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire. Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, London, 1995; Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1991; Jane Haggis, 'Gendering Colonialism or Colonising Gender: Some recent Women's Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 13, no.

basic question: in what ways were gender inequalities essential to the structure of colonial racism and imperial authority?

Anne McClintock's book *Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* employs a number of theories including feminist, post-colonial, psychoanalytic, to show that ways in which the categories of gender race, and class do not exist in isolation, but emerge in intimate relation to one another.⁷⁸ Using diverse sources such as advertising, diaries, novels, poetry and oral history, McClintock calls for a complex understanding of categories of social power and identity. Her work built on the ideas of psychiatrist and theorist Franz Fanon who, she noted, 'as male theorists go... is exemplary...for recognizing gender as a formative dimension of colonial and anti-colonial nationalism'.⁷⁹ Fanon, described as the 'founding father' of modern colonial critique,⁸⁰ applied psychoanalytic theory to an analysis of the ways in which sexuality and colonial domination interacted. Analysing Fanon's essay 'Algeria Unveiled', McClintock argues that Fanon had seen the Western dream of colonial conquest as an 'erotics of ravishment':

Under the hallucinations of empire, the Algerian woman is seen as the living flesh of the national body, unveiled and laid bare for the colonials' lascivious grip, revealing piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare.

Fanon argued that under colonialism women of the 'conquered' nation became symbolic mediators, 'the boundary markers', as Vron Ware argues, of empire. (discussed below). Fanon's work is crucial to McClintock's project and to the construction of this thesis in both his attention to sexuality and gender, and because of his contention that the media, image and symbol lie at the very heart of the practice of politics and social knowledge.⁸¹

1/2, 1990, pp. 105-116; Jane Haggis, 'Good wives and mothers' or 'dedicated workers'? Contradictions of domesticity in the 'mission of sisterhood', Travancore, south India', in Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly, *Maternities and Modernities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998; Margaret Jolly, 'Colonising Women: The maternal body and empire', in Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly, *Maternities and Modernities*, Sneja Gunew & Anna Yeatman, (eds), *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1993, pp. 103-127

⁷⁸Routledge, New York, London, 1995

⁷⁹McClintock, p. 360

⁸⁰Robert Young, *Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 161; see also H. K. Bhabha, 'Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition', forward to edition of *Black Skins, White Masks*, Pluto Books, 1986; and Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Grove Press, New York, 1967; Franz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, Grove Press, New York, 1967; Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1968

⁸¹For discussion of Fanon's contribution to this area see Alan Read, (ed), *The Fact of Blackness. Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London & Bay Press, Seattle, 1996

Ann Stoler's writings have explored what she calls the 'sexual politics of race'.⁸² Stoler has analysed the ways that strategies of colonial rule inter-locked with a system of sexual domination and she argues that colonial authority was constructed on two powerful, but false premises.⁸³ The first was the notion that Europeans in the colonies made up an easily identifiable and discrete biological and social entity: a "natural" community of common class interests, racial attributes, political affinities and superior culture. The second was the related notion that the boundaries separating colonised from coloniser were thus self-evident and easily drawn:⁸⁴

Neither premise reflected colonial realities. Internal divisions developed out of conflicting economic and political agendas, frictions over appropriate methods for safeguarding European privilege and power, competing criteria for reproducing a colonial elite and restricting membership⁸⁵

Stoler argues that the colonial politics of exclusion was contingent on constructing categories: legal and social classifications designating who was 'white', and who was 'native', who could become a citizen rather than a subject, which children were legitimate progeny and which were not. What mattered was not only one's physical properties but who counted as 'European' and by what measure:

Skin shade was too ambiguous; bank accounts were mercurial; religious belief and education were crucial but never enough. Social and legal standing derived not only from color, but from the silences, acknowledgments, and denials of the social circumstances in which one's parents had sex. ..Ultimately...inclusion or exclusion required regulating the sexual, conjugal and domestic life of both Europeans in the colonies and their colonised subjects.⁸⁶

⁸²Ann Laura Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 34, no. 2, July 1992, pp. 514-551; Ann Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1989, pp. 134-161; Ann Stoler, 'Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race and Morality in Colonial Asia', in Micaela di Leonardo (ed), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in a Postmodern Era*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991, pp. 55-101; Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire. Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1995, p. 1

⁸³Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable', p. 635

⁸⁴Stoler, 'Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 13, (1), pp. 134-161

⁸⁵Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable', p. 635

⁸⁶Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable', p. 635

Further, Stoler argued that the 'administrative apparatuses' that 'serviced the colonial state' and the ideological structures that reinforced beliefs in white superiority' were as important to colonialism as the frontier violence that secured colonial territories.⁸⁷ Stoler argues that non-indigenous women, in the 'modern' colonial encounter, have acted as both employees of administrative regimes and vital symbolic markers of 'benign' and 'sympathetic' modern government. Theorising the role of women working in a modernising colonial administration, Stoler argues that administrators planned to eliminate 'moral laxity' through the example and vigilance of women whose status was defined by their sexual restraint, and by dedication to their homes and to their men.⁸⁸

Vron Ware argues in her important work *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*,⁸⁹ that gender played a 'crucial role during colonisation', in organizing ideas about 'race' and 'civilisation'.⁹⁰ Ware argues that the 'deconstruction of concepts like woman and femininity in any period will yield important clues about the links between race, gender and class domination'⁹¹. She concludes that a historical perspective is needed to 'break into the contemporary codes of race and gender', this has been central to the analysis in this thesis. Ware has explored the ways that the figure of the white woman was mobilised by colonial bureaucracies as a 'boundary' line, reflecting hidden agendas and economic imperatives. Ware argues that in continuation of a much older theme in imperialism, white women were seen to embody civilisation, and a breach in the integrity of her body, through inter-racial sex, rape, or illness was the ever-present terror of colonialism.⁹² A recurring theme in the history of colonial repression, notes Ware, is the way in which the threat of real or imagined violence towards white women became a symbol of the most dangerous form of indigenous insubordination.⁹³ White women from the ruling elite in these colonial contexts provided a symbol of the most valuable property known to white man to be protected at whatever cost, from the colonised population.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁸⁸ *ibid*, p. 649.

⁸⁹ Verso, London, New York, 1992

⁹⁰ Ware, *ibid*, p. 37

⁹¹ *ibid*, p. 242

⁹² See Ware, 'To Make the Facts Known'. Racial Terror and the Construction of White Femininity', Part Four, *ibid*, 1992, pp. 167-225

⁹³ Ware, 1992, p. 38

⁹⁴ *ibid*

Claudia Knapman's work on the New Guinea White Woman's Protection Ordinance shows that most often the occurrence of, or even the possibility of, relationships between white women and black men, has been the subject of fears, in the colonial context, about the rape of the white woman by black men. The 'White Woman's Protection Ordinance' in Papua New Guinea which made any 'native' convicted of rape or even attempted rape of a European female liable to the death penalty.⁹⁵ The ordinance was passed on the basis of reports of two assaults on white females in a short space of time and the implication that these incidences were on the increase. Contemporary records reveal this was happening in a period of social and political uncertainty in the colony, and that the actual level of rape and assault bore no relation to the passing of the new law.⁹⁶ Helen Callaway's study of European women in Nigeria also seeks to show the ways in which the figure of the white woman, and the need to protect her from colonised populations, particularly from sexual threat, arose in times of particular political pressure, when the dominant group perceives itself to be vulnerable or threatened.⁹⁷

Jane Haggis's article 'Gendering Colonialism or Colonising Gender? Recent Women's Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism' makes significant criticisms of some works in this.⁹⁸ In a review of Knapman and Callaway, Haggis argued that these studies which utilised what she identifies as a 'woman-centred' approach to colonialism have, by 'centring' white women, actually served to 'ungender the colonised people and contribute to silencing colonised women'.⁹⁹ Further, argued Haggis, the woman-centred approach fails to locate class divisions between both colonial and colonised groups of women. Haggis's arguments against the woman-centred approach were important to the formulation of my approach. Rather than adopt a 'woman-centred' analysis throughout this thesis, gender is understood as a social relation distinguishable from, but shaped by, other

⁹⁵ Amirah Inglis, *The White Woman's Protection Ordinance: Sexual Anxiety and Politics in Papua*, Sussex University Press, London, 1974

⁹⁶ Ware, 1992, p. 38

⁹⁷ Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, p. 237

⁹⁸ *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 13, nos 1/2, 1990, pp. 105-115

⁹⁹ Haggis, 'Gendering Colonialism', p. 1; see also Jane Haggis, 'Good Wives and mothers' or 'dedicated workers'? Contradictions of Domesticity in the 'mission of sisterhood', Travancore, South India', in Kalpana Ram & Margaret Jolley (eds), *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, Cambridge University Press, 1998

relationships in society, such as those of race and class and by the meaning attributed to sexual difference.¹⁰⁰

This project attempts to locate gender historically, not as a separate dimension of identity to which one adds, cumulatively, the dimension of class or race. Rather, gender is seen to be an 'articulated' category, constructed through and by class and race.¹⁰¹ These relations, as this thesis seeks to show are evident in the inter-linkages between material and ideological relations; they are 'constructed both discursively, through ideology, and non-discursively, through struggles over material resources'¹⁰² in daily administrative practice, and in struggles over imagery and representation in both Aboriginal and state representations. The thesis analyses both the material/economic processes which impacted on Aboriginal cultures and identities during the assimilation decades (late 1930s to early 1970s) as well as ideological representations of Aboriginal culture and identity. It seeks to show something of the way in which discourses on gender are hierarchically arranged, and the ways individuals often elect to choose those that are more highly valued by the socially powerful.¹⁰³ These choices can not simply be 'read off' the structural place of women and men in society. Individual choice, like agency, is affected by desire and fantasy as well as the material alternatives available.¹⁰⁴

A key theme for this gendered analysis of assimilation is the shadow figure of sexuality that haunts the 'respectable' discourse around 'improving' Aborigines and assimilating them into white society. In those states of Australia, for example, where the public policy of assimilation closely followed on the heels of an earlier policy of explicit 'breeding out', the connections between Aboriginal women's sexuality and the 'final solution' to the 'Aboriginal problem' are most apparent.¹⁰⁵ In an ideological climate which could not publicly

¹⁰⁰ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p. 25; Verena Stolcke, 'Is Sex to Gender as Race is to Ethnicity?', in Teresa del Valle (ed), *Gendered Anthropology*, Routledge, London & New York, 1993, pp. 17-37

¹⁰¹ McClintock, p. 94

¹⁰² Anne Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making of South African Bantustan. A Social History of the Ciskei, 1945-1959*, Heinemann, Portsmouth, James Currey Oxford, David Philip, Cape Town, 1999, p. 9

¹⁰³ Anne Mager, "Girls' Wars: Gender and the Reproduction of the Educated Elite in the Eastern Cape, 1945-1959", *Perspectives in Education*, 14, 1 (Summer 1992/1993), pp. 3-20; Jacklyn Cock, 'Domestic Service and Education for Domesticity: The Incorporation of Xhosa Women into Colonial Society', in Cheryl Walker (ed) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*, Cape Town & London, David Phillip and James Currey, 1990, pp. 76-96

¹⁰⁴ See Sandra Harding, 'The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1986, pp. 645-664

¹⁰⁵ Anna Cole, 'The Institutionalisation of Aboriginal Children in Western Australia during the 1930s: Some Feminist Questions', BA Hons, University of Western Australia, 1992

countenance the sexual connection between a 'white' woman and a 'black' man, biological breeding-out of colour in Australia relied on the accepted idea of Aboriginal women having children with white men. This gendered approach, informed by postcolonial feminist scholarship, has opened up new questions from within the previous literature on assimilation in Australia.

Writings on 'Assimilation' in New South Wales

In New South Wales, the study of Aboriginal assimilation, up until the 1970s at least, was the domain of anthropology rather than history. Given the long history of 'culture contact' in New South Wales, few anthropological studies were produced in the state before the 1940s. This was to do with the dominant anthropological paradigm of structural-functionalism which searched for scientific laws of society to be found in 'traditional' societies which were seen to exist in the timeless, ethnographic present. This approach had led to a concern with 'pristine culture' and drew anthropologists to foreign and 'exotic' locations.¹⁰⁶ However from the 1940s onwards, some studies of 'part Aborigines' were produced in New South Wales, particularly by students at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Professor A.P. Elkin (see chapter three).¹⁰⁷ A common thread throughout these early ethnographies of 'part Aborigines' was the question: How well are Aborigines adapting to assimilation? These studies did not question the path of assimilation as such, and took as their premise the destruction of a viable New South Wales Aboriginal culture. Key works in this field are considered further in chapter three in terms of their comments on gender and assimilation.

¹⁰⁶ Gillian Cowlishaw, 'Colour, Culture and the Aboriginalists', *Man*, 1986, pp. 221-237; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, Cambridge, 1988; G. Stocking, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, J. Fabian, New York, 1983

¹⁰⁷ Marie Reay, 'Mixed-Blood Marriage in North-Western, Marie Reay and G. Stiltington, 'Class Status in a mixed-blood community, Moree, New South Wales', *Oceania*, 18, 1948, pp.179-207; Ruth Fink, 'The Caste-barrier: An Obstacle to the Assimilation of Part-aborigines in North-west New South Wales', *Oceania*, 28, 1957, pp. 100-10; Ruth Fink, 'Social Stratification - a sequel to the assimilation process in a Part-Aboriginal Community in N.S.W', MA Thesis, University of Sydney, 1955; Ruth Fink, 'The Caste-Barrier - An Obstacle to the Assimilation of Part-Aborigines in North-West New South Wales', *Oceania*, vol. 28, 1, September, 1957, pp. 100-110; Marie Reay, 'A Half-Caste Aboriginal Community in North West New South Wales', *Oceania*, 15, 1945, pp. 296-323; Marie Reay, 'Native Thought in New South Wales', *Oceania. A Journal Devoted to the Study of the Native Peoples of Australia, New Guinea, and the Islands of the Pacific*, vol. 20, no. 2, December, 1949, pp. 90-117; Marie Reay, 'Mixed Blood Marriage in North West New South Wales: A Survey of the Marital Conditions of 264 Aboriginal and Mixed-Blood, Women', *Oceania*, 22, 1951, pp. 116-129; Marie Reay, 'Aboriginal and White Australian Family Structure: An Enquiry into Assimilation Trends', *The Sociological Review*, 11, 1963, pp. 19-47; Marie Reay & Grace Stiltington, 'Class and Status in a Mixed-Blood Community(Moree, N.S.W), *Oceania*, vol. 18, 3, 1948, pp. 180-207; M. Reay, 'The Social Position of Women', in Shiels, (ed), *Australian Aboriginal Studies: A Symposium of Papers Presented at the 1961 Research Conference*, Melbourne, 1963, p 326; Pamela Nixon, 'The Integration of Half Caste Aborigines at La Perouse', 1948 Masters Thesis, University of Sydney

By the 1950s and 1960s new anthropological studies by Diane Barwick and Jeremy Beckett, for example, began to be less guided by the central question of the capacity of Aborigines for assimilation and by the premise that Aborigines in the settled states had lost their culture. Beckett, and later Barwick, began to study mixed-descent Aboriginal culture for itself, rather than as a process along a path to eventual, and 'superior', assimilation. These early attempts to recognise 'Aboriginality' in settled areas were not widely accepted. Jeremy Beckett recalls his PhD supervisor, W.E.H Stanner, visiting him during his field work amongst Aboriginal people in north west New South Wales during the 1950s and exclaiming: 'These aren't Aborigines, Beckett!'.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Beckett argued that amongst the 'part-Aborigines' of north-west New South Wales in the 1950s, a culture and identity distinct from mainstream white society existed. While acknowledging the differences between the people he studied and 'traditional' Aborigines, he stressed that 'the loss of their indigenous culture has not made them any more ready to adopt the white Australian way of life, as some advocates of assimilation seem to think it should'.¹⁰⁹

However, in his first study Beckett, like the earliest anthropologists of people of 'mixed-descent' had emphasised that Aboriginal identity and culture was a 'parasite' culture.¹¹⁰ He argued that what could be described as a separate Aboriginal culture and identity was actually an earlier form of European class culture. Beckett's early work entitled 'Kinship, mobility and community in rural New South Wales'¹¹¹ argued among other things, that Aborigines had taken the model of the rural working class as their way of life:

Instead of emulating the industry, thrift and regard for property and comfort of middle class Europeans - with whom they had little contact - they took as their model the nineteenth century pastoral workers...[They] took little account of property or thrift, preferring to squander their earnings in prodigality and drunkenness; they changed their jobs frequently, affecting a sturdy independence, and took what was almost a pride in enduring rough food and conditions; generosity to friends was perhaps their cardinal virtue. Few Europeans live this way today, and

¹⁰⁸Beckett pers comm in Kijas, p. 41

¹⁰⁹Beckett, (1965), 1988, p. 17

¹¹⁰Elkin, 'Intelligent Parasite', this notion is critiqued in Goodall 'Elkin. An Intelligent Parasite: A.P Elkin and White Perceptions of the History of Aboriginal People in New South Wales', paper presented at *Australian History Association Conference*, 1982, pp. 3-27', paper in author's possession

¹¹¹First published in the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 6, 1965 and re-printed in Ian Keen, 1988, pp. 117-137

those who do are not highly regarded by the more settled section of the population; however it has been carried on by Aborigines for several generations.¹¹²

Despite this stress on Aboriginal adaptation of an earlier form of working class white culture Beckett went on to describe particular observable kin obligations amongst the 'part-Aboriginal' people he studied, as well as a series of migratory patterns which he described as 'beats' and which hinted at an earlier Aboriginal social and cultural form. Beckett's work was focused mainly on 'marginal men'¹¹³, rather than women. Along with the focus on extended kinship networks, and migratory 'beats', a series of publications began to outline the elements of an 'oppositional culture' of 'part-Aborigines'.¹¹⁴ These studies accentuated the informal 'oppositional' ways in which Aboriginal culture maintained links with a traditional past¹¹⁵, or re-invented itself in the face of white hostility¹¹⁶.

Diane Barwick's work was exceptional at this time for the attention she paid to the role of women and gender relations amongst Aborigines in 'settled' areas, and her critical stance on the current 'prescriptions for assimilation'.¹¹⁷ Barwick's major intervention in the anthropological debates around assimilation was her assumption that the self-identified Aborigines of part-European descent in southern Australia were authentically Aboriginal. As such, her work, as Johanna Kijas has argued, was at the 'forefront of a very significant, and painfully-fought shift in the academic and public acceptance of Aboriginal self-identification/definition'.¹¹⁸

Regarding assimilation, Barwick argued against the idea that 'the elementary, nuclear family household' was a precondition for assimilation.¹¹⁹ Instead, she argued that the extended

¹¹²Beckett, (1965), 1988, p. 118

¹¹³'Marginal Men: A Study of Two Half Caste Aborigines', *Oceania*, 29, 1958, pp. 91-108; 'Aborigines, Alcohol and Assimilation', in M. Reay (ed), *Aborigines Now: New Perspectives in the Study of Aboriginal Communities*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1964

¹¹⁴A term that was dropped from anthropological and historical writing by the early 1980s

¹¹⁵Keen, Ian (ed), *Being Black. Aboriginal Cultures in 'Settled' Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988

¹¹⁶Discussed below

¹¹⁷'A Little more than Kin' Regional Affiliation and Group Identity Among Aboriginal Migrants in Melbourne, PhD Thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1963; Barwick, 'Outsiders: Aboriginal Women', in Julie Rigg (ed), *In Her Own Right: Women of Australia*, Sydney, 1969; Barwick, 'and the lubra's are ladies now', in Fay Gale, (ed), *Woman's Role in Aboriginal Society*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1974; see also Diane Barwick, 'This Most Resolute Lady: A Biographical Puzzle', in D. Barwick, J. Beckett & M. Reay, (eds), *Metaphors of Interpretation*, Australian University Press, 1985

¹¹⁸Johanna Kijas, 'An Unfashionable Concern with the Past': The Historical Anthropology of Diane Barwick', Master of Arts, University of Melbourne, 1993, p.9

¹¹⁹Barwick, 1963, p. 309

family network was what made the difference between extreme poverty and survival amongst Aboriginal families in Melbourne. Assimilationist goals were thus counterproductive for the economic well-being of 'part-Aborigines'. She stressed the importance of kinship networks to basic economic survival as well as a coherent sense of identity. In her seminal study of 'part-Aborigines' - 'A Little more than Kin: Regional Affiliation and Group Identity Among Aboriginal Migrants in Melbourne'¹²⁰ - Barwick observed that more women than men were likely to marry 'whites', but noted that it was usually the white men who married Aboriginal women who became part of Aboriginal community rather than the white community adopting the Aboriginal wife. She stressed the predominance of 'female-headed' households and the prominent place of the Aboriginal mother in extended family networks.

An important theme in Barwick's early work was the Aboriginal self-perception that assimilation was a euphemism for 'breeding out'. An Aboriginal 'informant' from Gippsland complained, for example:

I can't understand these loans¹²¹. They don't want us to mix with them those mothers would go mad and start a real blue if their kids came home with a dark boy or dark girl, but all the time they talk about solving the Aboriginal problem by marrying the dark and white....I reckon those white men have been breeding on the dark girls since before my Granny's time but most left their black babies behind.¹²²

While Barwick did not analyse these statements in their historical context (as this thesis attempts) she took seriously the perception amongst her informants that biological assimilation had fused with the more acceptable social assimilation that was being advanced in the early 1960s¹²³. Basing her analysis on official reports of the Aborigines Protection Board in Victoria and New South Wales she concluded that '[government] implicitly assumes that the eventual assimilation of the Aborigines will come about through marriage with whites'.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ PhD Thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1963

¹²¹ 'white people', Gippsland Aboriginal dialect, Barwick, *ibid*, p. 324

¹²² Quoted in Barwick, *ibid*, p. 24

¹²³ The time of her first field-work in Australia

¹²⁴ Barwick, *ibid*, p. 265

The impact of the women's liberation movement on anthropology in the 1970s generated a new wave of anthropological work about Aboriginal women.¹²⁵ With few exceptions these studies of Aboriginal women focused on 'outback' and desert Aboriginal society.¹²⁶ Helen Boyle's short overview of the Aboriginal women's position in an unidentified urban area published in 1983 concluded:

In summary...the Aboriginal woman has been able to adapt more easily to Australian society than has the Aboriginal man. But at the same time she has conflicting odds against her. She is being forced to play the role of the submissive sex in the wider society but at the same time forced to play the role of the dominant sex within the Aboriginal society because of the frustrations and alienation of the Aboriginal men, which have been brought about by the racism and class structure in this country.¹²⁷

Boyle, then a young Aboriginal graduate in Sociology from the University of New South Wales, raised a number of important issues about the relative status of women to men in Aboriginal society. It was a controversial area which few studies have attempted to address in the New South Wales context since.

One of the major general criticisms that can be made of the ethnography on assimilation in New South Wales has been that it lacks a historical dimension. However, as part of more general reappraisal of ethnography as practice, and particularly its relationship to colonialism by scholars such as James Clifford and Nicholas Thomas, anthropology has

¹²⁵ Annette Hamilton, 'The Role of Women in Aboriginal Marriage Arrangements', in F. Gale (ed) *Woman's Role in Aboriginal Society*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1970, pp. 28-35; Annette Hamilton, 'Aboriginal women the means of Production'; J. Mercer (ed), *The Other Half*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, pp. 167-79; A. Hamilton, 'A Complex Strategical Situation: Gender and Power in Aboriginal Australia', in N. Grieve and P. Grimshaw (eds), *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1981, pp. 69-85; A. Hamilton, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal Child-rearing in North Central Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981; C. H. Berndt, 'Women as Outsiders: A Partial Parallel', *Aboriginal News*, 1, 4, pp. 7-8; Gillian Cowlishaw, *Women's Realm: A Study of Socialisation, Sexuality and Reproduction Among Australian Aborigines*, PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 1979; G. Cowlishaw, 'Socialisation and Subordination among Australian Aborigines', *Man*, 17, 1982, pp. 492-507; Pat Grimshaw, 'Aboriginal Women: A Study of Culture Contact', in N. Grieve & P. Grimshaw (eds), *Australian Women*, 1981, pp. 69-85; Diane Bell, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, McPhee Gribble & Allen & Unwin, Melbourne and Sydney, 1983

¹²⁶ Barwick, 'And the Lubras are Ladies Now', in F. Gale (ed), *Woman's Role in Aboriginal Society*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1970, pp. 51-63; Helen Boyle, 'The Conflicting Role of Aboriginal Women in Today's Society', in F. Gale, (ed) *We are Bosses Ourselves. The Status and Role of Aboriginal Women Today*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1983, pp. 44-47; Fay Gale, 'Role Revisited. The Women of southern South Australia', in Gale (ed), *We are Bosses*, 1983, pp. 120-136

¹²⁷ Helen Boyle, 'The Conflicting Role of Aboriginal Women in Today's Society', *ibid*, pp. 44-49

become more attuned to historical change.¹²⁸ Two of the first studies to incorporate historical questions into an analysis of the construction of Aboriginal identity and the development of an oppositional culture in New South Wales were Gillian Cowlshaw's *Black White or Brindle: Race in Rural Australia*, based on field work in Bourke, north west New South Wales, and Barry Morris's study, of the Dhan-gadi people from the Macleay Valley in northern New South Wales.¹²⁹ The paucity of anthropological work on New South Wales had led Gillian Cowlshaw to argue in 1988 that '[a]ccounts of the lives of Aborigines in rural New South Wales are so rare that the popular notions of 'dispirited remnants' and 'detrivalised blacks' are entrenched'.¹³⁰ On the background to assimilation Cowlshaw argued that

Some white policy makers advocated miscegenation as a method of assimilation following the logic of scientific racism, but few actually offered to participate in the scheme. Those white men who did participate by forming long-term or marital relations with Aboriginal women seem to have merited universal disapproval or horror among their white fellow citizens.¹³¹

Cowlshaw's most recent study is centrally concerned with the 'intimacy' of the racial context, including cross-cultural marriage and sexual relations in the Northern Territory, and argues today for a more nuanced approach to the question of miscegenation.¹³²

Barry Morris made an important contribution to the analysis of the process of assimilation in his study of 'the cultural logic of the reproduction of power relations' in the context of a history of the Dhan-gadi people of the Macleay Valley in northern New South Wales from the mid-nineteenth century to the late 1980s. Morris described the assimilation era in

¹²⁸James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988, James Clifford, Review of *Orientalism*, by Edward Said, in *History and Theory*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 204-223, James Clifford, 'Diasporas' in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1994, pp. 302-338, James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture*, 1994

¹²⁹Gillian Cowlshaw, Cambridge University Press, Sydney, 1988, Barry Morris, *Domesticating Resistance. The Dhan-Gadi Aborigines and the Australian State*, Berg, Oxford, New York, Munich, 1989, see also Cowlshaw, 'Studying Aborigines: Changing Canons in Anthropology and History', in Bain Attwood & J. Arnold (eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, La Trobe University Press, Melbourne, 1992, Cowlshaw and Morris, 'Cultural Racism', in G. Cowlshaw and B. Morris (eds), *Race Matters. Indigenous People and 'Our' Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997

¹³⁰'The Materials for Identity Construction', in J. Beckett (ed), *Past & Present: The Construction of Aboriginality*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, pp. 87-107

¹³¹Gillian Cowlshaw, 'The Materials for Identity Construction', in Beckett (ed) *Past and Present*

¹³²*Rednecks, Eggheads and Blackfellas: A Study of Racial Power and Intimacy in Northern Australia*, Allen & Unwin with University of Michigan Press, Michigan and Sydney, 1999

Foucauldian terms as a shift in state power relations from legalistic custodianship, 'where control is exercised from outside the community in a sporadic manner, to facilitate repressive interventions' to a form of bureaucratic custodianship, where 'control is exercised from within the community in a systematic way to facilitate pedagogic interventions'.¹³³ Under assimilation argued Morris, individuals were the objects of strategies of intervention and 'normalisation', which are the aim of the exercise of control, that is, to internalise self-regulation within each individual.¹³⁴

The policy of assimilation as Morris shows, 'assumed that the values of western civilisation were absolute and universal and that other cultural forms were obstacles to progress'¹³⁵ 'The policy reflected the view that through systematic training at the local level Aborigines could be uplifted to take their place in a superior culture and society'. Morris argues that the assimilation era was one characterised by an 'increasing evolution towards more systematic forms of control, seeking as their end the creation of new forms of sociality amongst Aborigines'. Under these pressures an Aboriginality defined by opposition developed in northern New South Wales. He described, for example, how gambling and drinking became forms of Aboriginal cultural resistance to state surveillance. Morris identified assimilation as not simply a policy or historical period but a culture. His seminal work in the analysis of assimilation is central to this thesis. My own study draws from this work to consider gender as a central form of analysis in the history of assimilation, and to consider some of the public, as well as personal and oppositional forms of Aboriginal culture, from this period.

Histories of Assimilation

The first writing to place gender as a central analytic category in the context of the history of assimilation in New South Wales was by Heather Goodall.¹³⁶ Drawing on doctoral

¹³³Morris, *ibid*, p. 129

¹³⁴Morris, *ibid*, p. 129 from Foucault *Discipline and Punishment*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1977, p.138

¹³⁵Morris, *ibid* p. 125

¹³⁶ Heather Goodall, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales, 1909-1939, PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Sydney, 1982; Goodall, 'Saving the Children'. Gender and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Children, 1788-1990', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 44, June 1990, pp. 6-9; Heather Goodall, 'Assimilation begins in the Home': the State and Aboriginal Women's Work as Mothers in New South Wales, 1900 to 1960s', in Ann McGrath & Kay Saunders, (eds), *Labour History: Aboriginal Workers*, no. 69, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Sydney, 1995, pp. 75-101; see also Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy. Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, Allen & Unwin in association with Black Books, St Leonards, New South Wales, 1996

research produced in the early 1980s Goodall argued in an article sub-titled 'Gender and the Colonisation of Aboriginal Children' that the practice of forcibly removing Aboriginal children was directed at female children from its inception until the 1940s.¹³⁷ Based on an analysis of 800 records of Aboriginal wards removed in New South Wales Goodall showed that in the first ten years of the Aborigines Protection Board's scheme to remove Aboriginal children from their families, from 1912 to 1921, eighty-one percent of the children removed were girls.¹³⁸ Over the whole period for which detailed records are available, she argued, girls who were twelve-and-over made up fifty-four percent of the Aboriginal children taken in this period, while boys who were twelve-and-over made up only fourteen percent. By removing girls before puberty, argues Goodall, the Board aimed to regulate both the young women's sexuality and reproduction.

Goodall outlined both ideological and economic forces driving this focus on removing young women from their communities. In New South Wales, she concluded, this was done in the immediate context of fears about a perceived increase in a 'half-caste' Aboriginal population and the declining white middle-class birth rate. At an ideological level, the early policy of removal of Aboriginal girls at puberty mirrored widespread beliefs about the need to control the sexuality of working class women. These widespread beliefs were epitomised in the recommendations put forward in the Royal Commission Report into Neglected and Delinquent Children in 1912 by the Commissioner McKellar. His solution to the 'problem' was to 'detain women of child-bearing age' from any of the groups of women recognised by the government as a source of the 'problem'. Such solutions, which echoed the earlier British reports on the Poor Laws and the Select Committee on 'Native Inhabitants', were most harshly and unrelentingly applied to Aboriginal women.¹³⁹

Similarly, historian Peter Read has noted in his work on the removal of Aboriginal children in New South Wales that the focus of removal had been girls.¹⁴⁰ This insight, from both Read and Goodall, has been incorporated into the Link-Up submission to the *Human Rights*

¹³⁷ Goodall, 'Assimilation begins in the Home', 1995, 75-101; Goodall, 'Saving the Children': pp. 6-9

¹³⁸ 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', pp. 75-102

¹³⁹ Goodall, 1995, p 81

¹⁴⁰ Peter Read, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in New South Wales, 1883-1969*, New South Wales Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs Occasional Paper no. 1, 1982, Read, 'A Rape of the Soul so Profound': Some Reflections on the Dispersal Policy in New South Wales', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 7, 1983, pp. 23-24, Peter Read, *A Hundred Years War: The Wiradjuri People and the State*, Australian National University Press, Rushcutter's Bay, 1988, Peter Read, 'Don't Turn your Back on Me' A Bibliographical Review of the Literature of the Stolen Generations', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 73, April 1995, pp. 22-24

and Equal Opportunity Commission's Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, and in its final report.¹⁴¹ Both Goodall and Read have been central to current interpretations of assimilation in New South Wales.

Traditional interpretations of twentieth century New South Wales Aboriginal history drew a distinction between a period of 'Protection' which lasted roughly until 1939, and a period of 'Assimilation' lasting roughly until the 1970s and the beginnings of 'Self-determination'. Goodall has argued that the move from 'Protection' to 'Assimilation' represents government rhetoric rather than a real change in practice and attitude.¹⁴² She argues this is a false representation of the situation, in New South Wales at least, 'where in fact the administrators [formulated a policy] which was *more* segregationist than earlier policies'.¹⁴³ The main change during the assimilation period, from the earlier 'protection' policies, suggests Goodall, was the stress on the pedagogic role of the administration and its new attempts during the post-war period at behaviour modification. Goodall argues that 'to a significant degree the 'assimilation' policy failed to achieve its aims of re-socialising and relocating Aboriginal people. In part this was because of Aboriginal people's cultural and political resistance, demonstrated in the histories of Aboriginal people who refused to sever their links with their kinfolk or their land.'¹⁴⁴

Read, in his overview of the New South Wales administration during the 1900 to 1960 period, described assimilation and earlier 'protection' policies as 'the two sides of the same coin'.¹⁴⁵ Read argues that unofficially the board had been 'pursuing a policy of assimilation since at least 1909'.¹⁴⁶ He identifies the 1937 initial conference of state and Commonwealth administrators as marking the official endorsement of assimilation:

It is clear that despite the 'watershed' of the 1930s, there was in practice very little difference between the policies of protection and assimilation. In the period of 'protection' three thousand children, and perhaps a thousand adults, were driven from reserves 'merge' into the white

¹⁴¹Link-Up (New South Wales) and Tikka Jan Wilson, 'Foundations of Separation: 1788-1915, "In the Best Interests of the Child?" Aboriginal History Monograph 4, Aboriginal History Inc. 1997, Ronald Wilson, *Bringing them Home: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*, 1997

¹⁴²Goodall, 'An Intelligent Parasite', 1982, pp. 3-27

¹⁴³Goodall, 1982, p. 21

¹⁴⁴See Goodall, 1995, p. 95

¹⁴⁵Peter Read, 'A Double headed coin: Protection and Assimilation in Yass, 1900-1960', in Bill Gammage & Andrew Markus, (eds), *All that dirt. Aborigines 1938*, History Project Inc, Canberra, 1982,

¹⁴⁶Read, 'A double headed coin', p. 25; Read, 'A Rape of the Soul', 1983, p. 29

population... Many of the reserves were taken over by local farmers, revoked on the erroneous belief that Aborigines were no longer interested in them. Southern Aborigines throughout the period not only were denied the rights accorded other national groups, such as the fundamental right of free association. They were subjected to a host of restriction and invasions of privacy: a man might be prevented from visiting, let alone cohabiting with his own family living on a reserve from which he'd been expelled. Police and managers assumed the right to enter any reserve or town house owned by the board for any purpose at any time.¹⁴⁷

The aim of assimilation, concluded Read, was to eradicate self-identifying Aboriginal communities and this represented the same aim as that of the earlier administrative period of 'protection'.

More recent work by Fiona Paisley and Victoria Haskins has made important contributions to the analysis of the relationship between 'gender' and 'race' in the context of the policies of removal of Aboriginal children.¹⁴⁸ Paisley's work, on the white women's Aboriginal reform movement in the inter-war years in Australia, shows that that campaigners such as Bessie Rischbieth and Mary Bennett protested against the policies of child removal and 'breeding out'.¹⁴⁹ Paisley noted in her study that little significance has been attributed to either white or Aboriginal women as delegates and witnesses to official investigations into Aboriginal policy:

It is not so much the absence of women that is notable, what is notable is the blindness to the significance of gender as a category within the history of race relations that has produced an artificial segregation of Aboriginal and (white) women's history. This conceptual separation has obscured important aspects of Australia's political and constitutional history.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷Read, 'A double headed coin', p. 25

¹⁴⁸ Paisley, 'Ideas have Wings. White Women Challenge Aboriginal Policy, 1920-1937', PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 1995; Paisley, 'Don't Tell England! Women of Empire Campaign to change Aboriginal Policy in Australia between the Wars', *Lilith*, no. 8, Summer, 1993, pp. 139-152; Paisley, 'Feminist Challenges to White Australia, 1900-1940', in Diane Kirby (ed), *Sex, Power and Justice: Historical Perspectives on Law in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, ; Paisley, 'No Back Streets in the Bush: 1920s and 1930s Pro-Aboriginal White Women's Activism and the Trans-Australia Railway', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 12, no. 25, 1997, pp. 119-137; Vicky Haskins, 'Servants in Suburban Sydney: the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and the Policy of Sending Aboriginal Girls to Sydney, 1883-1940', in *Urban Life, Urban Culture - Aboriginal/Indigenous Experiences, Proceedings of the Conference Hosted by the Goolangullia Centre, University of Western Sydney, Macarthur, November 27-29, 1997* A Goolangullia Publication, University of Western Sydney, Macarthur, 1998, pp. 166-180; Haskins, 'Skeletons', p. 176; Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot'

¹⁴⁹Paisley, 'A Violation of Family Sentiment: Contesting Policies of Child Removal, 1920s and 1930s', paper delivered at Foucault Goes Troppo Conference, Australian National University, 28/6/97

¹⁵⁰Paisley, 1995 PhD thesis, p. 206

Paisley argues that women such as Bennett set out to challenge what Carole Pateman calls the 'sex right'¹⁵¹ of white men over both white women and Aboriginal women. However, women such as Bennett sought basically assimilationist outcomes for Aboriginal women and hoped, nevertheless, to ensure the progress of white 'civilisation' through enabling black Australians to adopt the highest white standards. They aimed for 'women' to take their place as civic individuals through reforming the white nation-state, not dismantling it.¹⁵² Paisley's detailed work on the relationship between white women activists in Australia in both the interwar and postwar years has significantly increased understandings about the particular intertwinings of ideas about women, 'race' and national identity, and the central relationship between Aboriginal movements for justice and white women's historical roles in these movements.

In 1998 Vicky Haskins produced a path-breaking, 'personal insight' into the intimate relationship between Aboriginal domestic servants and a white middle-class female employer during the time of the Aborigines Protection Board in New South Wales (1909-1939). Based on the detailed historical archive of her great grandmother who had herself hired Aboriginal domestic apprentices, Haskins argues that the state was 'straightforward' in its aim of using the 'apprenticeship' of Aboriginal female domestic servants as a way of removing girls from their communities and 'absorbing' them into the white working class.¹⁵³ Haskins points out that white women's role in the economy of the Aboriginal domestic servant was crucial to the success of the scheme which aimed to permanently separate Aboriginal girls from their families. Further, she argues that 'sexual exploitation of Aboriginal girls removed to domestic service was an intended consequence of the Board's removal policies'.¹⁵⁴ Haskins draws attention to the fact that the systematic sexual abuse of Board's apprentices has been ignored in recent media attention around the issue of the Stolen Generations.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹this term from Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988, p. 28

¹⁵²Paisley, 1995 PhD thesis, p. 12

¹⁵³Haskins, 'Skeletons in our Closet. Family Histories, personal narratives and Race Relations History in Australia' *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1998, p. 168

¹⁵⁴Vicky Haskins, 'Servants in Suburban Sydney', pp. 166-180

¹⁵⁵Haskins, 'Skeletons', p. 176; Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot'

Other contributors who bring gendered perspectives to the study of assimilation in Australia include Jeremy Beckett, Catriona Elder, Lynette Russell and Francesca Bartlett.¹⁵⁶ Their analyses focus on the textual representation of whiteness and sexuality in visual and literary media. Beckett's study of the film *Jedda*,¹⁵⁷ analyses the representation of the station owner's wife, Sarah McMahon, and the Aboriginal girl she adopts - Jedda. He argues that the 'agent of disorder' in the film is Sarah McMahon, the film's protagonist (to the Aboriginal Marbuk's antagonist) and it is her 'mistake' in believing she can tame the wild Aboriginal sexuality that sets the story in train, and determines Jedda's fate.¹⁵⁸ Beckett argues that the film *Jedda*, can thus be read as a comment on assimilation policy and the way it focused on women as the agents and 'answer' to assimilation.¹⁵⁹

Lynette Russell observes the salience of gender in her analysis of the magazine, *Walkabout* published between 1934-1972. Russell notes that photographs of men were much more common than images of either women or children 'by a factor of up to ten'.¹⁶⁰ The most common image of the Aboriginal man pictured him standing with his back to the camera gazing over a spectacular vista. Russell notes how the captions accompanying the picture often failed to mention the man and referred only to the scene. These images, she concludes, set up a relationship between indigenes and the landscape that suggested the humans were 'a mere feature of the landscape': 'There is a powerful silence in these images that mutes the presence of the Aboriginal people'.¹⁶¹ Despite these observations and her comment that 'many more women than men were represented in hybrid or contact images, particularly when wearing European clothing', Russell's explanation of the gendered images is merely that: 'perhaps this may be interpreted as an expression of modesty on behalf of the photographers or journal editors'. The women pictured, were often seen taking advantage of European medical facilities, especially for their children. Such images,

¹⁵⁶Jeremy Beckett, 'Mrs McMahon's Mistake. Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* and the Assimilation Policy', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2, December, 1993, pp. 15-19; Catriona Elder, 'What is the White in White Australia? A Reading of A. O Neville, Australia's Coloured Minority', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 11, nos 1/2, 1999, pp. 28-33; Lynette Russell, 'Going Walkabout in the 1950s: Images of 'traditional' Aboriginal Australia', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1994, pp. 4-8; Francesca Bartlett, 'Clean, White Girls: Assimilation and Women's Work', *Hecate*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1999, pp. 10-38

¹⁵⁷'Mrs McMahon's Mistake. Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* and the Assimilation Policy', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2, December, 1993, pp. 15-19

¹⁵⁸Beckett, 'Mrs McMahon's Mistake', p. 15

¹⁵⁹ibid, p. 16

¹⁶⁰Lynette Russell, 'Going Walkabout in the 1950s: Images of 'traditional' Aboriginal Australia', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1994, pp. 4-8

¹⁶¹Russell, 'Going Walkabout', p. 5

concludes Russell, suggested that women and children were more likely to adopt the new ways than the men'.¹⁶²

These studies, using textual sources, and the recent work of Paisley and Haskins, have in common a sense that women and men have different, and only recently historicised relationships to race-relations in Australia, both real and symbolic. They remind us that negotiations about femininity and masculinity and about sexuality take place and get enacted *within* racial ideology and policy. The implications of a gendered reading of assimilation policy are still remarkably rarely brought together in other works in the field of Aboriginal studies. The recent 'History and Sociology of Eugenics Conference' was a case in point.¹⁶³ While a special strand of the conference included both gender and race, the intrinsically gendered nature of the breeding-out policy was not incorporated into the many papers delivered on the subject.¹⁶⁴ This thesis attempts to follow the implications of the breeding-out policy and the historical focus on girls in the child removal program, through to the period of cultural assimilation using both archival, textual and oral sources. A review of the literature on gender and race relations and the politics of identity reveal a historiographic 'gap' in Australian theoretical and empirical work which this thesis will attempt to redress. Firstly, the recent studies of white women's role in race relations history have focused mainly on these women either as employers of Aboriginal domestic servants or as feminist reformers.¹⁶⁵ In part one of this thesis the historical role of white women as employees of the Aboriginal administration is discussed in the light of post-colonial writing. Secondly, recent work on Aboriginal identity in Australia has almost completely ignored the impact of the systematically gendered nature of Aboriginal policy.

¹⁶² *ibid*

¹⁶³ Customs House, Newcastle, New South Wales, 27-28 April, 2000

¹⁶⁴ For example, key note address, Dr Russell McGregor, 'Breed out the Colour': Reproductive Management for White Australia; Alan Charlton, 'Colour Counts: Norman Tindale and the Mathematics of Race'; Christine Cheater, 'J. B Cleland and the Search for the Essential Aborigine'; an exception was Victoria Haskins, 'The Apprenticing of Aboriginal Girls to Domestic Service in New South Wales between the Wars: Eugenic Preoccupations and the Feminist response', Thursday 27 & Friday 28th, April 2000, Customs House, Newcastle

¹⁶⁵ Paisley, 'Ideas have Wings'; Paisley, 'Don't Tell England!'; Paisley, 'Feminist Challenges to White Australia, 1900-1940'; Paisley, 'No Back Streets'; Haskins, 'Servants in Suburban Sydney'; Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot'

Methodology and Sources

Following Bain Attwood's approach in *The Making of the Aborigines*, this thesis does not seek to provide a continuous narrative of 'assimilation' in New South Wales from the 1930s to the early 1970s. Like E. P Thompson before him, Attwood argues that we can see history as 'made up of episodes', and in these we can see the ways in which particular 'significant encounters initiate, reshape and...confirm patterns of association'.¹⁶⁶ Further, Thompson, describing his methodology in studying 'class', wrote that he saw his task was to observe the 'patterns' in 'relationships, ideas, and institutions'.¹⁶⁷ This thesis seeks to discern the patterns, not of class but of gender, in the policy of assimilation across a forty year period from biological, to cultural assimilation.

To this end I ask how ideas about gender and sexuality informed the assimilation policy. What repetitive symbols and metaphors that relating to Aboriginal men and women can be found in this period? The records of the Aborigines Protection Board (1909-1939) and the Aborigines Welfare Board that followed (1940-1969) were read for what they revealed of the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals and communities. Detailed and systematic written records of the policy of assimilation are found in the Board's annual reports, minutes, station reports and returns. The Board's concerted attempt to publicise and popularise its assimilationist goals is charted in the Board's magazine, *Dawn: A Magazine for the Aboriginal People of New South Wales*, produced monthly from 1952 - 1969. In 1965, a two year inquiry into the running of the Welfare Board provides information about how gender and culture informed key policy decisions and new administrative bodies. The report of the *1965-1967 Select Government Inquiry upon Aboriginal Welfare*,¹⁶⁸ which spelt the legislative end to the Aborigines Welfare Board, show, for example, patterns of questioning which revealed the publicly accepted interest in Aboriginal women's sexuality and what were called the 'mechanisms' to deal with it.

¹⁶⁶Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Wellington, Boston, London, 1989; E. P Thompson, 'Happy Families', *Radical History Review*, vol. 20, Spring/ Summer 1979, p. 49; also E.P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, Victoria, Ontario, Auckland, 1963

¹⁶⁷Thompson, 'The Making', p. 11

¹⁶⁸*Report from the Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines Welfare 1965-1967*, in *Joint Parliamentary Papers*, 13/9/1967

Questions in the public domain of the government inquiry describe a normative definition of Aboriginal women and demonstrate the way these women were casually blamed for sexual violence directed at them. Answers to such questions, spoken in public forums, particularly when contrasted with other sources, speak of the ambivalence of the non-Aboriginal female matrons and bureaucrats who staffed the administration. Their public responses show their own confusion about race and sexuality and the way their personal experiences, as women employed by the colonial bureaucracy, contradicted the rhetoric they preached and policed. Chapters two and four take up these questions in more detail (see chapter outline below). These records have illuminated the subtle, and often not so subtle ways that concerns with gender and sexuality have intersected with ideas and fears about 'race' in public policy, and the impact of this on the everyday lives of both Aboriginal and white women and men. In the later period studied in this thesis the new arts administrations set up in this time to 'regenerate' Aboriginal culture, such as the first Aboriginal Arts Board, provide a rich source of material to address questions of gender, identity and performance raised by this thesis. The library of the Australia Council provided an important policy and administrative outline of these years. Annual reports, minutes of meetings and policy statements from the emerging Aboriginal arts bureaucracies, Federal and State in the late 1960s, early 1970s were a useful source for understanding the way ideas about Aboriginal culture had been used throughout this period.

In the early 1990s the Office of Aboriginal Affairs in New South Wales, responsible for the archives containing the Board's records made a decision, based partly on the privacy of Aboriginal individuals and families, to restrict access to any records bearing personal information about Aboriginal individuals. As a result, records of Aboriginal 'wards' removed from their families, which both Heather Goodall and Peter Read had used so effectively to reveal the systematic nature of government removal of children, are no longer openly available to historical researchers.¹⁶⁹ Non-Aboriginal researchers can still gain access to records involving individual names and files only in exceptional circumstances, as in the recent work of Victoria Haskins (discussed above) in which her own non-Aboriginal family history intersected intimately with various Aboriginal individuals and families.¹⁷⁰ My

¹⁶⁹Goodall, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities', Read, *A Hundred Years War*

¹⁷⁰Victoria Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot'. A Personal Insight into Relationships between white women and Aboriginal women under the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board Apprenticeship Policy, 1920-1942', PhD, University of Sydney, 1998

research draws from those records which could be accessed by a non-Aboriginal historian not pursuing family histories. This thesis has drawn on restricted, but not personal family records, to explore how race and gender permeate government and bureaucratic regimes at particular historical periods. One focus is on Aborigines Welfare Board strategies, on the employees who were paid to implement the policy, and on Aboriginal men and women who were expected to embrace this 'new' ideology and culture.

Twenty taped history interviews were conducted with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals who had been involved in the cultural and administrative domain during the period of my study. Some interviews became conversations which ranged over a number of years. I interviewed Aboriginal activists, artists and performers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Builders Labourers involved with the construction of the first Redfern Black theatre, an ex-matron and manager of the Brewarrina reserve, and a range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women and men who had been critical of the post-war assimilationist policies at the time, or who had intersected in important ways with the issues I was describing and analysing.

Focusing on the broad area of cultural intervention, these interviews became important not only for the resonances with my central questions surrounding race, gender and identity. They also illuminated the varied ways in which 'culture' was mobilised in debates during the official period of assimilation. Arguments about what 'Aboriginal culture' was were intrinsic to assimilation policy. How to change and control that culture was the 'problem' faced by administrators and anthropologists sympathetic to the assimilationist goals of the state. In the interviews I conducted it became clear that often 'culture' became the province where people could re-write some of the most oppressive of the colonising narratives of assimilation, a place where fantasy and desire, and simple hope, could overflow the limiting parameters of the assimilationist ideology. To borrow a phrase from the title to an article written about the first Aboriginal theatre in Sydney, cultural activity became a 'city people's place of dreaming'. My approach to 'culture' draws from Catriona Elder who argues that the work of imagination, fantasy and desire are not 'peripheral to political understanding'.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹What is the white in white Australia? A reading of A.O. Neville, Australia's Coloured Minority', in *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol 11, nos 1 & 2, 1999, pp. 28-33

Following Robert Young,¹⁷² Elder argues that, historically 'desire is social' it is not only an individual or maverick feeling, but something, that 'permeates the infrastructure of society'.¹⁷³

Partly as a result of the debates around the politics of identity and some significant criticisms of non-Aboriginal 'appropriation' of Aboriginal history over the past two decades, questions have been raised about the use and rationale of cross-cultural oral history.¹⁷⁴ Non-Aboriginal scholars engaged in 'oral history' work have been confronted by challenges on two fronts, since at least the 1980s. One challenge has come from academics who question the subjective nature of oral testimony. Bain Attwood, for example, has been critical of the way oral history has become 'the great touchstone of Aboriginal history', arguing that most writers have been reluctant to address the historiographical issues that oral history entails, 'preferring merely to consider the methodological problems of eliciting and presenting their material'.¹⁷⁵ While a number of scholars in the field have directly addressed such historiographical issues,¹⁷⁶ another challenge has come from Aboriginal authors who are critical of non-Aboriginal authority in producing Aboriginal oral history.¹⁷⁷ Further, it is no longer true that oral history is the only way to gain an Aboriginal perspective on events since the late 1970s and early 1980s, as Aboriginal writers have been increasingly published. Aboriginal women's autobiographies, for example, have

¹⁷²Robert Young, *Colonial Desire. Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Routledge, New York, London, 1995

¹⁷³Young, 1995, p 32

¹⁷⁴Gordon Briscoe, 'History and Oral History? An Historical and epistemological viewpoint', *Black Voices*, vol. 4, no. 1, July 1988, pp. 14-22; Heather Goodall, 'Aboriginal History and the Politics of Information Control', *Journal of Oral History Association of Australia*, no.9, 1987, pp. 17-32; Allan Johnston, 'Oral History and Cultural Controversy', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 7, 1985, pp. 23-27; Kevin Carmody, 'Aboriginal Oral History: Some Problems in Methodology', *Black Voices*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1987, pp. 1-6; 'for a discussion the issue of appropriation more generally see Meaghan Morris, 1987, p. 163

¹⁷⁵Attwood, *The Making*, p. 143

¹⁷⁶Heather Goodall, 'Aboriginal History and the Politics'; John Murphy, 'The Voice of Memory: History, Autobiography and Oral Memory', *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 87, October, 1986, pp. 157-175; Popular Memory Group, 'Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method', in R. Johnson et al (eds), *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, Hutchinson, London, 1982, pp. 206-252; Peggy Brock, 'A History of the Adnjamathanha of the Northern Flinders Ranges - Methodological Considerations', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 7, 1985, pp. 68-77; Vicki Cowden, 'Historiography and Oral History: A Plea for Reconciliation', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 5, 1982-83, pp. 35-40; Paul Thompson, 'Oral History and the Historian', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 5, 1982, pp. 41-47

¹⁷⁷Briscoe, 'History and Oral History'; Briscoe, 'Aboriginal Australian Identity'; Karmody, 'Aboriginal Oral History'; Huggins et al, Fesl, 'Why Aborigines Should Teach'; Fesl, 'How the English Language is used'; Langford, 'Our Heritage'; Jackie Huggins, 'Read between the Lines', *Australian Book Review*, no. 156, Nov. 1993, p. 43

become an important genre in Australian history generally, and are an important source in this thesis.¹⁷⁸

Chapter Outlines

This thesis is divided into two parts, of four chapters each. The first part focuses on the material and ideological processes which impacted on Aboriginal girls and women in the period of 'biological' assimilation, and through to the period of 'cultural' assimilation. Chapter One begins at the first national meeting of state and Commonwealth Aboriginal authorities in 1937, and considers some of the ways in which debates about gender and sexuality informed Aboriginal policy in Australia, and New South Wales specifically. Chapter Two considers how attempts to biologically and culturally assimilate the Aboriginal population interacted with ideas about women, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in the context of the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board in New South Wales.

Chapter Three traces the change from a focus on biological assimilation to a stress on the cultural or behavioural aspects of assimilation under the administration of the Aborigines Welfare Board. That chapter gives an outline of the ways in which ideas about Aboriginal women played a central role in the implementation of cultural assimilation and considers the inter-relationship with ideological and economic imperatives that contributed to the role of non-Aboriginal women at the time of the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board, during, and after, world war two.

Chapter Four considers the employment of white women by the Aborigines Welfare Board, and the various ways in which gender and sexuality informed official policy and administration in this period. In New South Wales little is known about the women employed by the Aboriginal administration and the role of women who were directly

¹⁷⁸Some important examples for this thesis include; Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1977; Patsy Cohen with Margaret Somerville, *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs*, Allen & Unwin, 1990; Marnie Kennedy, *Born a Half-Caste*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1985; Elsie Roughsey, *An Aboriginal Mother tells of the Old and the New*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Ringwood, 1993; Glenyse Ward, *Wandering Girl*, Magabala Books, Broome, 1987; Glenyse Ward, *Unna You Fullas*, Magabala Books Aboriginal Corporation, Broome, 1991; Ruby Langford-Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1988; Ruby Langford-Ginibi, *Real Deadly*; Rita Higgins and Jackie Huggins, *Auntie Rita*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1994

employed by the Aborigines Protection and Welfare Boards has been largely unexplored.¹⁷⁹ This chapter argues that the position of non-Aboriginal women in the administration of the Aborigines Protection and later Welfare Board was complex. They participated both as 'subordinates of colonial hierarchies and as active agents of colonial culture in their own right'.¹⁸⁰

The second part of the thesis builds on the historical and administrative framework considered in the first four chapters to focus both on the administrative and cultural impact of the gendered policy of assimilation in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, and some Aboriginal self-representations in this context. Chapter Five is a visual and textual analysis of the *Dawn* Magazine. In the days of the early 1950s and 1960s, a time when the domestication of Aboriginal Australians was officially sanctioned, this magazine was produced which spanned two decades and produced a series of vivid images. These images raised vital questions about how masculinity and femininity, sexuality and race are shaped and defined in bureaucratic representational strategies. A striking paradoxical image of assimilation in the post-war era was that of the Aboriginal debutante. Chapter Six explores this significant symbolic image in terms of gender and assimilation. In this chapter the Aboriginal debutante and the emergence of the Aboriginal debutante ball, as both a symbol and an event, are analysed to explore some of the complexities and contradictions of the gendered policy of assimilation.

Drawing on the established themes of this thesis, the penultimate chapter considers some of the representations of women, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal during the *1965 to 1967 Joint Parliamentary Committee in New South Wales*. The last word in Chapter Eight, is given to a self-identified Aboriginal cultural centre which established itself in Redfern in the 1970s and attempted to intervene in the long standing debates amongst 'whites', about Aboriginal cultural forms and gendered identity. To begin then, this thesis looks back, in order to look forward to a time when people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, can choose to perform their own sense of gendered identity.

¹⁷⁹ Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', analyses the gendered impact of the apprenticeship policy but not the staff who enacted it, Hankins, 'The Missing Links', mentions the role of Matron Hiscocks from the Cootamundra Girls Home as does Read, 'A History of the Wiradjuri'

¹⁸⁰ Stoler, *ibid*, p. 26

CHAPTER ONE

'The Glorified Flower'¹: Gender and Debates about Biological Assimilation 1930-1937

The chronology of this thesis frames a time in Australia when biological or scientific approaches to solving the Aboriginal 'problem' through absorption of that population, were replaced with the cultural model of assimilation. In this opening chapter debates about biological assimilation or absorption, popular in pre-war Australia, are discussed and analysed from a gendered perspective. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the policy directions debated at the first meeting of national administrators held in Canberra in 1937.

This first national meeting of State and Commonwealth authorities on Aborigines marks the beginning of the period officially known as 'assimilation' in Australia.² The previous era of 'protection' was over, argued administrators and policy makers, and a new set of problems which centred around what to do with the 'half-caste' population in Australia took centre stage in official discourse on Aboriginal affairs.³ The policy of assimilation marked a new approach to an old problem conceived in biological terms. That was; how to achieve the disappearance, or mergence, of a lower race with a higher race? This chapter argues that representations of race, gender and class played a significant role in scientific, political and administrative discourse in the lead up to the 1937 meeting of Aboriginal authorities, and the establishment of assimilation as official national policy. Debates about biological assimilation, which dominated the 1937 conference of Aboriginal authorities were implicitly informed by prevailing ideas about sexuality and gender. Specifically, central to debates about how to achieve the absorption of Aboriginal people within white Australia, were ideas about the sexuality of Aboriginal women and white, working class men.

¹Herbert Basedow, *The Australian Aboriginal*, F. W. Preece & Sons, Adelaide, 1925, p. 14

²*Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, held at Canberra, 21st-23rd April, 1937*, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1937, see also Paul Hasluck, 'The Policy of Assimilation', in *Shades of Darkness. Aboriginal Affairs, 1925-1965*, Melbourne University Press, Collingwood, 1988, pp. 66-70, Charles Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1970, Peter Read, 'A double headed coin: Protection and Assimilation in Yass 1900-1960, *All That Dirt. Aborigines 1938, An Australia 1938 Monograph*, Canberra History Project Incorporated, 1982, pp. 9-27

³*Aboriginal Welfare, 1937*, pp. 2, Rowley, *The Destruction*, Charles Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1972

When biological 'assimilation' appeared as policy in the late 1930s, it was part of a continuum of ideas about how best to 'solve' the 'Aboriginal problem'. Assimilationist ideas grew out of a much longer discourse about the inevitable extinction of the Aboriginal 'race' under the impact of British colonisation. The 'doomed race theory' as Russel McGregor argues, was a dominant strand in colonial thinking since the nineteenth century.⁴ According to this theory Aboriginal extinction was inevitable in the face of white civilisation and 'progress'. Progress was seen to be a law of nature and those belonging to a lesser race would be 'swept aside in the universal struggle for survival of the fittest'.⁵ The extinction of the unfit was the obverse of the law of 'survival of the fittest' which was seen to guarantee the constant elevation and improvement of mankind.⁶

Social Darwinists argued that Australian Aboriginal extinction was an inevitable accompaniment of a general advance in civilisation⁷. McGregor describes how biological scientists and anthropologists of the late nineteenth century thought that the struggle for survival was the necessary means by which the 'pathway of progress was to be swept clean of all inferior and outmoded forms of humanity'.⁸ Alfred Russel, a popular scientist at that time argued that,

[w]ith the demise of the lower and more degraded races... the world would be again inhabited by a single homogenous race, no individual of which will be inferior to the noblest specimens of humanity.⁹

Karl Pearson, a prominent British biometrician and eugenicist, used Australia as an example of 'masterful human progress following an inter-racial struggle where a lower race had given way to a greater civilisation'¹⁰.

⁴McGregor argues that elements of this discourse remained in Australian discourse on race up until the 1950s, Russel McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939*, Melbourne University Press, 1997, p. 50

⁵See for discussion Richard Dawkin, *River our of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1994, Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1998, pp. 112-113

⁶Dawkin, *River our of Eden*, p. 45, Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Melbourne, 1996

⁷Richard Dawkin, *River our of Eden*, Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*

⁸McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 59

⁹Alfred Russel Wallace, 'The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man deduced from the Theory of 'Natural Selection'', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, vol. 2, 1864, pp. civii-xxxvii in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 58

¹⁰ *Natural Selection and the Australoid Perimeter*, quoted in McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 59

'To join in the march for progress'.¹¹ Opposition to Dying Race Theory

In the late 1920s and 1930s an umbrella organisation which many Christian and some specifically missionary groups participated in, argued against the ideas of the inevitable extinction of the Aboriginal race.¹² The Sydney-based all-white Association for the Protection of Native Races, argued that with the adoption of Christianity and a settled life of labour the Aboriginal 'race' could be preserved, and even prosper in Australia.¹³ From the late 1920s exhortations to 'preserve' the 'Aboriginal race' also came from the British-based Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, which intensified its lobbying of the Commonwealth government to increase the 'protection' of Aborigines.¹⁴

Other groups such as the Australian Aborigines Progressive Association in New South Wales which had a substantial Aboriginal membership, explicitly challenged ideas of racial purity, hierarchy and 'progress' in taking up the 'half-caste' cause.¹⁵ William Ferguson along with the Aboriginal activist Fred Patten argued repeatedly against the prevailing scientific discourse of 'survival of the fittest'.¹⁶ They, along with their membership and other active spokes people such as Pearl Gibbs (see chapter three), argued at public forums and in the newsletter produced by their organisation, against the 'scientific lie' of racial hierarchies:

We ask you to be proud of the Australian Aborigines and not to be misled any longer by the superstition that we are a naturally backward and low race. This is a scientific lie.¹⁷

Members of the organisation argued that they did not 'wish to go back to the Stone Age' but 'to join in the march to progress and civilisation'.¹⁸

¹¹*The Australian Abo Call*, no. 1, April 1938, P. R. Stephenson Papers, ZML MSS 1284/49X, Mitchell Library, Sydney, p. 2

¹²Jack Horner, *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom*, Australian & New Zealand Book Co., Sydney, 1974, Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts*, pp. 191-194, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 115

¹³see Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts*, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 115

¹⁴Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts*, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 115

¹⁵Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy. Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972*, Allen & Unwin in association with Black Books, St. Leonards, 1996, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*

¹⁶Horner, *Vote Ferguson*

¹⁷*The Australian Abo Call*: no. 1, April 1938, p. 1

¹⁸*The Australian Abo Call*: no. 1, April 1938, p. 2

They argued that entitlement to basic human rights should be based on culture not race.¹⁹ In taking on the 'scientific lie' of the doomed race theory their demand for citizen rights was premised on the assertion that Aborigines had a capacity for civilisation and that many, including themselves were already living in a civilized manner.

In constructing their political agenda with adherence to enlightenment notions of universal human progress, and universal human rights, the Aboriginal activists argued against the prevalent notion of innate racial differences. In doing so they entered into a long debate conducted within white discourse about whether Aboriginal people could be 'civilised' and, indeed, whether the Aboriginal race could survive in the modern era. From the perspective of these activists, arguments against the prevailing 'scientific' wisdom of racial hierarchy offered more than basic rights; it offered a future to a people who had long been regarded as doomed to extinction.

The Communist party of Australia which adopted a fourteen point programme in 1931 calling for civil justice for Aboriginal people, was one of the few non-Aboriginal organisations to support the Aboriginal call for human rights at that time.²⁰ Women's organisations such as the Australian Federation of Women Voters and the Women's non-party association of South Australia also supported Aboriginal rights in the 1930s.²¹ Feminist campaigner Mary Bennett argued that the government planned that the 'Native race is to die out by starvation and prostitution'.²² However their concerns did not lead to a systematic critique of the ideology of assimilation, which was seen by feminist campaigners of the time as the answer to Aboriginal women's continuing status as less than second-class citizens.²³ Their demands, which centred on the need for stricter moral protection of Aboriginal women by the employment of female protectors, highlighted a major theme at the heart of the debates about 'half-caste' Aborigines.²⁴

¹⁹*The Australian Abo Call*: no. 6, Sept 1938, p. 1

²⁰Andrew Markus, *Governing Savages*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Wellington, London, Boston, 1990, pp. 159-160, Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 233-234

²¹see Fiona Paisley, 'Don't tell England! Women of Empire Campaign to Change Aboriginal Policy in Australia between the Wars', *Lilith*, no. 8, Summer 1993, pp. 27-58, Fiona Paisley, *Ideas Have Wings: White Women Challenge Aboriginal Policy, 1920-1937*, PhD, School of Women's Studies, La Trobe University, 1995

²²'Bennett to Pink', 12 September, 1937, in Olive Pink Papers, quoted in Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', p. 335

²³For fuller discussion of this issue see Paisley, chapter 8, 'Ideas have Wings', pp. 312-340

²⁴Cooke Constance 'The Status of Aboriginal Women in Australia', *Proceedings of the 2nd Pan-Pacific Women's conference*, Melbourne, 1930, Fiona Paisley, 'Feminist Challenges to White Australia', 1900-1940, in *Sex, Power, and Justice: Historical Perspectives on Law in Australia*, D. Kirby (ed), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, Fiona Paisley, 'Don't tell England! Women of Empire Campaign to Change Aboriginal Policy

Racial hybridity, femininity, masculinity and class

The idea that the extinction of the Aboriginal 'race' in Australia was inevitable, dovetailed with contemporary pre-occupations and presumptions about the nature of 'progress', 'white civilisation' and 'man'.²⁵ Progress towards a higher, 'white' civilisation was considered a law of nature. According to this 'law' inferior 'races' of blacks would be swept aside in the universal struggle for survival. White men, considered to be the 'noblest specimens of humanity'²⁶ were seen as the victors in a universal struggle for the survival of the fittest. Such ideas about race, civilisation and the progress of man interacted with a different set of ideas about women, in this context specifically Aboriginal women, in their role as the biological reproducers of the 'lesser race'.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Aboriginal women were characterised in male-dominated government discourse, as having what Heather Goodall has called an 'uncontrolled and active sexuality'.²⁷ Aboriginal women were described as 'moral imbeciles' with a 'congenital inability to make moral judgements about sexual or any other activity'.²⁸ In the context of the discourse of racial hierarchy, progress and civilisation, the potential for Aboriginal women to 'sabotage racial purity'²⁹ was thus viewed gravely. Aboriginal women were considered, in the context of fears about a growing 'half-caste' population and Aboriginal female sexuality, a 'menace to society'.³⁰

in Australia between the Wars, *Lilith*, no. 8, Summer 1993, pp. 27-58, pp. 127-45, Paisley, *Ideas Have Wings: White Women Challenge Aboriginal Policy*, PhD, La Trobe, 1995, Marilyn Lake, 'Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 46, 1996, pp. 12-19

²⁵ Andrew Markus, 'After the Outward Appearance: scientists, administrators and politicians, in B. Gammage & A. Markus, (eds), *All That Dirt, Aborigines 1938. An Australia 1938 Monograph*, Canberra History Project Incorporated, 1982, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, 1997

²⁶ Russell Wallace, 'The Origin of the Human Races', pp. xxxvii

²⁷ Heather Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home'. The State and Aboriginal Women's Work as Mothers, in New South Wales, 1900-1960', K. Saunders, A. McGrath, J. Huggins, (eds), 'Aboriginal Workers', special edition of *Labour History Journal*, no. 69, November, 1995, pp.75-97, see also Catriona Elder, 'What is the White in White Australia? A Reading of A. O. Neville, Australia's Coloured Minority, *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin. Anthropology, Race, Gender*, vol. 11, 1 & 2, 1999, pp. 28-33

²⁸ Charles McKellar, *Report of the Royal Commission into Neglected and Delinquent Children, 1913*, p. 91, quoted in Goodall, 'Assimilation begins in the Home', p. 80

²⁹ Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', p. 81

³⁰ McKellar, 'Report', p. 91, in Goodall, 'Assimilation begins', 1995, p. 80

For those who believed in the laws of racial progress, and 'survival of the fittest', the growing awareness of the 'half-caste' community was the subject of great concern.³¹ Rather than 'dying out' in the face of progress, 'part-Aboriginal' communities appeared to be growing, and at a greater rate than non-Aboriginal populations.³² In keeping with ideas of racial purity, many public figures in Australia argued that these 'half-castes' were not only 'uncivilisable' but also inferior to both parent stocks, as the cross between black and white was by nature dysgenic.³³ The notion of hybrid inferiority was most commonly expressed in the idea that half-castes inherited all the vices of their progenitors and few of their virtues.³⁴ These biologically framed ideas about racial hybridity and inherent inferiority were statements about the perceived low status and class of both Aboriginal women and white men.

A common belief was that white progenitors of 'half-castes' were men of the 'lowest type'.³⁵ Baldwin Spenser, Chief Protector of the Northern Territory in the early twentieth century, argued that 'the mother (of 'half-castes') is of a very low intellectual grade, while the father most often belongs to the coarser and more unrefined members of higher races'.³⁶ The consequence of this, according to Spenser was that 'the children of such parents are not likely to be of much greater intellectual calibre than the more intelligent natives'.³⁷

Spenser's regime in the Northern Territory entailed a considerable extension of control over people of mixed-descent. Chief Protector in the Northern Territory from 1912, he endeavoured to remove all 'half-caste children' from what he called 'native' camps. He argued that the Government should discourage all 'irregular intercourse between the white

³¹ Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', Rowley, *Outcasts*, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 134, Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness*, 1988, pp. 66-70

³² Goodall, 'Assimilation', 1995, p. 79, Rowley, *Outcasts* p. 398, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 134, Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness*, pp. 66-70

³³ Stephen Garton, 'Sound Minds and Healthy Bodies: Reconsidering Eugenics in Australia', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 103, October 1994, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, 1997

³⁴ J. W. Gregory, *The Menace of Colour: A Study of the Difficulties due to the Association of White and Coloured Races, with an Account of Measures proposed for their solution, and Special reference to white colonisation in the Tropics*, Seeley Service & Co, London, 1925, D. Hastings Young, *A White Australia: Is it possible: The problem of the empty North*, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne, 1922, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 139

³⁵ Peter Read, 'A double headed coin', p. 18, even more despised were the children of Asian and Aboriginal parentage, see Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, p. 139

³⁶ W. B. Spenser, 'Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory' in 'Report of the Administrator for the Year, 1912', [hereafter Preliminary Report], *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, [hereafter CPP], no. 45, p. 41

³⁷ Spenser, 'Preliminary Report', 1912, p. 81

and black races... as much as possible'.³⁸ The first exclusively 'half-caste' institution was established by Spenser in the Northern Territory in 1914.

This particular 'problem' presented to white Australia by 'half-castes' steadily gained widespread attention in both public and political discourse throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Daisy Bates, in her book *The Passing of the Aborigines*, which reached a wide popular readership was commended for what she described as her efforts to 'keep the dreaded half-caste menace from our great continent'.³⁹ Adelaide physician, William Walker's report on conditions of Aboriginal stations and reserves in Northern and Central Australia, combined earlier ideas about the 'dying out' of the Aboriginal race with new concerns with the growing 'half-caste' population:

The advent of the white man sounds the death knell of the black man - if not in this generation, in the next - and all that survives him is a pitiable horde of half-castes.⁴⁰

Of the paternity of these people of mixed-descent Walker argued that a white man in Northern or Central Australia, constantly without the company of white women and always in the company of Aborigines, 'gradually loses his finer feelings and becomes not merely immoral but unashamedly unmoral'.⁴¹ In short wrote Walker: 'Necessity is the father, and Blackgins the mothers of half-castes'.⁴²

Walker's assessment that white men in Northern and Central Australia would out of 'necessity' father children of mixed-descent, was a departure from the common idea that only white men of the 'lowest type' fathered children with Aboriginal women. The eugenicist journal *Health and Physical Culture*, carried articles during the 1930s which argued that only the 'lower classes' would marry part-Aborigines; 'thus the consequence would be the creation of an even more undesirable under-strata of humanity... a class of low

³⁸Spenser, 'Preliminary Report, 1912, p. 41

³⁹*The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime spent among the Natives of Australia*, John Murray, London, 1944, p. 18, Julie Marcus (ed), *First in their Field. Women and Australian Anthropology*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993

⁴⁰Walker, *Report on Aboriginal Stations and Reserves in Northern and Central Australia*, 1928, Australian Archives, Commonwealth Record Series, A1 8/10743

⁴¹Walker *Report*, 1928, p. 130

⁴²Walker *Report*, 1928, p. 131

white trash.⁴³ White men who had fathered 'half-castes' had 'committed a great racial crime', according to some eugenicist. As the editor of *Health and Physical Culture* put it, because of such men: 'the day may come when Australia will be a land of half-castes'.⁴⁴ W. E. H. Stanner, then a young lecturer in anthropology at the University of Sydney endorsed these popular sentiments in the 1930s. He argued that those whites who did marry Aborigines or 'half-castes' would be 'poor whites', or as he called them, 'inferior or failed types'.⁴⁵ Many of the problems of the half-caste, he argued, was that they were 'the progeny of inferior types of whites or Chinese'.⁴⁶

Chief Administrator Cecil Cook

Two of the most radical critiques of the assumption that the half-caste population was a result of 'failed' men, or men of the 'lowest type', came from two opposing sources during the 1920s and 1930s. One was from Dr Cecil Cook, Chief Administrator of the Northern Territory for over a decade beginning in 1927, and the other from Olive Pink, the outspoken anthropologist who lived and worked with Aboriginal people outside Alice Springs during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.⁴⁷

Cook is credited with being one of the most outspoken advocates of the 'breeding out' scheme.⁴⁸ This scheme became policy in the Northern Territory and Western Australia in the 1930s, and was adopted as national policy at the 1937 meeting of Aboriginal administrators in Canberra. According to Cecil Cook, biological absorption of 'half-castes'

⁴³'Would you welcome Marriage with a Half-caste?', 1 July 1937, pp. 20-1, clipping in A. P. Elkin papers, University of Sydney, Box 130, item 1/12/146

⁴⁴'Would you welcome?', p. 20

⁴⁵'Peril in Racial Crossing', *Sunday Sun*, 11 June, 1933, and 'The Problem of the Half-caste', 18 June 1933, clippings in Australian Archives, Commonwealth Record Series A659, 40/1/408

⁴⁶'Peril in Racial Crossing' and 'The Problem of the Half-caste', *Sunday Sun*, 11 & 18 June 1933, clippings in Australian Archives, Commonwealth Record Series A659, 40/1/408

⁴⁷Andrew Markus, *Governing Savages*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Wellington, London, Boston, 1990, Rowley, *The Destruction*, Julie Marcus, 'The Beauty, Simplicity and Honour of the Truth: Olive Pink in the 1940s', in J. Marcus (ed), *First in Their Field: Women and Australian Anthropology*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 111-136, J. Marcus, 'Miss Pink's Racism', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1996, pp. 4-7, Julie Marcus, 'Olive Pink and the Encounter with the Academy', *Mankind*, vol. 17, no. 3, December 1987, pp. 185-196

⁴⁸Tony Austin, 'Training for Assimilation: Cecil Cook and the 'Half-Caste' Apprenticeship Regulations', *Melbourne Studies in Education*, vol. 29, 1987/88, pp. 128-141, Tony Austin, 'Cecil Cook, Scientific Thought and 'Half-Castes' in the Northern Territory, 1927-1939', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 14, pt. 1, 1990, pp. 113-117, Andrew Markus, *Governing Savages*, Rowley, *The Destruction*, McGreggor, *Imagined Destinies*, 1997

was, 'the only method by which the future of this country can be safeguarded in the absence of such radical methods as sterilisation of the unfit and legalised abortion'.⁴⁹

Central to Cook's plans for the Northern Territory was his belief that 'a large proportion (of the 'half-caste' population) is derived from the best white stock in the country'.⁵⁰ Along with his radical critique of the paternity of the 'half-caste' problem, Cook stressed the beneficial result of miscegenation from a eugenicist viewpoint. He argued that people of 'mixed-blood' had some inherent advantages over 'pure blood' whites:

The aboriginal inheritance brings to the hybrid definite qualities of value including their pigmentation which even in high dilution will serve to reduce the at present high incidence of Skin Cancer in the blonde European.⁵¹

Thus Cook claimed his scheme for 'breeding out' would not only 'secure the uplift of the half-castes', it would also 'arrest the degeneration' of the white 'bushman' of the Northern Territory and 'thereby contribute to the noble enterprise of civilising the wilderness'.⁵² Many local white men, argued Cook, were 'deprived' of the company of women of their own 'race' and denied any opportunity of 'making homes' in the Northern Territory.⁵³ 'Many such men', argued Cook, 'would be prepared to marry 'half-caste females and make decent homes' provided the girl had been reared to a 'moderately high standard'.⁵⁴ Such marriages, he argued would be beneficial to both parties. So that there was no question of the woman impairing the social or economic status of her husband, Cook thought it was necessary to 'elevate' the half-caste girl to a high living standard.⁵⁵ Training in 'half-caste' institutions during the 1930s in the Northern Territory became oriented towards making young mixed-descent women attractive spouses for white men.⁵⁶ In Cook's thinking while the 'half-caste' girls and women were *capable* of attaining white social, economic and cultural standards

⁴⁹Cook to Admin, 23 July 1932, Australian Archives, Commonwealth Record Series A1 33/479, Markus, *Governing Savages*, 1990, McGregor, *Imagined Destinies*, 1997

⁵⁰Cook to Admin, 27 June 1933, Australian Archives, Canberra, CRS A659 40/1/408

⁵¹ibid

⁵²ibid

⁵³ibid

⁵⁴ibid

⁵⁵ibid

⁵⁶'Laundry-work at Half-Caste Home Darwin', Commonwealth Record Series [hereafter known as CRS], 1933/4332, NT Annual Report (1932-1933), CRS 1933/6909, see also Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', pp. 74-76

they had not yet reached that point. As Andrew Markus argues midway between black and white, they could be permitted some of the privileges of the white citizen while remaining subject to many of the controls placed on blacks.⁵⁷

Cook's visions for 'breeding out' were clearly gendered, in the sense that while he devoted much attention to securing viable vocational futures for male part-Aborigines he placed comparatively little importance on the employment prospects of young women.⁵⁸ According to Cook's scheme women did not need a vocational future mapped out for them because their destiny lay in the domestic - or more precisely - reproductive sphere. However male 'half-castes' could not advance the process of biological absorption by mating with white women as such unions were virtually unthinkable. The gender distinction in Cook's plan was one of the places it foundered for it meant only females of the existing part-Aboriginal population were potentially capable of participating in the breeding out scheme. It left begging the question of 'half-caste' men. With whom were they expected to reproduce? Cook's only answer was to suggest that after appropriate vocational training these men could be 'safely removed to centres of denser white population'.⁵⁹

Pink, Women and Absorption

Olive Pink disagreed entirely with the 'breeding out' policy but concurred with the Chief Administrator's view that the 'half-caste problem' was derived from some of the 'best white stock in the country'.⁶⁰ It was Pink's view that regardless of class or 'caste', white 'male licentiousness' was the reason that there was a 'half-caste' problem in the first place. 'Were there no white males', she wrote flatly, 'there would be no 'native problem''.⁶¹ The radical

⁵⁷Markus, *Governing Savages*, p. 19

⁵⁸'Employment of Female Half-Castes in Northern Territory' (1929-1934), CRS A432 1933/1246, 'Apprentices (Half-Castes) Regulations North Australia and Central Australia, (1929-1933), CRS A1 1933/479, see also Tony Austin, 'Training for Assimilation', p. 128

⁵⁹Cook to Admin, 27 June 1933, Australian Archives, Canberra, CRS A659 40/1/408

⁶⁰'What is the Future the Commonwealth is Preparing for the Australian Aborigine - the Full bloods? Especially those in the Northern Territory', Olive Pink Papers and Manuscripts, Australian Institute of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies [hereafter AITSIS], Canberra, MS 2368, Section F(d), 6 December 1938

⁶¹Pink, 'What is the Future'

critique inherent in Pink's approach to the 'half-caste' problem was that all white men, not just the 'lowest type' were responsible for creating the 'problem' of the 'half-caste'.⁶²

In a lecture entitled 'Camouflage', delivered in 1935 Pink argued that discussion about the 'real truth' of the destruction of Aboriginal society was 'generally evaded'.⁶³ Rather than 'race suicide' or 'malnutrition', which she saw as popular 'camouflage' explanations for Aboriginal suffering, she argued that the main cause of death amongst Aboriginal populations was venereal infection. The responsibility for the very high levels of sexual disease amongst Aboriginal communities fell in the laps, not of 'white trash' but upon all white men, regardless of class or social status argued Olive Pink.⁶⁴ A 'strong sex-solidarity' existed amongst white men in Australia particularly amongst those men most 'interested in the problem' of Aborigines.⁶⁵ Christian missionaries and their 'followers of all denominations' were included in this 'sex-solidarity'. Pink argued these Christian men should be made to 'live up to their professed but ignored code'.⁶⁶ In terms of the administration of Aboriginal people she argued that since an entirely male regime had failed to afford the Aborigines any real benefits, it was time women took an active and prominent part in the bureaucracy.

Central to Olive Pink's critique of the administration was her analysis that men of all classes and social status had a part to play in the 'half-caste' problem. In a letter to the anthropologist A. P. Elkin in New South Wales she argued that as a means of deterring miscegenation, the name of the white father should be placed on every birth certificate of every 'half-caste'.⁶⁷ In her correspondence to Carrodus, and other political figures and administrators she stressed that she 'wasn't the least interested' in the morals of white men:

⁶²Patricia Jacobs, discusses the idea that miscegenation was the province of the 'lower classes' alone, in 'Science and veiled assumptions: miscegenation in W. A. 1930-1937, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, 1986, pp. 15-22, Catriona Elder discusses the muting of male desire in questions of miscegenation in, 'What is the White in White Australia', 1999, pp. 28-33

⁶³'Camouflage'. Summary of a lecture dealing with culture contact in Australia, delivered before the Society by Miss Olive Pink on 3rd December, 1935, *Mankind*, vol. 2, no. 1, April, 1936, p. 20

⁶⁴Pink, 'Camouflage', p. 20

⁶⁵Pink, 'Camouflage', p. 20

⁶⁶Pink, 'Camouflage', p. 20

⁶⁷Pink to Elkin, 15 April 1934, Elkin archive, University of Sydney, box 38, item 1/10/3

But I am deeply and anxiously worried about the effect of their lack of sexual self-control is having on the native women. And on these women's (potential) black children. Infinitely preferable to any half-caste.⁶⁸

Few other contemporary commentators displayed the intense interest in the sexual welfare of Aboriginal women as Olive Pink. Other critics of Cook's plans to breed out colour included the Women's' Section of the United Country Party. Their arguments were focused on white male sexuality from a radically different perspective. At a meeting held in 1934 they resolved:

[T]hat women's organisations of Australia be urged that for the race heritage that we hold in trust for the generations to come, for the sanctity of our age old traditions and the protection of our growing boys, to combat with all their power this insidious attempt to mingle with the community, women of illegitimate birth, tainted with aboriginal blood, the offspring of men of the lowest human type, many of whom are Asiatics and other foreign nationalities.⁶⁹

In contrast the merits of biological assimilation were endorsed by a group called the Racial Hygiene Association (RHA), a white, middle-class women's organisation active in Sydney from the late 1930s. Originally called the 'Race Improvement Society', the Association supported eugenicist ideas, specifically those which argued for the positive potential of planned miscegenation for Australian society.⁷⁰ Members of the Racial Hygiene Association, the precursor to the contemporary Family Planning Association, took an energetic concern during the 1930s with the 'half-caste problem', and with the problem of population control in colonial nations generally.⁷¹ The three related aims of the Racial Hygiene Association's constitution were: the promotion of state-wide campaigns of sex education; working for the prevention and eradication of venereal disease and educating the community on eugenicist principles.⁷² To this end the organisation held weekly meetings,

⁶⁸Pink to Carrodus, 17 Aug, 1937, Olive Pink Papers, AIATSIS, MS 2368, section F (d)

⁶⁹Resolution passed by Metropolitan branch, Women's Section, United Country Party, Melbourne, 2 August 1934, Australian Archives, Canberra, CRS A452, 52/420

⁷⁰'Family Planning Work in Australia. Some Points in the Development of the Racial Hygiene Association of Australia', mimeograph, Family Planning Association Archive, ML MSS 3838/1

⁷¹Racial Hygiene Association, Constitution, April 1926, Family Planning Association Archive, Mitchell Library MSS 3838/1

⁷²Racial Hygiene Association, Constitution, April 1926, Family Planning Association Archive, ML MSS 3838/1, for history of eugenicist views in Australia see Rob Watts, 'Beyond Nature and Nurture: Eugenics in Twentieth Century Australian History', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1994, p. 319-; Ross L. Jones, 'The Master Potter and the Rejected Pots: Eugenic Legislation in Victoria, 1918-1939',

organised 'teach-ins' and eventually set up a 'birth-control' clinic in central Sydney in the early 1930s. In its prime, during the mid 1930s and 1940s, the Association occupied premises in the prestigious Colonial Mutual Building in Martin Place, and attracted a membership of some of the best-known and most outspoken feminists of the day.

One such feminist, Jessie Street, acted as the organisation's first vice-president.⁷³ Street is more widely remembered today for her work with the British based Anti-Slavery Society, the United Nations, her involvement in the formation of the first Federal Council of Australian Aboriginal and, later, Torres Strait Islander organisations in 1958, and to her formative role in the 1967 Referendum campaign which gave Commonwealth government power over Aboriginal affairs, and included Indigenous Australians in the national census.⁷⁴ During her time with the Racial Hygiene Association, Jessie Street with the other members of the Association, followed both imperial and local debates on the subject of eugenics and population control. When an Imperial Congress was called in London to discuss the health of the empire along eugenicist lines, the Association held a Sydney-based conference mirroring the proceedings and read papers sent out from London for the occasion.⁷⁵ In this way they sought to link the Australian question of 'the half-caste' with the wider context of population control in the British empire.⁷⁶

The records of the Association provide an index to some of the scientific pro-biological assimilationist material available in Australia at that time.⁷⁷ Dr Herbert Basedow, Adelaide

Australian Historical Studies, no. 113, October, 1999, Stephen Garton, 'Sound Minds and Healthy Bodies: Re-considering Eugenics in Australia, 1914-1940', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 103, October, 1994, p. 166, Moira Fitzpatrick, 'Preventing the Unfit from Breeding: The Mental Deficiency Bill in Western Australia, 1929', in Penelope Hetherington (ed), *Childhood and Society in Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, 1988, pp. 144-60, C. L Bacchi, 'The Nature Nurture Debate in Australia, 1900-1914', *Historical Studies*, vol. 19, no. 5, October 1980, pp. 199-212

⁷³Peter Sekules, *A Rewarding but Unrewarded Life*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, p. 56, 1980, Heather Radi (ed), *Jessie Street, Documents and Essays*, Women's Re-dress Press, 1990

⁷⁴Jean Elliott, *Jessie Street and the Foundation of the United Nation*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1995, Sekules, *A Rewarding but Unrewarded Life*, Heather Radi, (ed), *200 Australian Women, a Re-dress Anthology*, Women's Re-dress Press, 1988

⁷⁵'Health of the Empire', Proceedings of 5th Imperial Social Hygiene Congress, n.d (c.1933), Family Planning Association archives, ML MSS 3838

⁷⁶For discussion of eugenicist views, feminism and empire see Ann Laura Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 16, no. 4, November, 1989, pp. 634-660

⁷⁷John B. Cleland, 'The Native of Central Australia and his surroundings', Proceedings of the Royal Geographic Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch, vol. 35, 1933/34, pp. 66-81, Herbert Basedow, *The Australian Aboriginal*, F.W Preece & Sons, Adelaide, 1925, Basedow, 'Should White Marry Black?', *Adelaide News*, 10/6/1932, P. Watson, *The Ladder*, 1/2, 1936, p. 22 quoted in Markus, 'After the outward appearance', 1982, Griffith Taylor, *Environment and Race*, Jaevne & Co Ltd., Sydney, London, 1927, G. Taylor, 'Racial Misconception: Showing that a mixture of race is always advantageous', *The World*, 1934, see also, John

physician, geologist and anthropologist and first Chief Protector of the Northern Territory, was an advocate of the positive potential of miscegenation. In an article entitled 'Should White Marry Black?' Basedow argued that there could be no 'throwback' from the marriage of white and Australian Aborigines.⁷⁸ In his scientific opinion it was only a matter of time until the 'Aboriginal problem' would be solved through inter-marriage.⁷⁹ In his book on the subject he argued in 'three generations the progeny (of white and Aboriginal) will have white skin, Caucasian features and blue eyes'. In conclusion, he argued that the white Australian: 'is the glorified flower of that plant whereas the Aborigine is the bud'.⁸⁰

Havelock Ellis was another contemporary writer endorsed by the Racial Hygiene Association. Ellis, in his essay 'The Ancestry of Genius', argued along similar lines to Cecil Cook, that miscegenation could lead to the 'breeding' of a new and better generation of individuals.⁸¹ Referring to Australia Ellis argued:

[W]herever we find a land where two unlike races have become intermingled, are in the process of fusion, there we find a breed of men who have left their mark on the world and given birth to great poets and artists.⁸²

The Racial Hygiene Association also followed closely the work of Griffith Taylor who, in 1926 published *Environment and Race*.⁸³ Taylor's book argued against the French writer Joseph-Arthur Gobineau's widely-accepted notion of the superiority of the pure race, and advocated for miscegenation.⁸⁴ As well as keeping abreast of the latest scientific publications on miscegenation, members of the Association invited key advocates of eugenics to speak at their meetings. The anthropologist Ralph Piddington, son of Marion Piddington, a well-known Australian feminist and advocate of eugenics at the end of the

Andrews, *Frontier and Men. A Volume in memory of Griffith Taylor (1880-1963)*, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1966

⁷⁸Basedowe, 'Should White Marry Black?', *Adelaide News*, 10/6/1932 in Family Planning Archive, ML MSS 3838

⁷⁹Herbert Basedow, *The Australian Aboriginal*, F. W. Preece & Sons, Adelaide, 1925

⁸⁰Basedow, *The Australian Aboriginal*, 1925

⁸¹Despond Harmondsworth, 'Mixed Races Produce our Geniuses':. Review of Havelock Ellis', n. d, in Bulletin, of Racial Hygiene Association, 1926, 'Minutes, Bulletins & Annual Reports' Folder, Family Planning Archive, ML MSS 3838

⁸²Harmondsworth, 'Mixed Races', p. 12

⁸³Griffith Taylor, *Environment and Race*, Jaevne & Co Ltd., Sydney, London, 1927

⁸⁴Gobineau, *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, Librairie de L'Machette, Paris, 1896, reprinted 1920

1914-1918 War was one of the speakers at the regular Racial Hygiene Association meetings.⁸⁵

'If history is repeated'.⁸⁶ Gender and Absorption at the Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Authorities, 1937

'The answer is that we must make the coloured girls acceptable as whites.'

Dr C. E. Cook, Chief Protector, Northern Territory, 1937⁸⁷

The final section of this chapter analyses the debates held amongst white male administrators at the first national conference of Aboriginal authorities in 1937, in the context of the ideas and statements on biological absorption. The *Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities*, held in Canberra in 1937, brought together the majority of white men who dominated Aboriginal policy and administration in each state of Australia at the time. The meeting was described by the Minister for the Interior, the Hon. T. Paterson, as an 'epoch-making event... The first conference of all the governmental authorities controlling natives'.⁸⁸ Paterson noted that the 'public has taken the greatest interest in this meeting', and that 'some decisions of a concrete nature' were expected from the deliberations.⁸⁹ Delegates to the conference included Mr J. A. Carrodus, Secretary, Commonwealth Department of the Interior, Dr. Cook, Chief Protector of the Northern Territories, Mr M. T. McLean the Chief Protector of South Australia, J.W. Bleakly the Chief Protector in Queensland, Mr A. O. Neville, Commissioner of Native Affairs from Western Australia, J. B. Cleland Chairman of the South Australian Advisory Council of Aborigines, Hon. H. S Bailey, M.L.A, and Mr Chapman from the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines, and Mr B. Harkness, Dr Morris and Mr A. C. Pettit from the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board.

⁸⁵ Ann Curthoys, 'Eugenics, Feminism and Birth Control: The Case of Marion Piddington', *Refractory Girl*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1989, pp. 73-89

⁸⁶ Mr J. A. Carrodus, Secretary, Commonwealth Department of Interior, *Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference*, 1937, p. 22

⁸⁷ *Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference*, 1937, p. 17

⁸⁸ *ibid*, p. 6

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p. 6, for a broader discussion of this conference and the contribution of white women reformers see Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', pp. 312-339

The question which dominated the 1937 meeting of government administrators was what to do with the increasing 'half-caste problem'. Dr Cook, a vocal member of the conference argued strongly for his 'breeding out' scheme to be accepted as national policy. In his arguments to the conference Cook reversed the paradigm of the 'dying race' theories, suggesting that it was the white race that was in danger of extinction, unless something was done quickly to control the growth of the 'half-caste' population:

The natural increase of the white population in the Northern Territory is minus .3 per 1000, so that if left to itself, the white population would eventually die out. The natural increase of the half-caste population... is 18 per 1000.⁹⁰

Using alarmist descriptions of the vulnerability of the 'white race' in the Northern Territory he urged the conference to act quickly in 'absorbing' the 'black population':

My view is that unless the black population is speedily absorbed into the white, the process will soon be reversed, and in 50 years, or a little later, the white population of the Northern Territory will be absorbed into the black.⁹¹

Cook argued that administrators should therefore act quickly to remove this threat to the white population. The 'full-blood' population, the 'wild and uncivilised blacks' were to be left on reserves to 'live out their lives as aborigines'.⁹² This was the short term approach argued Cook, but 'the ultimate intention is that they shall be brought under the same control as is now proposed for those regarded as detribalised'.⁹³ Cook did hint however that a far easier way to reduce numbers of 'wild, uncivilised' blacks was to follow a policy of 'laissez faire' and to concentrate all administrative efforts on absorbing the 'half-castes':

Were a policy of laissez faire followed, the aborigines would probably be extinct in Australia within 50 years. Most of the aboriginal women would become sterilized by gonorrhoea at an early age; many would die of disease, and some of starvation. If aborigines are protected physically and morally, before long there will be in the

⁹⁰ibid, p. 13

⁹¹ibid, p. 14

⁹²ibid, p. 14

⁹³ibid, p. 14

Northern Territory, a black race, already numbering about 19,000, and multiplying at a rate far in excess of that of the whites. If we leave them alone, they will die, and we shall have no problem, apart from dealing with those pangs of conscience which must attend the passing of a neglected race.⁹⁴

While Cook remarked that a policy of 'laissez faire' was 'repugnant' to 'every Protector of Aborigines' he concluded that conference delegates needed to agree on his 'ultimate objective' of absorption and shifted the focus back to the 'half-caste' problem.⁹⁵ Other conference delegates were happy to focus on the 'half-caste' problem, as Mr Bailey, Chairman of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in Victoria stated, 'The full-blooded natives are not of much concern, really, in New South Wales and Victoria, or in South Australia, for they are so few in number; but the natives of less than full-blood are of concern to all of us'.⁹⁶ As Mr Carrodus, the Secretary of the Federal Department of the Interior, put it bluntly: '[u]ltimately, if history is repeated, the full bloods will become half-castes'.⁹⁷

A. O. Neville, the West Australian administrator argued strongly with Cook for biological absorption as the answer to the 'half-caste problem'. Neville argued that 'young women could be removed and colour bred-out', and in this way administrators could 'eventually forget that there were ever any aborigines in Australia'.⁹⁸ Both Neville and Cook noted the number of successful marriages that had already taken place between European males and 'coloured girls'.⁹⁹ Cook explained that to, 'overcome the problem of the half-caste multiplying these people must be treated as white so the male can take his place in a white community and the female can be accepted as the wife of a white man'.¹⁰⁰ He was proud to report that under his administration 'in the last seven or eight years, between forty and fifty

⁹⁴ibid, p. 14

⁹⁵ibid

⁹⁶ibid, p. 20

⁹⁷ibid, p. 21

⁹⁸*Aboriginal Welfare*, 1937, p. 11. In 1947 A. O. Neville published, *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community*, Currawong Press, Sydney, 1947 which set up the past as miscegenation, and the present and future as 'assimilation'. 'Coloured women', in Neville's text are responsible for inciting the desire of white men, see Catriona Elder, 'What is the White' Patricia Jacobs, 'Science and Veiled Assumptions', 1986, Pat Jacobs, *Mister Neville*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1990, Anna Cole, 'The Institutionalisation of Aboriginal children in Western Australia in the 1930's: Some Feminist Questions', unpublished History Honours Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1992

⁹⁹*Aborigine Welfare - Initial Conference*, p. 10 also see chapter three on Dawn magazine and mixed marriages

¹⁰⁰ibid, p. 18

coloured girls have married whites'.¹⁰¹ Dr Morris from New South Wales upon hearing this grand figure replied that he was 'afraid' they could not expect such 'satisfactory results' in other parts of Australia 'where women [white women] were more plentiful than in the Northern Territory'.¹⁰²

Neville made the gendered impact of his plans for 'breeding out' clear when he explained in his view, the 'successful absorption' of the 'half-caste' Aboriginal population rested on a different approach taken by administrators towards 'the female and the male'.¹⁰³ He advised that in 'furtherance of the scheme' of biological assimilation, administrators should follow the example of Western Australia which had excluded the male adult person from certain provisions of the Act:

We give him the benefit of the doubt, and tell him that so long as he does certain things and conforms to the act we shall not worry about him. In other words we give him a chance to enter into the communal life of the state.¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, Aboriginal women, considered to be the lynch-pin of the scheme for 'ultimate absorption' were not to be given the 'benefit of the doubt'. Rather their lives, particularly their reproductive life was to be observed and controlled. Aboriginal women were to be the breeding material for the absorbed 'near-white', population whereas 'near-white' Aboriginal men were instructed ambiguously to 'take their place' in the public world. As far as Aboriginal men went, as Charles Rowley remarked some twenty years later, it was unclear whether they were to remain celibate or whether 'some other fate awaited them'.¹⁰⁵

Bleakly, the Queensland administrator was unenthusiastic about biological assimilation. His concern was about the dysgenic potential of the 'breeding out' scheme. In his view there was 'a danger of blood transmission' or 'throw back'.¹⁰⁶ The only academic at the conference, Professor Cleland from the School of Pathology at the University of Adelaide, volunteered

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 17

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 17

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 11

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 11

¹⁰⁵ Rowley, *Destruction*, p. 43

¹⁰⁶ *Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference*, p. 29

the information that inter-mixtures 'will not necessarily lead in any way to a deterioration of type, inasmuch as racial inter-mixtures seem, in most cases, to lead to increased virility'.¹⁰⁷

While the biology of the 'breeding out' scheme was challenged by Bleakley, none of the delegates challenged the assumptions about the malleability of Aboriginal women and their sexuality, at the heart of the biological-assimilation debates and the absorption policy. Questions raised about biological assimilation centred on the effect on European racial stock of an 'admixture of Aboriginal blood', the likelihood of 'throw-backs' and the number of generations required to 'breed out black blood'.¹⁰⁸ Debates at the conference were underscored by an implicit acceptance of a particular racial and sexual 'order' and an idea that the only thing that stood in the way was biology. No delegate suggested that Aboriginal women may reject the proposals put forward in support of biological assimilation. No member of the conference questioned the idea that Aboriginal women's sexuality was rightly the object of administrative control. The 1937 meeting of Aboriginal authorities resolved that:

[T]his conference believes that the destiny of the native of aboriginal origin, but not the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.¹⁰⁹

To answer some of the 'scientific' doubts about 'breeding out' raised by Cleland, the conference ordered the first state-commissioned, detailed scientific study to be conducted into the feasibility of biological absorption. The study was conducted by anthropologists Norman Tindale and Birdsell, from America, the joint auspices of the Harvard-Adelaide University's Expedition during 1938-39.

Tindale's arguments in favour of biological absorption, published in 1941, were based on a mass of genealogical data collected by himself as well as anthropometric data collected by Dr Birdsell.¹¹⁰ Their overall conclusion was that the 'mergence of the half-caste in the general community was possible without detriment to the white race'. Birdsell 'proved' that

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p. 10

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, pps. 10-11, 28-29

¹⁰⁹ *Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference*, 1937, p. 21

¹¹⁰ Norman Tindale, 'Survey of the Half-caste Problem in South Australia', Joint Harvard/Adelaide, 1941

there was 'no danger of throwback to the aboriginal type as was the case with the Negro and the general absorption of the Australian into the white population should be easy'.¹¹¹ Tindale's report acknowledged that 'successful absorption' had biological *and* social dimensions. However he concluded that its achievement required 'raising the educational, vocational and economic standards of the 'half-caste' to a level that made them fit members of a civilised society and fit spouses for white people'.¹¹²

What none of the scientific studies made explicit was the fact that miscegenation or biological assimilation rested on the unspoken acceptance of particular gendered assumptions about race and sexuality. The assumption that the children of 'black' women and 'white' men were the answer to the 'question' of biological assimilation was not challenged in political debates. It was not a possibility that 'black' men and 'white' women would provide the combination that would eradicate the mixed-race 'problem'. While this seems so historically predictable to almost not warrant special comment, it is the very taken for granted-ness of the underlying premis of biological assimilation that indicates the way ideas about race, and 'solutions' to racial problems relied on particular ideas about gender. It is the set of issues around the 'taken for granted-ness' of the premis of biological assimilation that this thesis questions, within the specific historical context of assimilation in New South Wales. This thesis asks in what ways did assumptions about gender and femininity under-pin the rationale of the assimilationist project?

Administrators representing New South Wales told the 1937 conference that their state administration was already progressing in the direction supported by the other delegates. Mr Harkness representing the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board remarked that while there was 'an historical appeal in preserving a vanishing race', assimilation was clearly the only way forward in his state and ultimately for the whole of Australia.¹¹³ Mr Harkness was pleased to point to New South Wales as an example of how to successfully implement such a policy. In New South Wales, Mr Harkness explained they had already a system of taking girls in the 'early adolescent stage' and 'training' them for domestic service.¹¹⁴ Harkness argued that based on his experience in New South Wales, and with his 'expertise' in

¹¹¹Tindale, *Survey*, 1941

¹¹²*ibid*

¹¹³*Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference*, p. 14

¹¹⁴*ibid*

the area of education, 'part-Aborigines' lacked the ability of ordinary European children but concluded that the 'potential could rise with the progressive elimination of Aboriginal blood'.¹¹⁵

At the conclusion of the conference it was agreed amidst much enthusiasm generated by the firm policy directives for 'half-castes', that State and Commonwealth authorities should meet annually to monitor progress. In fact, the next national meeting of Aboriginal authorities did not take place until over a decade later in 1948, when budget restrictions imposed by the Second World War had receded. Therefore in the time between the *Aboriginal Welfare – Initial Conference* and the next nation-wide meeting, State administrations were left to work out their own approaches under increasingly restrictive budgets, caused by war-time fiscal constraints.

The endorsement of biological assimilation in political, administrative, and some feminist organisations underwent a major revision in the course of World War Two. Assimilation began to be expressed as a social or cultural ideal, rather than as a biological project of absorption. The following chapter considers how the gendered discourse of biological assimilation impacted on the administration of Aborigines in the most 'settled' state - New South Wales. The impact of the Second World War on the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board in New South Wales is discussed in chapter three. Representations of femininity and sexuality formed a constant seam throughout the time when assimilation was official policy, and informed cultural representations throughout the period, as this thesis explores in the following chapters.

¹¹⁵ibid

CHAPTER TWO

'Do You Think I Have Not The Same Feeling As A White Woman?':¹ The 'Home Finder', Sister Ivy Pratt And Mrs Inspector English

The policy direction of absorption or biological assimilation agreed to at the 1937 meeting of Aboriginal authorities (discussed in chapter one) was incorporated into the state administrations around Australia in varying ways.² In New South Wales, as the representative, Mr Harkness, explained to the conference, the Aborigines Protection Board already had: 'a system of taking girls in the early adolescent stage and training them for domestic service'.³ In fact the New South Wales Board had been systematically removing Aboriginal children, specifically pre-pubescent Aboriginal girls, from their families and communities since the early 1900s.⁴

To undertake this programme of child removal, non-Aboriginal administrators and politicians viewed both Aboriginal parents and children as inferior to whites. In essence, Aboriginal people were viewed as a 'problem' to be 'solved' by the administration. Assumptions about Aboriginal women as mothers were central to defining this problem, and in many ways Aboriginal girls and women were seen as the 'solution'. This 'solution' was the

¹ Unidentified Aboriginal woman cited by Mr Scobie, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debate* [hereafter *NSWPD*], 27 January, 1915, p. 1964

² Patricia Jacobs, 'Science and veiled assumptions: miscegenation in W.A, 1930-37', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, 1986, pp. 15-23, Tony Austin 'Training for Assimilation: Cecil Cook and the 'Half-Caste' Apprentice Regulations', *Melbourne Studies in Education*, vol. 29, 1987/88, pp. 128-141, Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston, 1987, pp. 91-94, Anna Haebich, *For their Own Good: Aborigines and government in the South West of Western Australia, 1900-1940*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1988, Tony Austin, 'Cecil Cook, Scientific Thought and 'Half-Castes' in the Northern Territory, 1927-1939', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 14, pt. 1, 1990, pp. 113-117, Barbara Cummings, *Take this Child... From Kahlin Compound to the Retta Dixon Children's Home*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, Pat Jacobs, *Mister Neville*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1990, Ann McGrath, 'Beneath the Skin: Australian Citizenship, Rights and Aboriginal Women', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 37, 1993, pp.103, Tony Austin, *I Can Picture the Old Home so Clearly: The Commonwealth and 'Half-Caste' Youth in the Northern Territory, 1911-1939*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1993, pp. 148-149, Rowena McDonald, *Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth government and the removal of children of part descent in the Northern Territory: an Australian Archives exhibition*, Institute of Aboriginal Development Press, Alice Springs, 1995, pp. 20-25

³ *Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, held at Canberra, 21st to 23rd April, 1937*, p. 14

⁴ Peter Read, *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in NSW 1883-1969*, NSW Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs Occasional Paper No. 1, 1982, Link Up (NSW) and Tikka Jan Wilson, 'Foundations of Separation: 1788-1915', *In the Best Interests of the Child?, Aboriginal History Monograph 4*, Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation, 1997 and Aboriginal History Inc. 1997, p. 50, Heather Goodall, 'Land, Children, Power', in Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 1996, Heather Goodall, "Saving the Children": Gender and the Colonization of Aboriginal Children in NSW, 1788 to 1990, *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 44, June 1990, pp. 1-24, Heather Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home': the State and Aboriginal women's work as mothers in New South Wales, 1900s to 1960s', *Aboriginal Workers, Special Issue of Labour History*, no. 69, Nov, 1995, pp.75-102

removal of Aboriginal girls from their families as the potential reproducers of the next generation of a 'problem' population. Heather Goodall has argued that the removal of Aboriginal girls from their families also coincided with the gradual movement of white working-class women away from domestic service and into urban factory work in the early twentieth century.⁵ This chapter considers how both material and ideological factors impacted with attempts to biologically and culturally 'assimilate' Aboriginal girls and young women, in the context of the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board (1909-1939) in New South Wales.

The focus on Aboriginal girls and women as the 'solution' to the Aboriginal problem, in turn interacted with the Aborigines Protection Board's decision to employ white women to implement assimilationist policy in its first years of administration, as this chapter shows. Certain key personnel of the administration in the most 'settled' state were white women, employed by the all-male Board, to play their role in the removal of children, the overseeing of the apprenticeship system, and the surveillance of domestic life on stations and reserves. The chapter begins with a discussion of the establishment of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in New South Wales and describes the manner in which its child removal policies were principally directed at girls, before considering some of the roles, and representations of white women within the administration.

The Board for the Protection of Aborigines, first established in 1883, initially had no statutory authority.⁶ This Board was established during a period of missionary activity in the south-west of the colony of New South Wales, and in the context of Aboriginal demands for land in the face of the ongoing dispossession.⁷ The Board's initial role was to oversee the gazettal of Aboriginal reserves, to distribute rations and oversee Aboriginal mission stations such as one established at Warangesda, New South Wales, by the Reverend Gribble in 1880.⁸ Within a short time the Board had taken over the management of all Aboriginal reserves from missionaries such as Gribble.⁹ The focus of official attention on

⁵Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', p. 82

⁶Link Up & Wilson, 'Foundations of Separation', p. 50, Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 88-97

⁷Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 88-97, see also Read, *A Hundred Years War*

⁸Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 88-97

⁹Peter Read, *A Hundred Years War* pp. 30-31, Victoria Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 31-32, Ann Curthoys, 'Good Christians and useful Workers: Aborigines, Church and State in NSW, 1870-1883', *What*

Aboriginal girls is evident in early Protection Board records and activities. In 1891 Board minutes contain an anonymous recommendation to establish a central training home for Aboriginal girls, and in 1893 a girls dormitory was built at the Warangesda Aboriginal Station.¹⁰ At this stage the Board had no legal power to confine Aboriginal girls to the dormitory. Early attempts to convince Aboriginal parents to send their daughters there were strongly resisted.¹¹

In 1909 the passage of the *Aborigines Protection Act* authorised the newly constituted Aborigines Protection Board to provide for the 'custody, maintenance and education' of Aboriginal children.¹² To gain custody of Aboriginal children under this Act, the Board had to obtain a magistrate's order under the provisions of the *Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act*, 1905, administered by the State Children's Relief Board. Children could also be taken by the Board under the conditions of the *Apprentices Act*, 1901, provided the persons so apprenticed were between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one and their parents approved of their indenture.¹³ At this stage the bill closely following existing legislation dealing with neglected and apprenticed non-Aboriginal children.¹⁴

During Parliamentary debate over the bill M. L. A. Robert Donaldson introduced an amendment designed to give the Aborigines Protection Board far more power over Aboriginal children and their parents than the State had over non-Aboriginal children:

The board shall have power to assume full control and custody of the child of any aborigine if such course shall be deemed by the board to be in the interest of such child, and the board may thereupon remove such child to such control and care as the board may decide.¹⁵

Rough Beast? The State and Social Order in Australian History, Sydney Labour History Group, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston, 1982, pp. 36-45

¹⁰Board for the Protection of Aborigines, Minute Books, 1890-1901, State Archives of New South Wales, Sydney, 4/7108-27

¹¹Gungil Jindibah Centre, *Learning from the Past: Aboriginal Perspectives on the effects and implications of welfare policies and practices on Aboriginal families in New South Wales*, New South Wales Department of Community Services, Sydney, 1994, Link Up & Wilson, *In the Best Interests of the Child?*, Ron Merkel, 'Government Culpability for the Forced Removal of Aboriginal children from their Families', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 47, pp. 4-5

¹²*Aborigines Protection Act*, 1909, in *NSW Statutes*

¹³*Aborigines Protection Act*, 1909

¹⁴See for example Stephen Garton's description of non-Aboriginal legislation, *Out of Luck: Poor Australians and Social Welfare, 1788-1988*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, also Link Up & Wilson, *In the Best Interests?* p. 62

¹⁵*NSWPD*, 16 December, 1909, p. 4552

At the time the amendment was not carried as other Parliamentary members argued that existing legislation dealing with neglected and apprenticed non-Aboriginal children was adequate for Aboriginal children.¹⁶

In the following years the Board developed a more systematic and institutional approach to the removal of Aboriginal children, directed at Aboriginal girls. In the 1910 Annual Report, under the agenda item, 'Proposed Home for Orphan and Neglected Children', the Board outlined its approach which was in line with the later debates about biological absorption expressed nationally in 1937:

Some of the children are almost white, and if it were not that they are resident of an Aborigines reserve, could hardly be distinguished from European children... The Board recognises the only chance these children have is to be taken from their present environment and properly trained... before being apprenticed out, and once having left the aborigines' reserve they should never be allowed to return to them permanently.¹⁷

The Board's interest in institutionalising Aboriginal girls, and their different approach to Aboriginal boys was demonstrated in a Protection Board circular which instructed station managers that all half-caste boys, fourteen years and older, had to leave the stations to find employment, and all girls of the same age had either to accept domestic work or be taken to the Cootamundra Training Home for Aboriginal Girls.¹⁸ The Home was set up in 1911 in the old Cootamundra Hospital.¹⁹ It was established as a training institution for Aboriginal girls too young to be apprenticed in domestic service.

The Training Home for girls was established some thirteen years before the Kinchela Home for Aboriginal Boys in 1924, indicating the administration's early focus on Aboriginal girls. The Cootamundra Girl's Home had been the idea of Board member, George Ardill, a religious philanthropist who believed in 'saving' unmarried mothers by putting them to work

¹⁶NSWPD, 16 December, 1909, p. 4552

¹⁷*Aborigines Protection Board, [APB]Annual Report, 1910, New South Wales Parliamentary Papers, [NSWPP] 1911, p. 11*

¹⁸*APB, Copies of Letters Sent, 26 March, 1914 in Link Up & Wilson, In the Best Interests? p. 56*

¹⁹*APB Annual Report, 1912, p. 2*

as servants and placing their children in Christian institutions.²⁰ Ardill was one of the most outspoken Board members on the subject of the removal of Aboriginal girls.²¹ His plans for the Cootamundra Girl's Home were consistent with contemporary ideas about how to deal with 'difficult' non-Aboriginal women.²²

Following the 1909 Act, the Aborigines Protection Board continued to lobby for further legislative power over the Aboriginal population. In their campaign to have further restrictions placed on Aboriginal people, Board members alluded to the growth of, what was referred to as a menacing part-Aboriginal population, being brought up on the stations and reserves:

The Act does not give the Board either the power to train or effectively bind them [in apprenticeship] without consent... Unless some prompt measures are taken, the children who are growing up will be in the same position as their parents. Of these children, a number of whom are half castes, quadroons and octoroons, are increasing with alarming rapidity. To allow these children to remain on the Reserves... would be... an injustice to the children themselves and a positive menace to the State.²³

Following a survey undertaken by the Board which indicated the increasing numbers of 'half castes' in New South Wales, Donaldson's amendment which had been defeated in 1909 was reintroduced to the New South Wales Parliament in 1914.²⁴ Opposition to the bill in Parliament made explicit reference to the central place of girls and women in the Board's removal policy. Mr Black representing Namoi, argued that the Board's apprenticeship and boarding out programme was actually a contributing factor in the increasing 'half caste'

²⁰Heather Radi, in Bede Nairn & Geoffrey Sale (eds), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 7, 1891-1939, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1979, pp. 90-91, Victoria Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', p. 35, Stephen Garton, *Out of Luck*, p. 95

²¹*NSWPD*, 16 December, 1909, p. 4552, *NSWPD*, 27 January 1915, p. 1964, *NSWPD*, vol. 149, 23 June 1936, Mr Ardill, p. 4848

²²Renate Howe & Shurlee Swain, 'Saving the Child and Punishing the Mother: Single Mothers and the State, 1912-1942', *Journal of Australian Studies: Women and the State*, no. 37, 1993, pp. 31-46, Sabine Willis, 'Made to be Moral at Parramatta Girl's School, 1898-1923', in Jill Roe (ed), *Twentieth Century Sydney*, Hale & Ironmonger, Sydney, 1980, pp. 178-192, Ann Hyslop, 'Agents and Objects: Women and Social Reform in Melbourne 1900-1914', in Margaret Bevege, Margaret James & Carmel Shute (eds), *Worth Her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, Hale & Ironmonger, Sydney, 1982, pp. 230-235, Jill Julius Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1984

²³*APB Annual Report for 1911*, *NSWPP*, p. 1

²⁴*APB, Copies of Letters Sent*, 7 August 1914; Circular 30 undated; 10 November 1914; 21 December 1914, Link Up & Wilson, *In the Best Interests?*, p. 57

population because many Aboriginal girls were placed in dangerous situations where they could be sexually assaulted and raped:

If you have a large number of half-castes it is due to the boarding-out system. They take young girls from the mothers and send them to stations where there are a number of hands, sons of the owners of the stations, and other men working there. Very often these girls are practically left to the mercies of these men.²⁵

Mr Scobie, Member for Murray, and himself a member of the Aborigines Protection Board since 1901, presented some of the strongest opposition to the bill during the Parliamentary debates. Unlike most of the other legislators, Scobie had extensive contact with Aboriginal people, and in his comments to Parliament he went beyond prevailing stereotypes about Aboriginal girls and women, which were at the core of demands for further powers of Aboriginal child removal:

I decline to be a party to perpetuating outrages which I saw committed at the Warangesda station. A woman came to me with a baby and two other children. The children were as clean and tidily dressed as those of any white woman. With flashing eyes and speaking in good English the woman asked me if I thought she would like her children to be taken away from her. She added, 'Do you think I have not the same feeling as a white woman? If you put my children into an institution to learn a trade I shall leave the mission station altogether.'²⁶

The Vice President of the Executive Council, a Mr F. H. Flowers sponsored the bill, arguing that increasing legislative powers were the only way the Board could effectively undertake to 'merge half-caste children into the white population'.²⁷ During the debate he quoted extensively from a deputation made to his office by members of the Protection Board in 1912:

As an illustration of how things are going, there are to-day five half-castes for every full-blood...
The whole object of the board was to put things into train on lines that would eventually lead to

²⁵NSWPD, 24 November 1914, p. 1958

²⁶NSWPD, 27 January, 1915, p. 1964

²⁷NSWPD, 24 November, 1914, p. 1354

the camps being depleted of their population... But this could never be achieved until the children were removed from the low surroundings of the camps... The mothers kept control of them... until they are about 14 years of age, but after that the bad influences and surroundings prevailed, and the children commenced to have children... with the result that the half-caste and white population was increasing.²⁸

Flowers put his case firmly and argued further: 'I want hon. members to clearly understand that... we are going to remove from the parents in the camp their parental responsibility, and place it wholly in the hands of the board which I think is perfectly justifiable under the circumstances'.²⁹ In conclusion he said:

Although great care has been taken to explain at length the many advantages a child would derive from training [at Cootamundra] the almost invariable experience has been that parents or relatives raised some frivolous objection and withheld their consent... The board is compelled to ask for the extended power... which gives them absolute control, *in loco parentis*, over every aboriginal child whose moral or physical welfare is, in the opinion of the board, imperiled.³⁰

Despite the arguments put forward by some politicians against increasing control of Aboriginal children, the Act was amended in 1915 by an overwhelming majority of 31 to 3. As a result, the Aborigines Protection Board was granted the power of *in loco parentis* over all children defined as Aborigines in New South Wales. In 1918 the Board was granted further powers to remove from its reserves all children under eighteen years, men who in official opinion ought to be earning a living elsewhere and all people of more than 'half European descent'.³¹

The Aborigines Protection Board's 'Home Finder'

When Mr Flowers had spoken of the 'great care' that had been taken to 'explain at length the many advantages a child would derive from training' at the Cootamundra Training

²⁸NSWPD, 24 November, 1914, p. 1353

²⁹NSWPD, 24 November, 1914, p. 1355

³⁰NSWPD, 24 November, 1914, p. 1354

³¹Amendment no. 7 of 1918, *Aborigines Protection Act*, no. 2 (i) (a)

Home for Aboriginal girls, he could well have been referring to the role taken by a new Board employee - the 'Home Finder', Miss Alice Lowe. The 'Home Finder' was the first direct employee of the Board - hired to 'find' girls for training and domestic service.³² It was no coincidence that the 'Home Finder's' employment in 1912 coincided with the establishment of the Board's Cootamundra Training Home, and with the step-up in the campaign to increase legislative power to remove Aboriginal children from their families for so-called 'apprenticeship'.

The appointment of a female 'Home Finder', before the employment of any male staff in similar positions, occurred during a period when the Board needed to gain the consent of Aboriginal parents and local magistrates before removing Aboriginal children. When the Board did secure the legislative power to remove children without parental consent in 1915, the first two men were employed to facilitate the now legal inspections of stations and reserves and to randomly select child 'candidates' for removal and apprenticeship.³³ One of the new Inspectors was Robert Donaldson the man who had originally introduced the restrictive amendment to Parliament in 1909.³⁴

However in the early years of the Protection Board, before its legislative base was expanded, Miss Lowe was employed to act as a go-between for the Board, amongst Aboriginal parents and the local officials, to help secure 'consent' for the removal of Aboriginal girls.³⁵ Before the amendments to the Aborigines Protection Act, the Board had found difficulty in convincing local magistrates of the neglected condition of many of the Aboriginal children brought before them.³⁶ During the second reading of the Amending Bill, Flowers had argued that: 'the difficulty of proving neglect where children are fairly clothed and fed is insurmountable'.³⁷ Similarly, in the Parliamentary debate to secure the additional

³²Miss Constance King was employed as a typist in the same year by the APB. The public service list of officers appointed permanently employed by the Government of NSW (excluding teachers) under the provisions of the Public Service Act, 1902

³³*APB Minutes* [APBM], 1915, 4/7119 & *APB Annual Report* [APBAR], 1915

³⁴*NSWPD*, 16 December, 1909, p. 4552, APBAR, 1916

³⁵*APB Minutes*, 1/11/1912, 4/7119

³⁶*NSWPD*, vol. 56, 1915, p. 1353 (Second Reading, Aborigines Protection Amending Bill), Legislative Council, 24/11/14, see also Carla Hankins, 'The Missing Links': Cultural Genocide through the Abduction of Female Aboriginal Children from their Families and their Training for Domestic Service, 1883-1969', Bachelor of Arts Honours thesis, University of New South Wales, 1982, p. 2.1.7

³⁷*NSWPD*, vol. 56, 1915, p. 1353 (second reading, Aborigines Protection Amending Bill), Legislative Council, 24/11/14, see also Hankin, 'The Missing Links', 1982, p. 2.1.7

legislative powers to indenture Aboriginal children, Board members argued that the withholding of parental consent was 'the almost invariable experience'.³⁸ Thus in its first years of functioning the Board had relied more on what it described in annual reports and minutes as 'persuasion' to facilitate the removal of Aboriginal children.³⁹

In the years between the passing of the 1909 *Aborigines Protection Act* and the increase in legislative power granted in 1915 the 'Home Finder' was employed to apply pressure on Aboriginal parents, specifically Aboriginal mothers to relinquish control of their children, specifically their daughters, to the Board. The 'Home Finder's' work of 'persuading' and 'explaining' to Aboriginal mothers the reasons why they should give their children to the Board, was integral to the gendered process of child removal and apprenticeship undertaken by the Aborigines Protection Board. As the work of 'merging' or biological assimilation was directed at Aboriginal girls and women, the work of persuading and 'gradually explaining' the necessity of Homes such as Cootamundra was considered suitable to the work of a non-Aboriginal woman. Aboriginal author, Margaret Tucker recalls her own experience of a visit from the 'Home Finder' in about 1914:

One day we were allowed to go home early from school. When we got home, the house was tidy, in fact all the homes were extra tidy. Rubbish had gone. We were made to wash up and brush up. The Aborigines Protection Board... was coming. I can remember how pleased and proud Mother [was]... to hear... 'what lovely little girls... how nicely kept, everything so scrupulously clean; could the two older girls go for training in that beautiful training school at Cootamundra, where they would be well cared for and trained to be domestics and earn a living? They would love being there in the beautiful surroundings, the lovely gardens with fruit trees'... Mother told them that while it sounded all right, she felt that the neglected children with no parents needed to be cared for, not our family, who were happy. We were terrified at the thought of being separated from our parents... Mother, to end this frightening conversation said, 'We will think about it'⁴⁰

In Margaret Tucker's case she, along with two of her sisters, were later removed from their family by force and taken to the Cootamundra Girls Home by a police officer, in the face

³⁸ *NSWPD*, vol. 56, 1915, 1353-1355 (second reading, Aborigines Protection Amending Bill, Legislative Council, 24/11/14), Haskins, 1998, p. 34

³⁹ see APBM, esp. 1911-1912, 4/7119, APBAR, 1910-1914

⁴⁰ *If Everyone Cared*, Grosvenor Books, Melbourne, London, Wellington, 1983, (1977), p. 82

of great resistance from their mother.⁴¹ Tucker, her sisters, and the hundreds of girls like them forcibly removed from their parents did not find the Home to resemble in any way the image of gardens and fruit trees outlined to their mother. Regimentation, severe physical and in some cases sexual abuse, alongside intimidation, loneliness, home-sickness, hunger and ill-fitting clothing supplied by the Prison's department are common memories of the Cootamundra Home (see chapter four). Margaret Tucker recalls that after a few months at the Home she attempted to run away with nine other girls, after experiencing a severe beating with a wooden plank wielded by the institution's cook.

However, in Annual Reports of the same time, the Board presented a picture of the rational, enlightened strategies of its administration patiently being explained to those it targeted: 'the Board's objects as regards the Cootamundra Home, &c [sic] are being explained and gradually realized as being only for the good of the children'.⁴² In this context the 'Home Finder' was meant to represent the benign, 'civilising' face of a colonial administration as it followed a policy aimed at removing all pre-pubescent girls from their families, neglected or not.

The main duty of the 'Home Finder', besides persuading parents to relinquish their children to Board control, was to secure the removed girls work as domestic servants for white families. In this job, Miss Lowe appears to have been more effective than in her role of persuading parents to hand over their children. The Board noted in its annual report a year after her appointment:

[T]he number of girls sent out since Miss Lowe took up her duties... has materially increased, and there is now a sum £493.1s.8d to the credit of the Board's trust account as compared with £322.8s.8d at the end of 1911.⁴³

To facilitate the placement of Aboriginal girls as domestic servants in white households, the 'Home Finder' was required to engage in what the Board termed 'escort work' - accompanying Aboriginal girls from their families to white households, both in urban and

⁴¹The harrowing account of the circumstances of the removal are recalled in Tucker, *If Everyone Cared*, 1983 (1977), pp. 90-93

⁴²APBAR, 1912, p. 4

⁴³APBAR, 1912, p. 4

rural areas. In this role the 'Home Finder' was also required to arrange transfers of girls from one domestic service position to another. Victoria Haskins has documented how transfers of girls between white households was often used by the Board to move sexually-abused, pregnant or violently-treated girls from one employer to the next, or in exceptional cases back to an Aboriginal station - far from her family and community.⁴⁴ Despite existing legislation which established a woman's right to support from the father of her child, paternity was rarely mentioned in the case of Aboriginal women in domestic service, and no attempt was made to claim maintenance from fathers.⁴⁵ The Board discussed, but resisted taking any action against white male employers who 'harassed, assaulted, or impregnated' an Aboriginal apprentice.⁴⁶ The Board's discreet removal of the Aboriginal women 'apprentices' babies at birth, meant that the white fathers were not blamed for Aboriginal women's pregnancies. These babies became the next generation of state controlled 'half caste' children 'merged' into the broader, non-Aboriginal community.⁴⁷ Accomplishing these 'discreet' removals was one of the roles of the 'Home Finder'. Miss Lowe was required to accompany girls in a 'situation' from employer, to hospital and back again into the same, or a new place of employment.⁴⁸ High levels of sexual abuse and resulting pregnancies, it has been argued, were an inadvertent offshoot of the apprenticeship system.⁴⁹ It represented a feature of the domestic service apprenticeship system unofficially sanctioned by official inaction.⁵⁰

As the system of removal and apprenticeship of Aboriginal girls increased in the years after 1915, Miss Lowe's duty statement expanded. During the 1920s and 1930s the 'Home Finder'

⁴⁴Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', 1998

⁴⁵Inara Walden, 'That was Slavery Days': Aboriginal Women Domestic Servants in New South Wales in Twentieth century History', in Ann McGrath & Kay Saunders (eds), *Labour History: Aboriginal Workers*; no. 69, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Sydney, 1995, pp. 196-207, Inara Walden, 'Aboriginal Women in Domestic Service in New South Wales, 1850-1969', Ba Hons, University of New South Wales, 1991, p. 121, Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', p. 47

⁴⁶APBM 1934, item 4/7126, Inara Walden, 'Aboriginal Women in Domestic Service', p. 121

⁴⁷Gungil Jindibah Centre, *Learning from the Past*, 1994, p. 41, Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', p. 47

⁴⁸ABPM, 1912, 4/7119

⁴⁹Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', Appendix Three, table I, 'Pregnancy Rates of Female Aboriginal Apprentices in Service in NSW 1916-1938': APB Ward Registers, p. 353, Haskins, 'Servants in Suburban Sydney': the NSW Aborigines Protection Board and the Policy of Sending Aboriginal Girls to Sydney, 1883 to 1940', *Urban Life/Urban Culture. Aboriginal/Indigenous Experiences. Proceedings of the Conference hosted by Goolangullia Centre, University of Sydney, Macarthur, November 27-29, 1997*, pp. 166-180

⁵⁰Vicky Haskins, 'Servants in Suburban Sydney', Goolangullia, Inara Walden, 'Aboriginal Women in Domestic Service', Inara Walden, 'That was Slavery Days', p. 203, see also C. M. Clark, *Pastor Doug: The Story of Sir Douglas Nicholls, Aboriginal Leader*, Landsdowne Press, Melbourne, 1966

was required to visit the homes of prospective employers in the city before the girls were placed there, keep all records on apprentices and to confirm that apprentices were filling out their pocket money books.⁵¹ In the latter task, Miss Lowe was required to check that Aboriginal women were learning to be accountable for small amounts of money they received from white employers, indicating the tutelary, 'civilising' influence she was meant to represent for the Board.

Under the apprenticeship scheme, wages were paid by employers directly into Trust Funds set up by the Board with a few pence given to the girls as pocket money. Aboriginal women seeking access to their wages were required to approach the Board (usually through the 'Home Finder' or in rare cases through a sympathetic employer).⁵² The Board argued that Aboriginal women should not be allowed to 'handle all the money which the employers pay them' because they 'only waste the money buying rubbish', or that 'some fellow' would try to get at them, and many workers never received any of their trust money at all.⁵³ Their earnings may have been unofficially channeled back into administration costs or embezzled, as happened in Queensland.⁵⁴ As Victoria Haskins notes, the question of what happened to the majority of the Board's trust funds continues to be unresolved today.⁵⁵

Monitoring the girls' pocket money books in the context of an administration that systematically denied Aboriginal women direct access to their wages reflects something of the complex role the 'Home Finder' played within the administration of the Protection Board. She was expected to act in a tutelary role, apparently teaching young women financial responsibility and self-regulation while they were placed in a system which directly removed the possibility of self-autonomy for female apprentices. As other writers have

⁵¹ APBM, March 1936, item 4/7123

⁵² see Haskins for full description of one such employer, 'My One Bright Spot', 1997

⁵³ *Select Committee on Administration of Aborigines Protection Board, appointed during the session of 1937-38*, Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, NSW Legislative Assembly, Sydney, 1938, in Joint Volumes of papers presented to the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly, vol. 8, NSW Parliament, Sydney, 1940, p. 49, Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', p. 39

⁵⁴ Loretta de Plevitz, 'Working for the Man: Wages Lost to Queensland Workers 'Under the Act'', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 81, June 1996, pp. 4-8, Ray Evans and Joanne Scott, 'Fallen amongst thieves': Aboriginal Labour and State Control in Inter-War Queensland', Ann McGrath & Kay Saunders, (eds), *Labour History: Aboriginal Workers*, no. 69, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Sydney, 1995, pp. 115-131, Rosalind Kidd, *The Way we Civilise: Aboriginal Affairs, the untold story*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1997

⁵⁵ Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', p. 39, p. 88, also Walden, 'Aboriginal Women in Domestic Service', Walden, 'That was Slavery Days', pp. 196-207

noted, the Board's apprenticeship policy sought to maximise its control over Aboriginal women by denying them any autonomy.⁵⁶ This is a view supported by ex-apprentices' memories of their treatment within the system.⁵⁷

The Board's and the young women's interests were in direct conflict, but Miss Lowe was employed to act again as a 'go between'. Miss Lowe was required to represent the civilising mission of the Board to young women in service, as she had to Aboriginal parents in the early days of the Board's programme of child removal. This was reflected in another duty on her job statement issued in the late 1930s which required her to 'correspond with parents and girls in service to keep them contented'.⁵⁸ While the Board was pursuing a systematic child removal programme aimed at eventually eradicating the Aboriginal problem by removing a generation of Aboriginal children from their families, they presented their role, through the 'Home Finder' as 'civilising' and 'helping' the Aboriginal community.

Towards the end of her years of employment in 1936, the 'Home Finder's' duty statement set out a long list of tasks for which she was responsible. These included finding 'positions' for girls in the country, and interviewing applicants for female Aboriginal apprentices, being generally responsible for 'visiting and helping poor and indigent married Aborigines' and for tasks specifically relating to the Cootamundra Home, including arranging clothing and 'training' for girls in the institution, and visiting all girls in the Cootamundra district.⁵⁹

As an indication of the varied levels of Institutionalisation of Aboriginal girls and women by the 1930s, a final re-issued duty statement for the 'Home Finder' included visiting all institutions and mental hospitals where Aboriginal girls and women were held.⁶⁰ For many Aboriginal women taken as young girls and institutionalised at Cootamundra, their incarceration at the Home was the beginning of a long cycle of Institutionalisation by white

⁵⁶ see for example Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 80-127, Goodall, 'Saving the Children', pp. 7-8

⁵⁷ Tucker, *If Everybody Cared*, 1977, Coral Edwards & Peter Read (eds), *The Lost Children: thirteen Australians taken from their Aboriginal families tell of the struggle to find their natural parents*, Doubleday, Sydney, 1989, see also Coral Edwards, 'Is the ward Clean?', in Bill Gammage & Andrew Markus (eds), *All that Dirt: Aborigines 1938, An Australian Monograph*, Canberra, 1982, pp. 4-8

⁵⁸ APB Minute Book, 1936, Item 4/7126, Reel 2792, 4/8544

⁵⁹ APB Minute Books, 1929-46, Item 4/7126, Reel 2792, 4/8544

⁶⁰ APBM, 23/4/1936, 4/7121-27

authorities.⁶¹ The 'Home Finder's' role in explaining and persuading parents to co-operate with the removal of children in the first years of the operation of the Protection Board, and her later work in keeping parents and domestic servants 'contented', her facilitation of the placement of girls in service, and her role in monitoring the tutelary role of the Board, was meant to represent the 'civilising' functions of this administration.

Amendments to the Act (1936) and Representations of Women

When the 'Home Finder' retired after twenty-three years of service, the Protection Board invited applications through 'the press' for a 'Lady Welfare Officer'.⁶² They advertised for a woman to take over the duties of the 'Home Finder' and for someone who was 'preferably a certified nurse', who would be available for 'emergency duty' when required at the Board's treatment rooms and clinics. The position of first Lady Inspector was advertised at a controversial time in the Protection Board's administration, and the woman employed in this position came to play an important role for the Board in representing its civilising, tutelary, public self-representation, as had the 'Home Finder', Miss Alice Lowe.

The reference in the Board's advertisement for a woman who was 'preferably a certified nurse available for emergency duty at the station's treatment rooms and clinics' alluded to an ongoing health crisis experienced by Aboriginal communities interned on the Board stations and reserves during the 1930s. Since 1909, when the Aborigines Protection Act was made law, conditions on the Board's reserves had steadily declined.⁶³ A free issue of blankets was withdrawn in 1916, the meat ration was withdrawn in the same year, Aboriginal people living on the reserves were entitled to four pounds of flour a week as basic nourishment. The few buildings that had been built on the stations by the government were decrepit and infrequently repaired.⁶⁴ More often than not the 'treatment rooms' and 'clinics', recorded in the Board's minutes as a site where the new employee was requested to

⁶¹Gungil Jindibah Centre, *Learning from the Past*: 1994, Link Up & Wilson, *In the Best Interests of the Child?*, Merkel, 'Government Culpability for the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their Families', pp. 4-5, Peter Read, 'Don't Turn your Back on Me', *HREOC*, Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 314-330

⁶²APBM, 23/4/1936, 4/7121-27

⁶³Read, 'A Rape of the Soul so Profound', p. 24, Goodall, Part IV 'Under the 'Dog Act', 1930s, in *Invasion*, pp. 173-247

⁶⁴APB Minute Books, 1911-1938, 4/7108-27, Read, 'A Rape of the Soul so Profound', pp. 23-33

serve, were the verandahs of the manager and matron's house on the Aboriginal stations spread throughout New South Wales.⁶⁵

During the depression years of the 1930s conditions on Aboriginal reserves got considerably worse, while simultaneously the reserve populations doubled or trebled. As Goodall and Read have shown the denial of the dole to those defined as Aboriginal under the Protection Act was one reason for the rapid increase in reserve populations during the depression.⁶⁶ Another factor that had led to a rapid population increase on stations and reserves was the increase, during the depression, of long-standing pressure from rural shires to remove Aboriginal fringe-dwellers from around their towns.⁶⁷ Under these conditions during the depression years the Board changed its approach from actively seeking to de-populate Aboriginal reserves and 'merge' people into the white community, to a policy aimed at concentrating the Aboriginal population on a few large stations for eventual assimilation.⁶⁸

In 1934, faced with continuing pressure from local councils, the Board sought amendments to the Protection Act which would entitle authorities to remove any person classified as Aboriginal from conditions considered 'undesirable' by white authorities to a reserve:

The Board realising the inadequacy of its powers under existing legislation, contemplates seeking certain amendments to its Act, which will enable it, among other things, to concentrate on its Reserves, persons of Aboriginal blood, who are now living on stock routes and alongside of towns, and maintain a definite control over them, so that they will not be at liberty to leave.⁶⁹

When the Board first approached Parliament in 1934 with intentions to increase its legislative powers to 'concentrate' Aboriginal people on stations it was greeted, as it had been in 1909 with reluctance. The Labor party, in particular, was opposed to the extra powers of confinement asked for by the Board and made repeated attempts to block the passage of the bill.⁷⁰ When the bill went again to Parliament in 1936, to convince

⁶⁵ see AWB Station Reports and Returns, 1942-48, Special Bundles, 1920-1957

⁶⁶ APBAR, 1931-2, p. 1, Read, 'A Rape of the Soul', p. 25, Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 173-247

⁶⁷ APBAR, 1929-30:1, Goodall, *Invasion*, 1996, Read, 'A Rape of the Soul', 1983

⁶⁸ APBAR, 1931-32, p. 2

⁶⁹ APBAR, 1931-32, p. 2

⁷⁰ APBM, 13/4/1934, 12/6/1935, 4/7/1936, NSW PD, 23/6/1936 149, p. 4844, Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 196

politicians of the need for greater powers over Aboriginal people, the Protection Board publicised the widespread epidemics of infectious diseases on their stations.

Overcrowding on the reserves and stations had led to further deterioration in living conditions and health, and during the 1930s the Board stations were the sites of major epidemics of respiratory and eye infections, exacerbated by the poor nutrition of station residents.⁷¹ In particular Board representatives argued that the eye disease present on the stations was a venereal inflammation called 'gonococcal ophthalmia' and that white people were more severely affected by the disease than Aboriginal people:

It has been stressed that this disease, gonococcal ophthalmia, affects the eyes of aborigines... As a matter of fact, to the aborigines it is not a very serious disease, but once it is contracted by white persons one can almost rest assured that in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred the white patient will lose their sight.⁷²

In the Parliamentary debate on passing the increased restriction of the new bill, Board representatives suggested that uncontrolled Aboriginal populations could spread a virulent, blinding infection to white communities while experiencing only a minor infection themselves.⁷³ The fact that the eye disease was inaccurately believed to be venereal in origin, added to the momentum of the Board's campaign.⁷⁴ Reports of 'infected' station matrons and nurses, and in some cases their children, were used in Parliament by representatives of the Board to counteract opposition to the increasing restrictions of the amended bill.⁷⁵

In these debates the figure of the white women, employed by the Board came to play an important part. Board representatives argued that white women were the most vulnerable to this disease - a vulnerability enhanced by their devotion to the 'cause' of Aboriginal people:

⁷¹Read, 'A Rape of the Soul', Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 194

⁷²NSWPD, 23 June 1936, p. 4845

⁷³Rowley discusses this 'moral panic' in *Outcasts*, p. 59, also Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, p. 115

⁷⁴Heather Goodall argues this is a diagnosis that would have been very hard to confirm medically in the 1930s and has since been disputed by ophthalmologists. Contemporary accounts suggest the eye disease was trachoma, see *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 196

⁷⁵NSWPD, vol. 149, 23 June 1936, Mr Ardill, p. 4848

The white people most likely to catch this disease are those who are showing such strict devotion to duty - matrons and nurses. During recent months women officers have contracted this horrible type of ophthalmia. One of the matrons at her own cost, flew from a country station to Sydney the same day as she thought she had contracted the trouble and she was saved... Another woman officer... is now lying in St. Vincent's Hospital with one eye gone and the doctors making a desperate effort to save the other one. We must get the aborigines in some place where we can have them medically examined in order to save them from themselves and to save the whites who come in contact with them. Are we through a wrong sense of justice, to allow these people to wander about to be a danger to themselves and others?⁷⁶

Along with white women, their children were considered to be especially vulnerable to catching this 'dread scourge':

The hon. member... gave the House an instance regarding one of the servants of the board who, through her faithfulness to duty and her unremitting care of the aborigines on one of the stations where this dread scourge had made its appearance, is today lying in St Vincent's Hospital... But the hon. member... forgot to tell the whole story. In addition to that woman herself, there are her three children. They too are under medical treatment, having contracted this dread scourge.⁷⁷

These images of infected women and their children were used to push through the controversial, and restrictive new amendments to the Aborigines Protection Act. The fear that the body of the white woman could become diseased, in the course of her work civilising, or in the terms of the Aborigines Protection Board, 'merging' the Aboriginal population into white society was used to introduce further restrictions on the Aboriginal 'subjects' of the administration. Mr Ardill argued that,

It is necessary in the treatment for the aborigines that the treatment should be regular and frequent. The trouble is that the aborigine is rather careless, and he is not prepared to submit to medical examination periodically. This bill provides that he shall be compelled where the board deems it necessary.⁷⁸

⁷⁶NSWPD, vol. 149, 23 June, 1936, Mr Bate, p. 4844

⁷⁷NSWPD, Mr Ardill, 23 June, 1936, p. 4848

⁷⁸NSWPD, Mr Ardill, 23 June, 1936, p. 4849

Along with station matrons, Board representatives argued that nurses were the other white women most likely to come in contact with the disease in their work on the Board's impoverished stations:

At Brewarrina there is Sister Eales. At Menindie, Sister Parke; at Woodenbong, Sister Brearley; at Cumeroogunga, Sister Pratt. Sister Pratt was rushed to Sydney yesterday suffering from a wretched eye trouble. Heavens knows what we are going to do to save her. It takes a pretty devoted woman to do the work that she has done.⁷⁹

Sister Pratt's infection was, argued Board representatives, the final straw. A few days after she had left work due to an eye infection the Board urged strongly that *all* the restrictive amendments for which it was pushing should be passed immediately 'in view of the serious position disclosed and lack of power to compel Aborigines to submit to examination and treatment'.⁸⁰ In their representations to Parliament, Board members argued that they sought to 'save' white woman by restricting the Aboriginal population. These arguments did not quite tally with the working life of Sister Ivy Pratt, the first trained Nursing Sister employed by the Aborigines Protection Board.

Sister Pratt began work in the early 1930s at Brewarrina station where she subsequently contracted trachoma and was taken off nursing duties.⁸¹ When she recovered enough to return to work, she was sent back to the over-crowded Brewarrina station, at what was described later by Board Inspector Smithers, as the 'danger point of the disease'.⁸² Later she was transferred as nurse-in-charge to Cumeragunja station specifically to 'take control' of eye treatment there. In 1939, having contracted both severe trachoma and then tuberculosis she became an inmate of the Queen Victoria Tuberculosis clinic in Thirlmere, New South Wales.⁸³

⁷⁹NSWPD, Mr Bate, 9th November, 1937, 12/8749B, p. 26

⁸⁰APBM, 3/6/1936, 4/7121-27

⁸¹APBM, 15/8/1936 4/7121-27

⁸²Eric E Smithers, Inspectors report 'Cumeroogunga Aboriginal Station - Allegations by Assistant, G. N Milne, against ex-Manager, J. G Danvers, and Sister I. .I. Pratt', to APB, Premiers Dept Files, 12/8749 B (no date c. 1934)

⁸³APBM 3/6/1936, 4/7119, Thirlmere Nursing Home, Patient Records 12/9/1939 (69)

The severity of the health situation on Cumeragunja station during Sister Ivy Pratt's time was outlined in a letter sent to the New South Wales Premier by William Cooper, secretary of the Australian Aborigines League.⁸⁴ Cooper's letter included a 'death roll' which listed fourteen women whose babies had died at the station, including a four year old, and two six year old children, furthermore some women had lost more than one child. The 'death roll' also included six adults, five women and one man.⁸⁵ Cooper's 1939 letter described the effect of sub-standard housing, and a contaminated milk supply on child and adult health on the station and concluded:

With other factors the health of the people is bad... I append a list of infant death during the time Nurse Pratt was in charge of the treatment rooms. Mortality figures, including infant mortality is too high and should be investigated.⁸⁶

Despite Cooper's protests there was no investigation.

In arguing for more legislative power to contain people on stations such as Cumerangunja, and thus protect white women and their children, the administration played on public representations of white women's vulnerability, while placing women such as Sister Ivy Pratt at - what their own Inspector Smithers had called - the 'danger point of the disease'.

All amendments to the Protection Act for which the Board argued were passed in 1936.⁸⁷ This allowed the Board to legally 'concentrate' Aboriginal people on reserves while extending the definition of who was Aboriginal from people 'predominantly of Aboriginal blood' to anyone 'deemed to have Aboriginal blood' by a white authority.⁸⁸ Thus, the decade in which the term 'Assimilation' began to be used to describe official policy, coincided with legislation introduced to allow forced segregation of Aboriginal communities in New South Wales.

⁸⁴'Death roll on Cumeragunja during the time Sister Pratt was in charge of the hospital', Australian Aborigines League to Premier, 20/2/1939, Premier's Department Correspondence File [PDCF], 12/8749 B

⁸⁵'Death roll', 12/8749 B

⁸⁶AAL to Premier, PDCF, 12/8749 B

⁸⁷Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act, 1936, *NSW Statutes*

⁸⁸Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act, 1936

Prompted by the depression and the continuing racism of white country towns, the amended Act extended the definition of those who came under its jurisdiction from 'full-blood and half-caste' to 'any person with an admixture of Aboriginal blood' and made provision for the removal and incarceration of Aboriginal people on stations across New South Wales. The 1936 amendments to the Act saw a far greater number of people defined as Aboriginal than ever before. Peter Read describes how under the new amendments, the 'onus of proof of non-Aboriginality lay on the accused':

Since by definition any fringe-camp could be considered undesirable, it followed that the town authorities had acquired the power to arrest a person on suspicion of being Aboriginal and forcibly remove him or her from a town.⁸⁹

In 1937 Sister Pratt came before a Select Committee of Inquiry on the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board.⁹⁰ The Parliamentary inquiry was initiated as a result of allegations of misconduct by station managers and increasing negative public attention to conditions on Board stations due to pressure from both Aboriginal, humanitarian and feminist lobby groups.⁹¹ Ivy Pratt was the first witness. In her evidence she disclosed that the chronic and inflammatory eye disease, which the Board had used to urge for restrictive amendments, was the result of conditions of poverty, overcrowding and poor sanitation on the stations themselves. She gave convincing evidence of the neglected condition of the stations and pointed out that the station matrons and managers, who were paid together as a married couple, were expected to act together as the school teacher, farm manager, accountant, employment agent and nurse. In the light of an approaching election the controversial and potentially damaging Select Committee Inquiry lapsed without reporting. The evidence of Sister Pratt, along with serious allegations from Aboriginal activists and some feminists was ignored.⁹²

⁸⁹Read, 'A Rape of the Soul', p. 25

⁹⁰*Select Committee on Administration of Aborigines Protection Board, appointed during the session of 1937-38, Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Exhibits*, NSW Legislative Assembly, Sydney, 1938, in Joint Volumes of papers presented to the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly, vol. VIII, NSW Parliament, Sydney, 1940

⁹¹See Jack Horner, *Bill Ferguson: Fighter for Aboriginal Freedom*, J. Horner, Canberra, 1994 (First edition 1974), and Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 1996, pp. 230-231, Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 211-216, Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, p. 127

⁹²Horner, *Bill Ferguson: Goodall, Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 230-231, Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 211-216

The position of non-Aboriginal women employed by the Aborigines Protection Board was complex. In the jobs they were employed to fill, they were seen as having particular roles in 'keeping people contented' as in the case of the 'Home Finder', or showing great 'devotion' to duty, like Ivy Pratt, which over-rode the often exploitative hours and wages they received. At the same time women working within the colonial administration in New South Wales became the subject of particular 'sexualised' concern in public debate at times of political pressure. Images of vulnerable white women working at the colonial 'frontier' between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, were used with expediency during the administrative campaign to increase restrictive amendments to the Aborigines Protection Act in 1936.⁹³ Thus non-Aboriginal female employees of the Aborigines Protection Board played a particular role both in the everyday practice of administration and in the self-representations of the Board at a time of increasing restriction over Aboriginal communities.

Mrs 'Inspector' English

It was at the height of the Board's campaign to introduce the 1936 amendments to the Protection Act, that the Board invited applications for a 'Lady Welfare Officer' to join the limited staff, including the male Inspectors, and the Manager and Matron teams employed at the Boards stations (see chapter four). As in the case of the appointment of the 'Home Finder' in 1912, the Lady Inspector's employment corresponded with an increasing push for legislative power by the Protection Board, and a campaign for increasing restriction over the entire Aboriginal population of New South Wales.

The Board interviewed five women for the new position in early June 1936. Two of the women who applied, Mrs Irene English and Mrs Ella Hiscocks, were already employed as matrons on the Board's stations. In the opinion of the interviewing committee the 'capabilities, personality and experience of aborigines' of Mrs Irene English gave her an advantage over the other applicants and she was offered the job on 3rd June, 1936.⁹⁴ Irene English became known informally, as well as in official records, as Mrs 'Inspector' English.

⁹³ APBM, 3/6/1936, Reel 2792, 4/7117

⁹⁴ APBM, 14/4/1936, 4/7117

The commencing salary for the new 'lady' officer was advertised as two hundred pounds per annum.⁹⁵ In comparison, the matron of Talbragar reserve, employed with her husband in the same year, was entitled to a stipend of only twelve pounds per annum and officer's rations.⁹⁶ The Lady Inspector's salary represented a certain amount of autonomy for a female employee of the Board. As well as being expected, like the 'Home Finder', to visit every female ward employed as a domestic in private homes and country stations, ideally two or three times each year, the Lady Inspector was instructed to visit Aboriginal stations throughout the State and meet with, and report on, all the resident women and children in their homes. Along with her rural visits each year, Mrs English was required to visit Aboriginal homes in the Sydney metropolitan area, principally at Redfern, Waterloo and La Perouse.⁹⁷

In the mid 1930s the Aborigines Protection Board 'managed' over twenty stations, and almost five times as many reserves, covering the extent of the state of New South Wales.⁹⁸ Travelling by car, in sometimes difficult outback conditions was slow and arduous. In any case the Board did not supply a vehicle for the 'lady' Welfare Officer and would only occasionally borrow one on her behalf from the police department in emergency situations.⁹⁹ The 'Lady Inspector' did most of her travel around the state by trains, relying on lifts from station managers to get from train station to Aboriginal station, most often positioned some miles from town.¹⁰⁰

Sent to report on domestic arrangements on Aboriginal stations, the Lady Inspector was fulfilling a role in monitoring Aboriginal home life which was considered an important part of plans for 'mergence' or assimilation. Aboriginal domestic life was frequently depicted in official reports and debate as a particularly 'dangerous' place for girls and women.¹⁰¹ Mr

⁹⁵ APBM, 14/4/1936, 4/7117. This salary was in the highest bracket for female adults in 1936. see 'Minimum Weekly Wage of Female Adult by Industry, Australia 1915-1980', (LAB 143-152), in Wray Vamplew (ed), *Australian Historical Statistics*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, Broadway, New South Wales, 1987, p. 157

⁹⁶ APBM, 1/4/1936, Reel 2792, 1/7126-27

⁹⁷ AWBAR, 1952, p. 3

⁹⁸ AWB, Station Reports and Returns, 1931-39, 4/10743

⁹⁹ APBM, 1/4/1936, Reel 2792, 1/7126-27

¹⁰⁰ APB & AWB 'Inspectors Report', Mrs I English, various, 1939-44, 4/110745

¹⁰¹ see APB Annual Reports through-out the 1911-38 period, Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', pp. 85-92, Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, p. 131

Harkness, a Board member, described what he saw as the dangers of Aboriginal women returning home after apprenticeship, to the 1937 conference:

These girls reach quite a high standard. Unfortunately, of course, if they go back to the old surroundings, they revert to the old habits, and particularly to the lower moral standard, and become mothers of illegitimate children early in life. It is not for this generation that we must work, it is for the next generation.¹⁰²

The permanent removal of Aboriginal women from their homes and families was key to the emergence, and later assimilation policy of the Board. Mr Harkness made the position of the Aborigines Protection Board clear in his discussion at the 1937 conference:

I have taken a girl into domestic service. She is intelligent, industrious and clean and submits to reasonable discipline. I do not think that if she was to go back to her station she would revert to the old standards, but of course one never knows. I am sure that if we can put into operation some improved technique in the handling of these people we shall be able to alter their attitude to life, and make it possible for them to be assimilated into the community, and become good citizens.¹⁰³

Mrs 'Inspector' English was part of what the Board saw as its 'improved technique' to encourage 'voluntary assimilation'. The Lady Inspector was meant to represent the rational, enlightened, caring side of the administration amidst poverty and endemic ill-health on the Board stations. Her role coincided with the continuing emphasis placed on managing and controlling Aboriginal girls and women. A main feature of the Lady Inspectors' work was to fill out Board inspection reports and send them back from the field, to the Sydney headquarters. These inspection reports had a special focus on Aboriginal women and young girls, including sections on the 'Training of Adolescent Girls and Young Women', 'Employment for Girls and Women', 'Pre-natal and ante-natal Instruction', 'Furniture and Cooking Utensils', and even a special sub-section to report on the 'Women's Sewing Circle'.¹⁰⁴ Mrs English was instructed to report on the capacity of Aboriginal women to

¹⁰²Mr Harkness, *Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference*, p. 14

¹⁰³*Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference*, p. 14

¹⁰⁴'Inspection of Aboriginal Station, 'Cowra', (for example) Report by Mrs English, 15 March, 1946, APB Station Reports and Returns, 4/10743, pp. 1-4

'absorb' information about domestic and health matters, and on the pedagogic function of the Board's administration.¹⁰⁵ In her reports she was also required to judge Aboriginal women on their willingness to co-operate with other personnel. On a visit to the Cowra station in 1943 she reported:

I was fortunate in that my visit coincided with that of the Clinic Sister and I was very gratified at the interest displayed by the women residents in her visit and the eager manner in which they absorbed her instruction and advice.¹⁰⁶

In her reports the Lady Inspector also kept an eye on other female employees of the Board:

In regard to the Matron, Mrs Foster, I found her to be a quiet unassuming woman. Anyone not conversant with the atmosphere of an Aboriginal station, and not knowing the machinery necessary to the successful conducting of same, might be deceived regarding this officer. In reality she is, though, without ostentation or display of any kind, a driving force, who without it being apparent to them, is urging her charges on in the way of advancement, and playing on all that is best in their natures for the harmony and successful conduct of the station.¹⁰⁷

Over the years of the Lady Inspector's employment, which extended into the 1940s and 1950s, there was an increasing bureaucratisation of the administration (see chapter four). For Mrs Inspector English this meant increasing detail about Aboriginal women's lives was recorded and submitted each week to the Sydney based Board. By the 1940s the Lady Inspector's reports had an increasing range of categories of information to ascertain the good behaviour, (or other-wise), of Aboriginal women resident on the stations and reserves. The reports began to include sections which detailed numerically the female population, divided into age groups and then an extensive series of headings on which each woman was judged:

¹⁰⁵'Inspectors Report', APB, A 1540, November, 1943, pp. 1-4

¹⁰⁶'Inspection of the Aboriginal Station, Cowra', Station Reports and Returns, APB, 15/3/46

¹⁰⁷'Inspection of the Aboriginal Station, Cowra', p. 2

- Care of Homes: Outstanding Homes (Good) and Outstanding Homes (Unsatisfactory), General Tidiness and Cleanliness, Efforts made for improving and beautifying Homes, Degree of Proficiency in Cooking, Extent to which Cooking Utensils and Furniture exist.
- Sleeping Accommodation: Observations with special reference to necessity for separating sexes, Cleanliness of Beds and Bedding
- Training of Adolescent Girls and Young Women: Degree of Achievement as a result of Instruction, Efficiency and Enthusiasm of Matron.
- Employment of Adolescent Girls and Unmarried Young Women: Names of those eligible who refuse employment
- Recreational Activities: Arrangements for Organised Recreation for Girls and Young Women.¹⁰⁸

At the stations as well as inspecting homes, the Lady Inspector was instructed to 'visit with' mothers whose children had been removed and, 'impress upon her, her responsibility regarding her child'.¹⁰⁹ Thus Mrs Inspector English, in her almost daily face-to-face meetings with station residents and young female 'apprentices', continued the work, begun by the 'Home Finder', of domesticating the public image of the removal and apprenticeship policies of the Board. The internalisation of wrong-doing on the part of Aboriginal parents whose children were removed was, in many cases, profound:

I remember my Aunty, it was her daughter that got taken. She used to carry these letters around with her. They were reference letters from the White fellas in town. The butcher, the chemist, people like that. Those letters said that she was a good respectable woman... She judged herself and she felt the community judged her for letting the welfare get her child. I think the letters from the White fellas made her feel that she wasn't a such bad mother, that even though she had allowed her daughter to be taken by the welfare, she was still a good person. She carried those letters with her, folded up, as proof until the day she died.¹¹⁰

The work of Mrs Inspector English reinforced the Board's idea that Aboriginal parental neglect was responsible for the removal of children. In reality there was very little an Aboriginal parent could do, in terms of actual behaviour, to stop the removal of their

¹⁰⁸APB, Inspectors Report, A 1540, Nov 1943, see over for illustration

¹⁰⁹AWBM, agenda item 24, 1/1/ 1945

¹¹⁰Interview, 13/10/94, name withheld, see also Link Up & Wilson, *In the Best Interests*, p. 85

children. Statistically, as Heather Goodall argues, 'age, sex and proximity to the Board Inspector's routes of travel were the only reliable predictors of removal'.¹¹¹ Mrs English's role within the administration formed a crucial part of the public face of the Board. The Lady Inspector represented the maternal, tutelary arm of an administration that held restrictive and authoritarian powers over the Aboriginal population of New South Wales. In her own efforts to provide for the welfare of her charges in small ways Mrs English attempted to soften the practices associated with child removal and indenture.¹¹² Two years after she was first employed as the Lady Inspector, for example, Irene English put in a request to the Board for a five pound allowance to purchase Christmas presents for girls in service and in the Board's institutions. Yet by ameliorating in a small way the alienation of the Board's treatment of Aboriginal children, she helped to represent its 'civilising' mission in the midst of a station 'concentration' policy and a systematic child removal scheme.

Women 'Protectors'?

Fiona Paisley has shown that at the end of the 1930s the inclusion of white women as 'Protectors' for Aboriginal people was a basic demand made repeatedly by such groups as the Women's Service Guild, the Federation of Women Voters and other feminist organisations of the inter-war years in Australia.¹¹³ At the 1937 conference, discussed in the previous chapter, the Chief Secretary of the Northern Territory, Mr Carrodus, amongst others, argued against recommendations for a female 'Protector'

We are frequently being requested, chiefly by women's organisations, to appoint women protectors... Such appointment would involve the appointment of protectors for the women protectors. We do not think that the time has yet arrived for the appointment of women protectors.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹'Assimilation Begins in the Home', p. 82, see also Link-Up & Wilson, *In the Best Interest*, 1997, Read, *The Stolen Generation*

¹¹² APB minutes, Reel 2724, 12/2/1938

¹¹³Paisley, "Don't tell England!", pp.139-152, and for a detailed history, 'Ideas have Wings'

¹¹⁴*Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities, held at Canberra, 21st to 23rd April, 1937, 12/8749 A, p. 32*

Against opposition from the majority of men who controlled the administration of Aboriginal affairs, feminist organisations argued that women had a particular professional role to play in the area. Aware of the gendered aspects of 'protective' Aboriginal legislation, feminist organisations at this time were noting that 'protection' was more often directed at women than men.¹¹⁵ Underlying this feminist campaign of the late 1930s was a belief in the moral authority of white women's supervision of Aboriginal women.¹¹⁶ Their campaign relied on ideas about the particular role that women could play in the public arena, based on assumptions about women's nurturing capacities.¹¹⁷

In their campaign for white women 'protectors' of Aborigines, middle-class feminist organisations at this time turned their attention predominantly to the 'frontier'¹¹⁸. The majority of feminist campaigners shared the assumption, with other humanitarian organisations active at that time, that the 'real' Aboriginal population was to be found largely in the northern, central and western Australian outback.¹¹⁹ Campaigns for women protectors and for a woman 'expert' on the Board undertaken by some middle-class, city-based feminist organisations overlooked the non-Aboriginal women who were already working, in different capacities, within the Aboriginal administration throughout New South Wales. On the occasions when New South Wales feminists did pay attention to things closer to home, the focus of their struggles with the Sydney-based administration was getting an 'expert' woman elected as a member of the re-constituted Welfare Board.¹²⁰

However, female employees of the Board such as Sister Ivy Pratt, the 'Home Finder', station Matrons (discussed in chapter four) and the Lady Inspector played an important role in filling the gap between the Protection Board's self representation as an enlightened civilising force and what Gill Cowlshaw calls the 'savage effects' of the Board's regime.¹²¹ Women employed by the Board participated both, in Stoler's words, as 'subordinates of

¹¹⁵Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', p. 169

¹¹⁶Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', p. 170

¹¹⁷Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: Knapman, White Women in Fiji*, Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making Ware, 'The White Woman's Burden? Race and Gender in Historical Memory'*, *Beyond the Pale* .pp. 3-45, Stoler, 'Making Empire respectable', Strobel, *European Women*

¹¹⁸Fiona Paisley, 'No Back Streets in the Bush': 1920s & 1930s Pro-Aboriginal White Women's Activism and the Trans-Australia Railway', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 12, no. 25, 1997, pp. 119-137

¹¹⁹Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', p. 23

¹²⁰Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 235-251, Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, p. 235

¹²¹Pers Comm. Gill Cowlshaw, 11/1999

colonial hierarchies' and as 'active agents of imperial culture' in their own right.¹²² Non-Aboriginal women employed by the Board were not passive in this process. They brought to their work their limited perceptions of Aboriginal culture and identity, and their own internalised ideas of their feminine role and authority over the domestic realm of Aboriginal women's (and young girls) lives. The interaction of ideas about the nature of women, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, influenced the employment of non-Aboriginal women by the Board from within a few years of its first operation.

End of the Aboriginal Protection Board, 1939

Despite the failure of the Select Committee, attended by Sister Pratt in 1937, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal humanitarian and activist individuals continued to lobby for the abolition of the Board and an Aboriginal majority on any continuing agency.¹²³ Struggles over the control of Aboriginal women by the all male, white board, were a significant locus of anti-Board campaigning in the late 1930s. In 1939, for example, Aboriginal campaigners made specific attempts to reduce the Board's control over young Aboriginal women. Long-term Aboriginal activist William Ferguson requested the names and locations of all 'apprentices' Trust Accounts held by the Board but was refused.¹²⁴ Other requests for permission to write to girls in service and, later, for a Christian organisation called the Aborigines Uplift Society to take over the finding of employment for Aboriginal girls around the Cumeragunja area, on the border of New South Wales and Victoria, were similarly refused.¹²⁵ A request by the Aborigines Missionary Society at Wauchope, in rural New South Wales, to communicate with Aboriginal female apprentices was also denied.¹²⁶ In March 1941, the National Missionary Council of Australia made a representation to the Chief Secretary's Department suggesting the appointment of Honorary Lady Welfare officers from their ranks.¹²⁷ The offer was refused by the Chairman of the Board, citing

¹²²Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable', p. 634

¹²³Horner, *Bill Ferguson: Goodall, Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 173-247, Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 211-216

¹²⁴AWBM, 11/2/39, 4/8544-48

¹²⁵AWBM, 10/5/39, 4/8544-48

¹²⁶AWBM, 12/6/39, 4/8544-48

¹²⁷AWBM, 3/1941, 4/8544-48

changes to the apprenticeship system since the Public Service Board's 1940 Report as the reason (see following chapter).¹²⁸

Internally the Aborigines Protection Board was in bad shape by 1937. Minute books show on a number of occasions only three of the nine members attended, making meetings non-quorate.¹²⁹ A Public Service Board Inquiry, called to look into the Board in 1938, had more effect on changing the administration than the earlier Committee inquiry. The outcome of the Public Service Inquiry was another amendment to the Aborigines Protection Act and a new name for the Board, the Aborigines Welfare Board (see following chapter). By 1937 in New South Wales the overwhelming focus on removing young Aboriginal girls from their families had shifted from its 1921 high. While the removal policies shifted from their earlier focus on girls, the following chapter considers some of the ideological, political and economic factors which contributed to the continued interest in Aboriginal women and girls as the major focus of assimilation policy and practice, during the time of the Aborigines Welfare Board. The following chapters follow the gendered ramifications of directions taken by the re-named administration during a changed set of war and post-war conditions.

¹²⁸AWBM, 2/2/41, 4/8544-48

¹²⁹see APB Minute Books, 1929-46, Reel 2792, 4/8544 (444), also AWB Special Bundles, letter from J. Mackay esq., Chairman of APB to Commissioner of Police, 5/11/35, 4/8544

CHAPTER THREE

The Birth Of The Aborigines Welfare Board: 'Cultural' Assimilation and Gender, 1940-1950s

In 1939, the Aborigines Protection Board, which had overseen the systematic removal of pre-pubescent Aboriginal girls since 1909, became the Aborigines Welfare Board. Amidst Aboriginal-led lobbying, supported by some feminist and humanitarian organisations, the Aborigines Protection Board was disbanded and a Public Service Board Report set out the new policy and administrative guidelines for the re-named Aborigines Welfare Board.¹ To the disillusionment of opponents of the Aborigines Protection Board, who had lobbied for the abolition of the Board altogether and an Aboriginal majority on any continuing agency, the recommendations of the Public Service Board report were more concerned with establishing, what Barry Morris calls a 'comprehensive custodianship' of Aborigines by introducing more effective bureaucratic procedures, than with ending the draconian powers of the previous administration.²

The Public Service Board report focused on the failings of the Aborigines Protection Board to effectively administer its policy, rather than criticising the nature of the policy itself.³ The report argued there was 'no better policy than the present, viz., the aggregation on stations, under close supervision, of those Aborigines who are not yet fitted to be assimilated into the general community'.⁴ According to this report, the concentration of Aboriginal people on stations and reserves was a necessary stage in the training of people for assimilation. The report signaled a new emphasis on the idea that systematic 'training' of all Aboriginal people, not just children, was the answer to the 'Aboriginal problem'.⁵ The report ignored the repeated attempts of town councils to remove Aboriginal people from white towns, and the restrictive powers held by the Aborigines Protection Act (discussed in

¹ *Aborigines Protection - Report and Recommendations of the Public Service Board of New South Wales, 1938*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1940, Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, pp. 125-128, Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 264-269. For a full history of campaigns against the Aborigines Protection Board see Jack Horner, *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom*, Australian and New Zealand Book company, Sydney, 1974, Jack Horner, 'Pearl Gibbs: A Biographical Tribute', *Aboriginal History*, 1983, 7:1, p. 10

² See Morris, *Domesticating Resistance* p. 127

³ *Aborigines Protection*, p. 19

⁴ *Aborigines Protection*, p. 20

⁵ *Aborigines Protection*, p. 21, Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, pp. 125-157, Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 264-269

previous chapter) and focused instead on how the administration could best control, monitor and 'train' individual Aboriginal people to ensure their assimilation into the white community.

The Public Service Board report stipulated a 'more detailed administration and an increase in staff to enact comprehensive techniques of surveillance'.⁶ In answering criticisms of Board staff and conditions which had been made by opponents of the Aborigines Protection Board during the 1937 Select Inquiry, the report stressed the need for more detailed methods of surveillance of both Welfare Board staff *and* Aboriginal people. The overriding approach set out for the new administration was one of bureaucratic standardisation.⁷ Under the new Board for example, monthly reports that station managers had filled in under the Aborigines Protection Board became weekly reports. Managers were instructed to fill out a daily diary detailing the work they did in each hour of their working day. Station matrons, as well as the 'Lady Inspector', were required to fill in a weekly report focusing specifically on Aboriginal women - their house-work and domestic attitudes - and on adolescents and children. Thus, there was a close relationship between increasing attempts to make the administration more efficient and centralised, and increasing attempts at surveillance of the Aboriginal population. Barry Morris argues, that following the bureaucratic logic of the Public Service Board report, the establishment of a more 'efficient and effective chain of command' was seen as an 'initial and inevitable step in the transformation of existing station residents into more disciplined and useful communities'.⁸

Representations of white woman were used, as they had been during the 1936 amendments to the Aborigines Protection Act (see previous chapter), to argue for both closer surveillance of Aborigines, and more detailed techniques of obtaining biographical knowledge of the 'inmates' on Aboriginal stations and in the Homes. A few months after the establishment of the Aborigines Welfare Board one of the station matrons was reported by the Board to have contracted a 'serious pulmonary illness' whilst employed at the Menindee Aboriginal station.⁹ The Aborigines Welfare Board used this example in its push for a new policy of introducing medical examinations and certificates for all Aboriginal girls

⁶*Aborigines Protection*, p. 14

⁷*ibid*, p. 14

⁸Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, p. 128

⁹AWB Minutes, item 8, Wednesday 26th June, 1940, 4/8544

and boys before they were admitted to institutions or sent out to employment 'with a view to ensuring they were free from infectious and contagious diseases'.¹⁰ In this instance additional ways of detailing and cataloguing information about Aboriginal children were linked with attempts to protect vulnerable white women from apparently contagious pulmonary disease.

Legislation to constitute the Aborigines Welfare Board was brought before Parliament in 1940.¹¹ All of the repressive clauses were retained from the Aborigines Protection Act, in particular the clauses which had been introduced in 1936, giving the Board powers to confine anyone identified as Aboriginal on stations and reserves, and the power to incarcerate children in the Board's Homes. The objective of Assimilation was formally added to the Aborigines Welfare Board's annual report in the same year. This marked the beginning of the repeated use of the word 'assimilation' in Board minutes, circulars, official correspondence and annual reports. 'Assimilation' replaced the more common use of the word 'mergence' which had been used in Board reports and correspondence throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The change from 'merge' to 'assimilate' marked a new era of bureaucratic discourse, which contrasted with the ongoing segregation and restriction of Aboriginal communities in New South Wales on severely under-resourced reserves and stations.

As argued in chapter one, the 1937 conference represented a national endorsement of the biological approach to assimilation, supported most strongly by Cook from the Northern Territory and Neville from Western Australia, and confirmed in Tindale's 1938/9 expedition. The development of a public discourse of assimilation as the answer to the Aboriginal problem took two inter-related forms in Australia, one biological and the other cultural/social. This present chapter traces the change from a focus on biological assimilation to a stress on the cultural or behavioural aspects of assimilation under the administration of the Aborigines Welfare Board. The chapter poses the question: if Aboriginal women were seen to play a central role in biological solutions to the 'Aboriginal problem', described in the opening chapters, how did women and gender manifest in the administrative and anthropological discourse of cultural assimilation, administered by the Aborigines Welfare Board? This chapter gives an outline of the ways in which ideas about

¹⁰AWB Minutes, item 2, 9th July 1940, Reel 2792, 4/8544

¹¹Amendment to the Aborigines Protection Act 1940 (12), 3 (b)

Aboriginal women, in anthropological and administrative discourse played a central role in the implementation of cultural assimilation. It considers the inter-relationship with ideological and economic imperatives that contributed to the role of non-Aboriginal women at the time of the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board, during, and after, World War Two. This leads to the following chapter which considers some of the different ways non-Aboriginal women took part in the modernising War and post-War bureaucracy of the Aborigines Welfare Board.

The Aborigines Welfare Board

The Aborigines Welfare Board, responsible for administering the official policy of cultural assimilation in New South Wales ran from 1940 to 1969 and marked a period of increased bureaucratic control over Aboriginal communities. The Welfare Board itself consisted initially of eleven white men. The Protection Act decreed that the appointed members should include a member of the police force of or above the rank of inspector, an officer of the Department of Public Health, an officer of the Department of Public Instruction, an expert in agriculture and an expert in anthropology or sociology. To decide on policy and make rulings that would affect the day to day lives of Aboriginal people this Board, made up of male, non-Aboriginal bureaucrats, met for two hours each month in a central office in Bridge Street, Sydney. One of the changes, from Protection to Welfare, was the break in the nexus between the Board's Chair and the Police force.¹² The Aboriginal Protection Board had always had a Senior police officer as its Chair. The Chairman of the Welfare Board was to be the Under-secretary of the Chief Secretary's Department. The administration's reliance on the New South Wales Police to act on their behalf to remove children, and enforce Board regulations continued, but the new government Chair reflected the increased bureaucratization of the Board and its intention to focus on the 'training' of Aboriginal people to assimilate into white society.

Under the Aborigines Protection Board, staff had been employed as ministerial employees under the direction of the Board. With the Aborigines Welfare Board, the superintendent and other employees were now subject to the provisions of the Public Service Act

¹²For further information on the factors leading to this change in Chair and the different interest groups on the Board see, Goodall, 'An Intelligent Parasite', p. 7-8

(1902).¹³ This formalised staff employment and began the long-standing process of mainstreaming the Board within pre-existing structures of administration. The re-structured Board, appointed to implement a revised policy of assimilation following amendments to the Aborigines Protection Act in May 1940, included some new members and staff, but all of the restrictive regulations of the Aborigines Protection Board remained unchanged.¹⁴ The superintendent of the Aborigines Welfare Board, Mr Alfred Lipscombe was the ex-superintendent of Dr Barnardo's Homes and the author of *Breeding and Management of Livestock*.¹⁵ Lipscombe sought to tighten up the 'apprenticeship' system, advocating an Employers' Card, a re-revised Inspector's Report Cards and a district registration of Wards.¹⁶ In his 1940 recommendations the new superintendent argued that in future, no boys should be sent to employment as house boys and kitchen boys unless under special circumstances.¹⁷ Such a recommendation formalised a process of gendered removal that made young Aboriginal girls more likely to be the targets of urban 'mergence' (see chapter six).

The Welfare Board's powers were spelt out in the Aborigines Protection Act, a twenty-five page document listing the Board's extensive methods of regulation of the Aboriginal population. These powers included child removal and the indenture of these children as wards, the payment of any wages earned by these wards to the Board, power to approve of persons applying for the custody of wards, powers to decide who could enter and leave Aboriginal reserves and stations, powers of inspection and policing of all reserves, authority to claim ownership of any building built on any reserve or station, and the right to apportion and distribute any money voted by Parliament in the form of rations for Aboriginal people in New South Wales.¹⁸

¹³ AWB Annual Report, 1940, p. 1, *Public Service Act*, section a, *NSW Statutes*

¹⁴ Aborigines Protection (Amending) Act, 1940 (12), 3 (b)

¹⁵ Clipping, 'Aboriginal Welfare: Superintendent Appointed', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9/2/39, PDCF (NSW) A38 931, APB Minutes 8/3/39, 4/8544-48

¹⁶ AWB Minutes, 'Apprenticeship of Aborigines. Recommendations in relation to Proposal to Revise the System', 1/1940, p. 52, 4/8544

¹⁷ AWB Minutes, 'Apprenticeship of Aborigines', 1940, p. 52

¹⁸ Aborigines Protection Act, 1940, *NSW Statutes*

Despite Aboriginal and feminist lobbying, no provision for either an Aboriginal or female representative was made on the re-structured Board.¹⁹ However under continuing pressure from Aboriginal organisations, particularly the Aborigines Progressive Association, in 1943 the Aborigines Protection Act was amended to allow for the election of one 'full-blood' and one 'half-caste' Aboriginal to become members of the Board. From eleven 'half-caste' candidates, and two 'full-bloods', William Ferguson and Walter Page were elected to the Board by a postal vote in August, 1944.²⁰ There were no women on the Protection Board, and later the Welfare Board, until 1954 when Pearl Gibbs, an Aboriginal activist and ex-domestic servant (see chapter five) was elected for a three year term succeeding Herbert Groves. She was the only woman to sit on the Board in its twenty-nine years of administration.²¹

Professor Elkin, the Welfare Board and 'Wodjins'

One of the men who had the greatest influence over the Aborigines Welfare Board was Professor Elkin from the Anthropology department of Sydney University. Elkin was the Vice-Chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board from its reconstitution in 1940 until its dissolution in 1969. His appointment to the Board and his strong influence whilst on it, marked a significant intervention of anthropological discourse in the administration of the Board. As the Board's Vice-Chairman throughout the 1940s and 1950s Elkin promoted assimilation as a break with the old policy of 'protection', partly as a way for him to secure himself, and the 'science' of anthropology, a place within the administration.²² He took credit as the architect of assimilation in New South Wales, arguing that other states had followed his lead: 'in the post-war years the concept was adopted by other states and the commonwealth and is now official policy everywhere'.²³

¹⁹ Aborigines Protection Act, 1940, 4 (2)Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 235-250, Horner, *Bill Ferguson*, pp. 129-131

²⁰ Horner, *Bill Ferguson*, pp. 127-128

²¹ Kevin Gilbert, Heather Goodall & Jack Horner, 'Three Tributes to Pearl Gibbs (1901-1983), in *Aboriginal History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1983, pp. 5-20

²² Elkin Papers, Unpublished paper 'Facts and Principles. Aboriginal Policy', Series 17, item 11, Sydney University Archive, see Goodall, 'An Intelligent Parasite: A. P. Elkin and White Perceptions of the History of Aboriginal People in New South Wales', *Australian Historical Association Conference Papers*, 1982, p. 6

²³ Elkin Papers, 'Assimilation and the work of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs', (n.d c. 1948), series 17, item 39

Elkin, an ordained Anglican clergyman had completed a library based Masters thesis on the religion of the Australian Aborigine in the early 1920s. His views on Aborigines at the start of his career in the 1920s were strongly influenced by biological evolutionary paradigms, discussed in chapter one, which viewed Aboriginal people and their culture as an earlier stage of mankind. Elkin's doctorate in anthropology, carried out in London and based solely on library sources, was heavily influenced by anatomical measures of race, including the 'science' of skull measuring. After the completion of his London studies, Elkin returned to Australia and undertook his first field work in 1927 and 1928, studying social organisation, totemism, and ritual in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Elkin, a proselytist for his new religion of anthropology, was appointed to the post of lecturer in charge and then Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University in 1932 after the first incumbent of the Sydney chair, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, resigned in December 1930.²⁴ As the only Professor of Anthropology in Australia, at the time his prolific writing and public speaking strongly influenced official and popular perceptions of Aborigines from the 1930s until the 1960s. During his Professorship, argues Tigger Wise, he was considered widely as, 'Australia's official expert and spokesman' on all 'Aboriginal matters'.²⁵

In a 1929 article 'The Practical Value of Anthropology' Elkin gave tentative support to a theory of miscegenation - as a route to cultural adaptation - suggesting that the observed greater 'adaptability of mixed bloods' had a biological basis.²⁶ In a 1932 article, 'Cultural and Racial clash in Australia', he argued that interbreeding with Caucasians improved the capacity for civilisation, but it was still an open question whether the 'mixed blood' were 'biologically capable of playing an average part in a civilised society'.²⁷

We must face the physiological fact that the aborigine is, generally speaking, endowed with a comparatively small size of brain, the average capacity of which is twenty per cent less than ours. Now this implies a handicap in the brain machinery.²⁸

²⁴Tigger Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist: A Life of A. P. Elkin*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985

²⁵Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p. 119

²⁶Elkin, 'Cultural and Racial Clash in Australia', *Morpeth Review*, 1929, vol. 1, no. 7, pp. 23-33

²⁷Elkin, 'Cultural and Racial Clash in Australia', p. 38

²⁸Elkin, 'Cultural and Racial clash in Australia', p. 38

The significance of racial inheritance, especially brain size, remained a continuing theme in his writings throughout the 1930s. However in his later work, and with the discrediting of racial science during the Nazi regime (see below) Elkin began to introduce ideas of cultural as well as biological determinants to his understanding Aboriginal people in Australia. In formulating his new approach Elkin circulated a 'Fifty-four Point Questionnaire' around Australia amongst non-Aborigines who worked with Aborigines on government or mission stations seeking to ascertain: 'Whether it is possible for half castes to become part of our social and economic order'.²⁹ Indicating the influence of ideas about Aboriginal women's sexuality and its integral place in plans for the Aboriginal population, one of Elkin's questions was: '[H]ave you any evidence that half caste females are of looser morality than full bloods?'³⁰

In his popular 1938 book, *The Australian Aborigine: How to Understand them* Elkin gave increasing prominence to the cultural and economic aspects, rather than racial, of what he assumed was Aboriginal 'primitivity':

The nomadic aspect of Aboriginal life is not biologically founded, but is culturally, in short economically determined. If the means of gaining a livelihood be changed then the characteristics of nomadism will be changed.³¹

At this time Elkin was developing what he called a 'positive policy' for the future of Aboriginal Australians centred on the elevation of 'primitive nomads' to the status of 'civilisation'.³² Elkin promoted his vision of a transformation from an Indigenous to a Western economic, religious and social order - in which only the trapping of traditional art, ceremony and ritual would be retained. His insistence on their retention, suggests Andrew Markus, derived not so much from a desire to preserve the exotic as from lingering notions of the connection between racial and cultural attributes.³³ Elkin characterised Aboriginal people as lost and cut adrift from their indigenous culture, struggling to make it into the world of civilisation. This view, which he expounded in his prolific social anthropological

²⁹Questionnaire and responses to questionnaire. Elkin Archive box 72, items 1/12/200

³⁰Questionnaire', item 1/12/201

³¹Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1938, p.112

³²Wise, *The Self-made Anthropologist*, p. 190

³³Markus, *Governing Savages*, p. 145

literature, was symptomatic of the marked tendency to reify the concept of culture in much the same way as the concept of race had earlier been reified.³⁴

During Elkin's Professorship at Sydney University, in the 1940s to the late 1950s, a number of anthropological studies were under-taken which assessed Aboriginality in New South Wales in terms of its 'distance' from traditional Aboriginal culture. 'Part' Aborigines were seen as a transition stage in the path to full assimilation and anthropological work was carried out amongst Aboriginal people in New South Wales who were believed to have 'lost' their culture or were 'between' two cultures.³⁵ The dominant construction of Aboriginality in these studies stressed Aboriginal 'assimilability' into the white society.³⁶ Many anthropological studies conducted under Elkin's supervision (discussed below) assumed that the 'de-tribalisation' of New South Wales Aboriginal people constituted a one-way process of cultural assimilation. Such a representation was consistent with the move towards pedagogic strategies of surveillance and training taken by the Aborigines Welfare Board. Much of this work was explicitly carried out to establish the role of anthropology in implementing the policy of assimilation of 'part' or 'half-caste' Aborigines to the dominant Anglo norms and values.

'Wodjins'

A significant feature of Elkin's professorship was the number of white women he supervised as post-graduate anthropology students, and the use he made of these women's findings in his efforts to play an influential role in the administration of Aborigines in New South Wales.³⁷ Caroline Kelly, for example, one of Elkin's first graduate students went into the field in New South Wales before Elkin, and recorded information about five New South Wales South Coast Aboriginal communities. Elkin would later use Kelly's findings in his successful lobbying for the inclusion of anthropology in the New South Wales

³⁴Elkin was not alone in this opinion, for discussion of the notion of culture in early twentieth century anthropology, see for e.g., Beckett (ed) *Past and Present: Clifford, The Predicament of Culture*

³⁵Johanna Kijas, 'An 'unfashionable concern with the past': The Historical Anthropology of Diane Barwick', MA thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1993, p. 43

³⁶Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, p. 139

³⁷For discussion of the role of women and anthropology in Australia generally see Marie Lepervanche, 'Women, Men and Anthropology', in Julie Marcus (ed) *First in their Field*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Portland, 1993, pp. 1-14

administration.³⁸ During the 1940s and 1950s a significant number of ethnographies on New South Wales Aborigines were produced by these female post-graduate students supervised by Elkin.³⁹ Several factors contributed to this relatively high proportion of women in anthropology at that time. The number of men away during World War Two had a wide-spread impact on the professions generally in Australia. In addition the more far flung, exotic location were considered the domain of male anthropologists. Johanna Kijas argues that the relatively low status in the discipline, of work amongst what were termed 'mixed-bloods', was a contributing factor in the larger proportion of female students than males working in this area at that time.⁴⁰ Commenting on the number of female students supervised by Elkin, Tigger Wise suggests, 'male or female made no difference to him, if anything he preferred women, in their gratitude they were easier to dominate'.⁴¹ These factors, coupled with a prevailing notion in anthropology, that female anthropologists were better suited to studying female Aborigines, produced a large amount of information about Aboriginal women's everyday lives, identities and beliefs in New South Wales during the official period of Assimilation.

These first 'applied assimilation' studies placed significant emphasis on gender and the place of Aboriginal women in effecting assimilation. The works of Marie Reay, Grace Stiltington and Ruth Fink, for example, on 'aborigines of mixed descent' in New South Wales, written in the 1940s and 1950s under Elkin's supervision, are a significant source of information on the anthropological focus on Aboriginal women as the 'answer' to the perceived 'problem' of

³⁸For discussion of Kelly's findings and the administrative plans drawn up on the basis of them see Goodall, 'An Intelligent Parasite', pp. 11-13

³⁹Marie Reay, 'Mixed-Blood Marriage in North-Western, Marie Reay and Grace Stiltington, 'Class Status in a Mixed-blood Community, Moree, NSW', *Oceania: A Journal Devoted to the Study of the Native Peoples of Australia, New Guinea, and the Islands of the Pacific*, 18, 1948, pp.179-207, Ruth Fink, 'The Caste-Barrier: An Obstacle to the Assimilation of Part-Aborigines in North-west NSW', *Oceania*, 28, 1957, pp. 100-110, Ruth Fink, 'Social Stratification - A Sequel to the Assimilation Process in a Part-Aboriginal Community in N.S.W.', MA Thesis, University of Sydney, 1955, Marie Reay, 'A Half-Caste Aboriginal Community in North West New South Wales', *Oceania*, 15, 1945, pp. 296-323, Marie Reay, 'Native Thought in New South Wales', *Oceania*. vol. 20, no. 2, December, 1949, pp. 90-117, Marie Reay, 'Mixed Blood Marriage in North West New South Wales: A Survey of the Marital Conditions of 264 Aboriginal and Mixed-Blood, Women', *Oceania*, 22, 1951, pp. 116-129, Marie Reay, 'Aboriginal and White Australian Family Structure: An Enquiry into Assimilation Trends', *The Sociological Review*, 11, 1963, pp. 19-47, M. Reay, 'The Social Position of Women', in Shiels, (ed), *Australian Aboriginal Studies: A Symposium of Papers Presented at the 1961 Research Conference*, Melbourne, 1963, p. 326, Pamela Nixon, 'The Integration of Half Caste Aborigines at La Perouse', 1948 Masters Thesis, University of Sydney. Post graduate students under Elkin included Phyllis Kaberry, Camilla Wedgewood, Olive Pink, Caroline Kelly, Marie Reay, Ruth Fink, Jean Craig, Florence Harding, Mona Ravenscroft

⁴⁰Kijas, 'An Unfashionable Concern', p. 38

⁴¹Wise, *The Self-made Anthropologist*, p. 194

Aboriginality in New South Wales during the 1940s and 1950s.⁴² In 1948, a co-authored essay by Marie Reay and Grace Stiltington entitled 'Class and Status in a Mixed-Blood Community (Moree, N.S.W.),'⁴³ sought to map the social contours of Aboriginal life in a rural town in north west New South Wales, in order to discuss how successfully the Aboriginal community was adopting white attitudes towards money, work and family.

'Mixed-blood' people, as they were referred to in this study, were grouped by the authors into different local groupings and social classes. Echoing Elkin's preoccupation with Aboriginal 'attempts' at civilisation the five hundred people identified as 'aboriginal mixed-bloods' in Moree were divided into categories, in Reay and Stiltington's study, representing different 'stages of transition,' different levels of civilisation', and different degrees of learning European customs and manners.⁴⁴ This analysis relied on a teleological notion of human cultural development and represented 'mixed-blood' Aboriginal culture as something Aborigines were attempting to learn from whites. It echoed Elkin's widely accepted concept of the 'intelligent parasitism' which he applied to Aborigines who 'attempted' to live equally with whites. Individual attitudes were stressed in Reay and Stiltington's analysis; Aboriginal women's particular role in the process of assimilation was a main feature of their analysis. They argued that Aboriginal women, particularly those from what they called the 'upper class' were more status and class conscious than Aboriginal men, and keenly aspired to be like white women.⁴⁵ Whether seeking to work as domestics in white homes in town in order to overhear white family gossip and to emulate white home life, or reading popular romantic novels to find out how to love like white women, Aboriginal women were depicted to be in thrall of white culture:

The social status of the employer is more important to upper class mixed-blood women than it is to men. High status in the employer gives a job added gossip-value for upper class mixed-blood women. They are interested to observe all aspects of home-making. They discuss the furnishings

⁴²Ruth Fink, 'Social Stratification', Fink, 'The Caste-Barrier', Marie Reay, 'A Half-Caste Aboriginal Community', Reay, 'Native Thought in New South Wales', Reay, 'Mixed Blood Marriage', Reay, 'Aboriginal and White Australian Family Structure', Reay & Stiltington, 'Class and Status', Reay, 'The Social Position of Women', in Shiels, (ed), *Australian Aboriginal Studies: A Symposium of Papers Presented at the 1961 Research Conference*, Melbourne, 1963, p. 326

⁴³*Oceania*, vol.18, no. 3, 1948, pp. 180-207

⁴⁴'Class & Status', p. 180

⁴⁵'Class & Status', p. 195

of their employers' homes, as well as their employers' dress, manners and behaviour, as these are observed in the family situation and in the presence of visitors.⁴⁶

Reay and Stiltington concluded that it was women who were most instrumental in establishing and maintaining class standards, which

operate most strongly in the specific spheres of women, for example home-making and the care of children. The frequent absence of many mixed-blood men of all classes from their homes when they are working, and the matriloal bias this circumstance imposes, contribute towards the woman determining the class of the family, rather than the husband.⁴⁷

Aboriginal women's attitudes towards child-rearing and social life, the idealisation of romantic love amongst 'upper class women', women's attitudes to their 'sexual life' and 'marital prestige', were all noted as essential to the successful assimilation of Aboriginal families in Moree. Reay and Stiltington's stress on the central role of Aboriginal women in assimilation coincided with an emerging administrative discourse and strategy that placed Aboriginal women at the centre of efforts to socialise and culturally 'assimilate' Aboriginal populations. The administrative and anthropological discourse emphasised the key role of women in efforts to socialise and train the Aboriginal population to conform to normative white standards. Impediments to assimilation according to Stiltington and Reay came mainly from what they described as the women of the 'lower-classes' whose attitudes towards sexuality (they took pride in having many lovers), work (they were unconcerned if their male partner was not the primary bread-winner), and home-life (they were not interested in furnishings and cleaning), made them difficult subjects of assimilation.⁴⁸

In their synchronic study, Reay and Stiltington ignored the wider administrative context and the impact of restrictive legislation on the Aboriginal communities they studied. Amongst the 'upper class' of Aboriginal families, for example, they noted a fear of contracting venereal disease and a fear of 'dirty lower class mixed-bloods'.⁴⁹ Dirty, here had

⁴⁶'Class & Status', p. 205

⁴⁷'Class & Status', p. 195

⁴⁸'Class & Status', p. 196

⁴⁹'Class & Status', p. 186-187

a double meaning, they explained, meaning both 'unclean' and 'diseased'.⁵⁰ They noted that 'fear of venereal disease does not here indicate fear of actual pain or physical discomfort, but fear of social disapproval which attaches to the disease'. They characterised this behaviour, or attitude, as a child-like superstition found amongst the Aborigines they studied in Moree:

There is the fear, found in all classes, of harm from strangers, who are suspected of placing the native poison (bunda bunda) in food or drink which is offered to visitors. This is closely associated with the fear of contracting venereal disease from eating and drinking in the house of a stranger, and apparently explains the origin of this second fear.⁵¹

The administrative campaigns, described in the previous chapter, which had secured increasing power to control Aboriginal communities by drawing on the fear of venereal eye disease, played no part in this analysis. Instead, the wide-spread talk of venereal disease and its impact on social status, was seen as a primitive superstition, a fear of the 'native poison bunda bunda'. While the broad aim of Reay and Stiltington's study was to explain why Aborigines had 'failed to assimilate' so far, and what they needed to do to achieve their full assimilation, the impact of administrative decisions on the Aboriginal communities they studied, and broader economic and political pressures were invisible. Moree, for example, had been a site of forced relocations of people from the surrounding Aboriginal stations Terry Hei Hei and Boggabilla, during the Aborigines Protection Board's dispersal policy in the 1920s. The impact of this was ignored in their account of the differences between Aboriginal 'migrants', as they called them, from these two areas and longer standing residents.⁵² In an article written some ten years later Reay remarked on the relocations and the friction between people on crowded and impoverished reserves with the observation: 'some years earlier, well intentioned authorities had brought together remnants of tribes which were strangers to one another to be co-residents'.⁵³ Reay's assessment appeared to underestimate, or was ignorant of, long-standing government attempts to control and contain Aboriginal populations in New South Wales.

⁵⁰'Class & Status', p. 187

⁵¹'Class & Status', p. 187

⁵²For a historical perspective on these relocations see Heather Goodall, 'Land as Prison: Moree, 1927-33', *Invasion to Embassy*, pp. 173-178

⁵³Reay, 'Behavioural Responses to Discrimination. A Supplementary Note', in *Oceania*, Vol. 28, 1, September 1957, pp. 111-112

In a later essay, 'Native Thought in Rural New South Wales',⁵⁴ based on her field work in northern New South Wales, Marie Reay argued that Aboriginal men were the best place to look for 'remnant' tribal culture. This distinction between women as the subjects of assimilation and men as the objects of remnant traditional culture in New South Wales, was one that became increasingly pronounced in administrative and popular cultural discourse during the 1950s and early 1960s, as we shall see in following chapters. Another significant example of the focus on Aboriginal women as the 'answer' to the assimilationist agenda was Reay's 1951 article entitled 'Mixed-blood Marriage in North-Western New South Wales. A Survey of the Marital Conditions of 264 Aboriginal and Mixed-Blood Women'.⁵⁵ Reay's research was again carried out under the direction of Elkin, as part of his broader study seeking to ascertain the process of assimilation of the 'mixed-bloods' into the general life of the white community.

Reay's survey and analysis was based on 'one formal and at least one semi-formal' interview, plus the family records of over three hundred 'aboriginal and mixed-blood women' in north-western New South Wales, collected during 1945 and 1946. Based on these results Reay concluded that 'the mixed-bloods can be said to be slowly becoming assimilated'.⁵⁶ In this paper Reay's definition of 'assimilated' referred directly to the breeding out of colour as a result of Aboriginal women from the 'mixed blood' population marrying, or having children with men of a 'lighter caste'. Marriage to a lighter coloured man, in order to 'breed out' Aboriginality was a deliberate choice by the Aboriginal women, argued Reay: 'In conversation, these lighter caste women express their preference for lighter partners, on the grounds that their children will be lighter than themselves'.⁵⁷

Reay argued that despite 'retarding factors', 'half-caste and predominantly aboriginal women tend to merge with the lighter castes, thus making the mixed-blood population progressively lighter'. The 'retarding factors' included Aboriginal women's experience that 'it is difficult to extract money from white men for the maintenance of their children, even by legal means' and that 'mixed blood men do not object to supporting their wives' illegitimate

⁵⁴*Oceania*, vol. 20, no. 2, December, 1949, pp. 90-117

⁵⁵*Oceania*, vol. 22, December, 1951, pp. 116-129

⁵⁶'Mixed Blood Marriage', p. 123

⁵⁷'Mixed Blood Marriage', p. 122

children, whereas white men were generally reluctant to do this'.⁵⁸ The main 'retarding factor' in slowing the process of assimilation was, argued Reay, the operation of what she called 'the colour bar': 'The ultimate assimilation of the mixed-bloods is being retarded by the operation of the colour bar which limits the marriages between aboriginal women and white men'.⁵⁹ Reay seemed hopeful that Aboriginal and mixed-descent populations were increasingly assimilated - *biologically*, and socially - into the larger white community. Opposition to such a future, by either Aboriginal people or white townspeople was seen to 'retard' a process that was essentially inevitable.⁶⁰

Ruth Fink's study, 'The Caste Barrier - An Obstacle to the Assimilation of Part-Aborigines in North-West New South Wales'⁶¹ (based on her 1955 M. A. thesis supervised by Elkin) was written nearly a decade after Reay and Stiltington's seminal article on 'class status' in a mixed blood community. Quoting statistics from the Western Australian Commissioner of Native Welfare (whom we encountered in chapter one) Fink set out the assimilation 'problem' clearly in her introduction:

While the number of full-blooded Aborigines throughout Australia has steadily declined, the number of half-castes has increased in some cases by as much as threefold in one generation. This high fertility rate in a group of people who are in many areas economically insecure, and tend to have a low standard of living, has resulted in growing apprehension that if measures are not taken to absorb them into the community, they may become a considerable social problem in the future.⁶²

Fink's article marked a development in anthropological discourse, when it identified a further obstacle to assimilation other than the 'colour bar'. This was the development of an oppositional culture amongst some 'part-Aborigines'.⁶³ According to Fink's research, based on four months participant observation on an Aboriginal reserve in north west New South Wales, certain groups of 'coloured' people, a term which Fink used in place of 'mixed-

⁵⁸ 'Mixed Blood Marriage', p. 123

⁵⁹ 'Mixed Blood Marriage', p. 122

⁶⁰ 'Mixed Blood Marriage', p.119

⁶¹ *Oceania*, vol. 28, 1, September 1957, pp. 100-110

⁶² 'The Caste Barrier', p. 1

⁶³ Fink's article uses a capital 'a' for the word 'Aboriginal' unlike the earlier studies. This is significant in the context of the changing discourse at a state and national level discussed in chapter seven

bloods', actively criticised white society and culture and had no interest in assimilating. She identified a group of Aboriginal people who, despite 'de-tribalisation' were self-identified as Aboriginal. This group, 'looks upon white people and their ways of living as undesirable and tends to reject many values commonly associated with white people'.⁶⁴

In what Fink identified as the 'Lower group', 'resistance to assimilation may be extreme'.⁶⁵ She argued that Aboriginal people resident on the town reserve, or 'mission' 'do not reject their colour; they have no desire to be like a white person'. In particular Fink noted that the word 'Wodjin', or white woman 'has a certain insult value when used for a person known to be coloured':

They refer to the Upper group women in mocking tones as "Black-Wodjins" and speak about their adoption of white ways as "trying to be flash". "The black Wodjins won't eat kangaroo any more - they won't own up that they ate it when they were kids".⁶⁶

This was in contrast, she argued, to the 'Upper group' women who still actively sought to assimilate. In the 'Upper' group, these women were identified as the key to assimilation with whites, at both a physical and social level:

The women are the most status-conscious group in this community. They are the only ones who can take the steps necessary to increase status, namely by marriage to a white man. Very few dark men marry white women, as there is tremendous feeling against such matches on the part of the white community. Dark men, therefore, possess lower status than dark women. Many of them find it difficult to find wives, for the darker girls do not wish to marry them, and they are often forced to accept older or undesirable women. While the women can leave their group and move upwards, men generally cannot. Perhaps this is why men seem to show more signs of maladjustment than women, for it is mainly the men who drink and quarrel and seem dissatisfied.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ 'The Caste Barrier', p. 103

⁶⁵ 'The Caste Barrier', p. 104

⁶⁶ 'The Caste Barrier', p. 106

⁶⁷ 'The Caste Barrier', p. 106

The works of Reay, Stiltington and Fink identified an important dynamic in the assimilation process which they defined in both biological and cultural terms. Gender played a crucial role in Aboriginal self-definition against white assimilation and *for* assimilation. The gendered dynamic of assimilation policy, its specific impact and interest in Aboriginal women was a feature of administrative, as well as anthropological discourse and practice throughout the period of 'cultural assimilation'. As the theme of 'part-Aboriginal' culture in 'settled' areas increasingly gained status within anthropology, over the following decades more men began publishing in the area, with the result that less was written specifically about women and gender relations.⁶⁸ The following section focuses on administrative discourse and gender in this period of cultural assimilation.

The Aborigines Welfare Board: Post- War policy, practice and gender

During the Aborigines Welfare Board's administration the focus on the removal of Aboriginal girls shifted to the equal removal of both boys and girls.⁶⁹ The Board's attempt to facilitate biological assimilation by removing girls and apprenticing them out, had partly been successful because of the demand for domestic servants. Changing economic conditions along with a new discourse on assimilation, from biological to cultural, were significant features of a changed post-war Australia. The move away from an openly biological-assimilationist stance, with its stress on racial determinism, amongst government representatives in Australia, was encouraged by the discrediting of eugenics with the defeat of Germany in 1945. The Nazi regime's endorsement of eugenics and their eventual 'final solution' to disposing of an unwanted 'race', had, by the end of the War, brought such ideas into public disrepute, in Australia and world-wide.⁷⁰ This precipitated the move from a

⁶⁸James Bell, 'Assimilation in New South Wales', in M. Reay, (ed), *Aborigines Now*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1964, Jeremy Beckett, 'Aborigines, Alcohol and Assimilation', in M. Reay, (ed), *Aborigines Now*, A. P. Elkin, *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1977, J. Le Gay Breton, 'An Estimate of Assimilation Rate of Mixed-Blood Aborigines in New South Wales', *Oceania*, 22, 3, 1962, pp. 187-290, Jeremy Beckett (ed), *Past and Present. The Construction of Aboriginality*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, based on the 1986 Biennial Meeting of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies (AIAS) in 1986, and Ian Keen (ed), *Being Black. Aboriginal Cultures in 'Settled' Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988

⁶⁹By 1950 both Kinchela boys home and Cootamundra Girls Home were reported to take a maximum of 50 children ranging in age from 6 to 15, AWBAR, 1951, pp. 6-7

⁷⁰Elizae Barkan, 'Mobilising Scientists against Nazi Racism, 1939', in G. Stocking (ed), *Bones, Bodies, Behaviour: Essays on Biological Anthropology*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1988, pp. 180-205, Elizae Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars*, Cambridge University Press, 1992

discourse that explicitly endorsed a biological solution to the 'problem' of Aboriginal populations, to one that promoted a 'cultural' solution.

The Second World War impacted on Australia's economic and cultural life in other ways. The arrival of European refugees and displaced persons, and large-scale European immigration after the War, influenced 'white' Australian society irrevocably. The period of increased immigration coincided with new War time, and post-War reconstruction, employment opportunities which impacted on the Aboriginal population.⁷¹ For Aboriginal men in particular, War time industrialisation created work opportunities in both rural and metropolitan areas and increased opportunities for movement off the Aboriginal stations and reserves. Country towns in New South Wales, such as Bathurst, Dubbo and Wagga Wagga, which prospered due to their proximity either to military camps or factories, provided work for hundreds of Aboriginal men. The Aboriginal community in Sydney increased in the post-War period, particularly in the munitions factory area of St Marys.⁷² During the War years many Aboriginal men were able to obtain permanent employment and equal wages with whites for the first time in their lives.⁷³ Australia-wide, demands of the war-effort economy were such that by 1944 over 90% of able-bodied Aboriginal men on the managed reserves had been continuously employed for three years, mainly at award wages.⁷⁴ This was compared to a pattern of seasonal work, impermanent labour conditions and unemployment experienced throughout the depression of the 1930s which impacted particularly on Aboriginal men.

To some extent the War also impacted on the public perception of Aboriginal men. The experience of Aboriginal men returning as soldiers highlighted the contradiction between

⁷¹ Glenn Withers & David Pope, *War, Immigration and Australian Unemployment*, Working Papers in Economic History, no. 24, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1984, John Collins, *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land: Australia's Post War Immigration*, Pluto Press, Leichardt, NSW, 1991, Australian Department of Labour and Immigration, *1788-1975. A Review of Migrants to Australia especially since World War Two*, prepared by Australian Department of Labour and Industry, Immigration Information Branch, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1975, C. Farrell & J. Gibson, *Australia Remembers: 50th Anniversary of World War Two*, J. Gibson Publishing, Lake Heights, NSW, 1997

⁷² Horner, *Bill Ferguson*, p. 48

⁷³ Robert Hall, *Report: Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders during World War Two*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 1987, Greg Patmore, 'Race, Ethnicity & Australian Labour History: Aborigines', *Australian Labour History*, Industrial Relations Series, Longman & Cheshire, Melbourne, 1991, pp. 188-194, see also Rosalind Kidd, *The Way we Civilize. Aboriginal Affairs - The Untold Story*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1997, p. 56

⁷⁴ Glen Withers, Tony Endres & Len Perry, *Australian Historical Statistics: Labour Statistics*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, p. 15, Hall, *Report: Employment of Aboriginal*, pp. 7-9

their equal role in the war and the conditions of extreme marginalization that they experienced upon returning to Australia.⁷⁵ Their participation as soldiers in the War had to a degree increased public opinion of Aboriginal men. A float in the Moree Carnival, in 1948 for example depicted 'Aborigines of Yesterday and Today' - with a display of boomerangs and spear throwing by a 'few of the darkest types who have retained these arts today' and two Aboriginal men dressed in uniform with a banner reading 'soldiers yesterday - citizens today'.⁷⁶

Generally, male labour was in high demand during the immediate post-War reconstruction years.⁷⁷ A low-birth rate during the depression coupled with the loss of men during the war led to a concern in Australia about the shortage of male workers.⁷⁸ In 1950, the conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers, for example, was dominated by the question of a diminished male labour force.⁷⁹ The conference noted that while 9,100 boys reached the age of twenty-one in 1939, only 5,900 boys had reached that age in 1949. Thus, during the 1950s the question of how to regulate young men left in Australia to form an efficient labour force became an important issue in public policy.⁸⁰ The establishment of the Adult Probation Service in New South Wales in 1952, for instance, reflected this concern with young men. Of the 114 persons placed on probation in the Adult Probations Service's first year of functioning, 65% were under 25, 2% were over 40 and only two of the 114 people under the control of the new service were women.⁸¹

⁷⁵see Robert Hall, *Fighters from the Fringe: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders recall the Second World War*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1997, Rory O'Connor, *Yugambah: In Defence of our Country*, Runaway Bay, Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation, Runaway Bay, Queensland, 1991, Kay Saunders, 'Inequalities of Sacrifice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labour in the Northern Territory during the Second World War', in McGrath & Saunders, *Aboriginal Workers*, pp. 131-149, Doreen Kartinyeri, *Ngarrindgeri ANZACS*, Aboriginal Family History Project, South Australian Museum & Raukkan Council, 1996

⁷⁶AWBM, item 9, August 1948, p. 82, 4/8545

⁷⁷Paul Smyth, *A Legacy of Choice: Economic Thought and Social Policy in Australia, the Early Post-War Years*, Social Welfare Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Kensington, 1989, pp. 26-28

⁷⁸Smyth, *A Legacy of Choice*: p. 27

⁷⁹*Joint Commonwealth and State Ministers Conference, 1950*, in *NSWPP*, vol 8, 1950-51, p. 111

⁸⁰Smyth, *A Legacy of Choice*, pp. 187-194, Greg Patmore, *Australian Labour History*, pp. 71-73, K. Windschuttle, *Unemployment: A Social and Political Analysis of the Economic Crisis in Australia*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1979, John Murphy & Judith Smart (eds), *The Forgotten Fifties: Aspects of Australian Society and Culture in the 1950s*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1997, see also *Joint Commonwealth and State Ministers Conference, 1950*, *NSWPP*

⁸¹Initial Report of the Adult Probation Service, NSW, 1952, p. 1, *NSWPP*

Thus, in the context of these wider changes in the 1950s, the Institutionalisation and surveillance of Aboriginal boys by the Aborigines Welfare Board was starting at a younger age and extending longer into teenage years than it had at the start of the decade.⁸² During this time then, the Aborigines Welfare Board's increasing Institutionalisation of Aboriginal boys and men, reflected a concern with the discipline of young men generally in Australia during the war and post-war era. In contrast during the 1950s the number of girls at the Board's Cootamundra home for Aboriginal girls dropped dramatically. In one year, 1957, the number of girls held by the institution went from 44 to 29.⁸³ This dramatic decrease was due to the Board's successful appeal throughout the year for foster parents for the Aboriginal girls.⁸⁴ This decrease in 'inmates' at Cootamundra, reflected the Board's increasing confidence in the assimilation of Aboriginal girls through individual fostering during the 1950s.⁸⁵

In line with the Public Service Board report, the Board's approach to girls and young women became centrally concerned with attempting to 'train' and socialise Aboriginal women for full assimilation with white society. In 1941, for example, a scheme was devised by the Aborigines Welfare Board for the training of a 'limited number' of Aboriginal girls who,

possess the intelligence and aptitude, to continue their education beyond the primary school stage and eventually receive a specialised training for a year or two in a hospital for nursing or teaching.⁸⁶

A sub-committee of the Board was established on the subject of training Aboriginal girls, made up of Professor Elkin, Dr Morris from the Department of Education and Mr Glasheen, an officer of the Department of Public Health. Authorities in Queensland and Western Australia were to be approached for statistics and information about their experiences of training of young girls.⁸⁷ At this time the Board argued in its annual reports

⁸²AWBAR, 1950, p. 4, AWBAR, 1956, p. 10. In 1950 the age range of boys taken to Kinchella was six to fifteen in 1956 it was five to seventeen.

⁸³AWBAR, 1956-57, p. 10

⁸⁴AWBAR, 1958, p. 6

⁸⁵see Aborigines Welfare Board, 'Newspaper Drive for Foster Homes for Aboriginal Wards', 30 November, 1955 in Link Up & Wilson, *In the Best Interest of the Child?*, p. 95

⁸⁶AWBAR, 1941, p. 12

⁸⁷AWBM, 6/1943, 4/8544

for the establishment of a special Training Hostel for Senior Girls.⁸⁸ Possible sites were to be the old Narrabin Hospital Building or La Perouse House, with Cootamundra Girls Home to be retained as an institution for younger children. There was no similar new scheme for training Aboriginal boys. Heather Goodall argues that Aboriginal men were 'seldom depicted' as the subjects of 'training' in the way that women and children were in the Welfare Board public statements.⁸⁹ However, the Board did push in the early 1940s for the establishment of special delinquent homes for Aboriginal boys, and a prison farm for Aboriginal adults. Thus indicating the way that in the post-war years the more punitive aspects of Welfare Policy were directed towards Aboriginal boys and men whilst the efforts at training and socialisation were directed at women and girls.⁹⁰

This emphasis on 'training' Aboriginal women and girls was consistent with a broader societal structuring of family and personal relations at this time. Kereen Reiger, and other feminist historians and sociologists have explored in detail attempts to 'rationalize' the domestic world of women during the 'modern era' of the early twentieth century.⁹¹ The introduction of new technology to the household and new definitions of the housewife as a 'modern', 'efficient' houseworker; changes in patterns of reproduction due, among other things, to the introduction of contraception, and the placing of pregnancy and childbirth under professional control, and prescriptive and normative definitions of childrearing practice and sexuality, were emblematic of the modernisation of the domestic realm (see chapter five). New approaches to infant welfare and 'domestic science', extended new 'scientific' principles to the household and were part of the extension of 'technical rationality' to the modern world.⁹²

These processes of modernity had a specific impact on Aboriginal girls and women under the administration of the Aborigines Welfare Board. Aboriginal women, for example, who

⁸⁸AWBAR, 1944, p. 5, 4/8545, AWBM, 16/12/43, 4/8544

⁸⁹Goodall, 'Assimilation begins in the Home', p. 89

⁹⁰AWBM, 1942, item 2, AWBAR, 1943, p. 7, AWBM, 1944, item 6, 4/8544 and Interview, Chika Dixon, Sydney, 12/3/96

⁹¹Kereen Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernising the Australian Family*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, Lesley Johnson, *The Modern Girl. Girlhood and Growing Up*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, Rita Felski, 'The Gender of Modernity', in Sally Ledger et al (eds), *Political Gender: Texts and Contexts*, New York, Harvester, 1994, Carolyn Allport, 'Women and suburban Housing: Post-War Planning in Sydney, 1943-61', in J. B. McLoughlin and M. Huxley, (eds), *Urban Planning in Australia: Critical Readings*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1986

⁹²Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home*, p. 22

remained in their houses on reserves and stations or in town camps were more consistently accessible to Welfare Board surveillance and control than husbands or male relations who were working off the reserves during the war and post-War increase in job opportunities. The 1943 amendment to the Aborigines Protection Board Act, for example, which enabled the Aborigines Welfare Board to issue what it called 'Exemption Certificates', had a specific impact on Aboriginal women in this respect.⁹³ The certificate, which deemed the holder to be exempt from the Aborigines Protection Act, was representative of the new approach to solving the 'Aboriginal problem' under the Aborigines Welfare Board which focused on individual socialisation. Any Aboriginal person wanting to receive old-age, invalid or unemployment relief, or their child endowment payment directly, rather than as rations distributed by the Board, was required to apply for an Exemption Certificate.⁹⁴ This Certificate was seen as one way of ensuring the new policy of 'cultural' assimilation.

The certificate sought to control Aboriginal behaviour by requiring certain conditions be met, not only at the time the exemption certificate was issued, but for the rest of the person's life, under the threat of revocation. As the exemption approval letter said: 'the certificate remains in force permanently, subject to your continued good standards of citizenship'.⁹⁵ Aborigines Welfare Board minutes contain many references to revoked exemption certificates and also applications to have them reinstated.⁹⁶ In particular, exempted Aboriginal applicants if male were required to be employed and if female, 'good housekeepers' who had to live 'clean, sober and thrifty' lifestyles. To qualify for an exemption certificate the applicant was not supposed to associate with people the Board identified as 'Aboriginals' and, once in receipt of the certificate, as they were classified as non-Aboriginals themselves, they could not visit relatives and friends living on Aboriginal stations without permission. The exemption certificate effectively required holders to denounce their Aboriginality and made it illegal for them to associate with other Aboriginal people.

An applicant for an exemption certificate would be met at their home by a Welfare Board Inspector or police officer who filled out a long questionnaire on the basis of this interview

⁹³ *Aborigines Protection Act*, Amendment 1943

⁹⁴ *Aborigines Protection Act*, Amendment 1943

⁹⁵ AWB Exemption Approval Letter in Special Bundles, 1962, A51/1079

⁹⁶ AWB Correspondence Files, 1943-69, item 29, item 5, item 6

and inspected the house. The questionnaire included questions about men's employment, and a series of detailed questions about home conditions, cleanliness, amount and condition of furnishing and decoration, and the state of the garden all of which were seen as the women's sphere. In particular, as Heather Goodall argues, houses and housekeeping became the more measurable, inspectable tests of 'assimilation'. Welfare Board officers found that by inspecting houses, furnishings and more particularly house-keeping styles, they could:

- test the income of both men and women;
- test how that income was spent, e.g. on furnishings for the individual, nuclear home rather than on assisting relations, on travel to maintain kin contacts, on gambling;
- measure time spent on and in the home;
- measure interest in home (and by implication, in 'husband and children', ie in nuclear family relations);
- measure interest in hygiene;
- test interest in 'morality' and in kin relations (by finding out who and how many people lived in a house and slept with whom).⁹⁷

Another area of Board control which impacted heavily on Aboriginal women was the practice of withholding direct social service payments from Aboriginal mothers throughout the 1930s to the 1960s.⁹⁸ Unlike white women, Aboriginal women had to be judged as 'competent' mothers by the Aborigines Protection Board, and then Aborigines Welfare Board, before being issued the child endowment as a direct payment.⁹⁹ Emphasising the importance of individual 'good behaviour', the Welfare Board argued that each woman whose endowment they administered, was encouraged to qualify for direct payment by indicating that she was 'prepared to improve her system of management' and her expenditure of endowment moneys:

Every encouragement is given to aboriginal mothers to qualify for direct payment. They can do this by improving their home conditions and demonstrating that they can be relied upon to care

⁹⁷Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', p. 87, see also Francesca Bartlett, 'Clean, White Girls: Assimilation and Women's Work', in *Hecate*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1999, pp. 10-37

⁹⁸Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', p. 93

⁹⁹In 1927 the Lang Government had included Aborigines in its new Child Endowment see Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home', p. 93

for their children in a satisfactory manner. Unfortunately in many instances the conduct and mode of living precludes any possibility of any administration of the endowment by other than the Board.¹⁰⁰

In the 1950s the Board introduced the idea of a 'trial period' of direct payment which gave the Board's staff more reason to constantly monitor and review 'cases'.¹⁰¹ The Board argued that withholding payments would encourage people to become more 'self-reliant' and 'better fitted to take their place in the general community'.¹⁰² In many cases the Board withheld child endowment payments altogether from the Aboriginal mother and replaced them with the issue of a baby outfit. The Board suggested in their annual reports that this represented a 'considerable saving for the mother'.¹⁰³ In cases where the Board chose to let the endowments be paid directly to the Aboriginal women, they ensured they had the right to re-instate their control of the women's money at any time:

It is the custom to supply all expectant mothers with baby outfits. Endowees may qualify for direct payments if they demonstrate by their thrift and habits generally that they are thoroughly reliable and fit and proper persons to be entrusted with this responsibility. The privilege is of course, revoked if it is abused.¹⁰⁴

This 'privilege' was given only rarely by the Board throughout the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰⁵

In the post-War decades additional sets of economic incentives and constraints were placed on Aboriginal women which were described in Board reports as an effective way to 'train women' to 'assimilate'.¹⁰⁶ To 'socialise and assimilate' adult Aboriginal women the Board used the threat of withholding or issuing in kind, the new Commonwealth social welfare payments introduced during World War Two. To facilitate the war effort, the Commonwealth government had assumed sole responsibility for the collection of income tax, and a series of social service payments to support the population were introduced at

¹⁰⁰ AWBAR, 1952, p. 5

¹⁰¹ AWBAR, 1953, p. 6

¹⁰² AWBAR, 1946, p. 5

¹⁰³ AWBAR, 1952, p. 6

¹⁰⁴ AWBAR, 1947, p. 5

¹⁰⁵ AWBAR, 1940s-69

¹⁰⁶ AWBAR, 1946, p. 5, AWBAR, 1947, p. 5, AWBAR, 1952, p. 5, AWBAR, 1952, p. 6 AWBAR, 1953, p. 6

the state level.¹⁰⁷ Old Age, invalid and widows pensions, maternity allowance, child and family endowment were controlled by the Aborigines Welfare Board in New South Wales. These payments were only granted directly to the small proportion of Aboriginal people exempted from the Act.¹⁰⁸ In the case of maternity allowance the Board took control of payments from the Commonwealth on behalf of the Aboriginal mother. 'Exempted' women were required to apply to the Social Welfare Branch of the Department of Labour and Immigration for child and infant endowment. The Board recommended that the women's request be considered similarly to 'those received from other indigent or near indigent members of community'.¹⁰⁹

White women as employees of the Welfare Board

To supervise assimilation and socialisation throughout the 1950s, paid employees of the Board were instructed specifically to increase their 'duties of surveillance' over Aboriginal women, particularly Aboriginal mothers. Both the Select Inquiry in 1937 and the Public Service Board report of 1940 stressed the role that non-Aboriginal women could play in the Welfare Board (see following chapter).¹¹⁰ The increase in the application of 'modern' and 'scientific' practices in the post war-era meant that the Aborigines Welfare Board, as well as other mainstream welfare and education bureaucracies, saw an increasing role for white women 'professionals' paid to implement new modernist policies.¹¹¹

There were both economic and ideological factors behind this push for women in the administration. While the Aborigines Welfare Board was attempting a new level of surveillance and training to establish their assimilationist agenda, simultaneously, the Board experienced a reduction in its budget in the post-War era. By the end of the War, the Board noted that the 'serious reduction to the budget will hamper assimilation'.¹¹² However, one way to fill the gap between the Board's policy of increased surveillance and their shrinking

¹⁰⁷ Social Services Consolidation Act 1947-50, section 19 (2), 62 (2), 86 (3)

¹⁰⁸ AWB 'Applications for Certificates of Exemption', 1948-1959, 8/3089 -3098

¹⁰⁹ AWBAR, 1953, p. 2

¹¹⁰ *Aborigines Protection*, Public Service Board Report, p. 20, *Select Inquiry 1937*, p. 613

¹¹¹ AWB Station Reports and Returns, 4/10744.2, 4/10744.3

¹¹² AWBM, item 13, 11/1945, p. 332, 4/8544

budget during the War years was to increase the underpaid workload of the female employees of the administration (see following chapter).

There were other outside pressures that influenced the Aborigines Welfare Board's increasing employment of women. The War and its aftermath saw an upsurge in Australian and British feminist demands for Parliamentary representation which specified separate political agendas for women.¹¹³ Calls for the involvement of 'professional' white women in the administration of Aboriginal people were part of the broader demand for an increased role for women during and after the Second World War, both within Australia and overseas.¹¹⁴ In particular, in the area of Aboriginal policy and administration, feminist lobbying for white women 'protectors' was informed by their analysis of the 'exploitation and abuse' that characterised Aboriginal women's sexual relationships with white men.¹¹⁵

In this context one of the final decisions made by the Aborigines Protection Board before it was disbanded in 1940, was to issue a general policy directive that it was 'not agreeable' to have single males residing on reserves and stations.¹¹⁶ When the new Aborigines Welfare Board was constituted in 1940 it emphasised the need for the employment of married manager and matron teams on Aboriginal stations. The Welfare Board aimed to protect 'morality' on the stations by ensuring that all managers lived on the Aboriginal stations with their wives. The Board wanted to avoid cases such as that of Mr Arthur Blackshaw, Assistant Teacher-manager on the Aboriginal Station at Menindee, who was accused by residents at the station of impregnating a young Aboriginal woman working at the schoolhouse.¹¹⁷ Blackshaw's conduct and 'indiscreet relations with the half-caste girl', wrote the Board 'could not fail to have a subversive effect on the people of the station and on his position as teacher'.¹¹⁸ When the Board's plan to employ a separate manager and teacher on each of its stations failed due to lack of funds, the Board began to urge for the appointment of 'a married teacher whose wife could take an interest in the well-being of the

¹¹³ Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', p. 176

¹¹⁴ Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', pp. 167-203

¹¹⁵ Paisley, 'Ideas Have Wings', p. 168

¹¹⁶ APBM, Policy Section, item 2, 5/1939, 4/8544

¹¹⁷ When these allegations were corroborated by local police the Board had him removed. APB & AWBM, 1929-46, see esp. Minutes of Meeting of APB, Wed 5th April, 1939, item 17, 4/8544

¹¹⁸ APBM, 5th April, 1939, item 17, 4/8544

people. A woman with nursing experience if necessary'.¹¹⁹ The Board made the assumption that European women - with or without training - could fulfil roles such as that of nurse in their capacity as wife of the manager.

By the early 1940s it had become Welfare Board policy that all station matrons attend 'confinement cases'.¹²⁰ During the second World War and in the post-war era the medicalisation of childbirth had become widespread.¹²¹ Such a shift in mainstream society impacted heavily on Aboriginal communities who had relied on extended kin and other women to support them during pregnancy and birth. The Aborigines Welfare Board made it policy,

That in future, no Aboriginal women, practicing as mid-wives should be allowed to carry on this work on the Board's stations and reserves. Wherever practicable all confinement cases must be taken to the nearest public hospital for attention.¹²²

For a variety of reasons it was often not 'practicable' for Aboriginal women to give birth at a public hospital. Racism and segregation in country towns, as well as geographic distance and lack of transport between Aboriginal stations and public hospitals, reduced the likelihood of this recommendation being met. As Aboriginal women were denied the right to act as midwives, increasingly non-Aboriginal station matrons were expected to act in this role. As an addendum to the recommendation that no Aboriginal women act as midwives the Board noted that 'in cases where public hospital facilities are not available, the best possible provision is to be made for attention to confinement cases on the station'.¹²³ This was seen as the responsibility of the station matron. In 1939 the Board considered a request from some station matrons that they be paid an amount of ten pounds per annum extra to their allowance, for attending births. This additional income was not approved and station matrons were informed that maternity duty was to be 'performed in conjunction with her

¹¹⁹AWBM, 1941, item 4, 4/8544

¹²⁰AWAR, 1942, p. 5, AWBAR, 1943, p. 4

¹²¹ see Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home*

¹²²APBM, Business Sheet, 10th May, 1939, item 9, Reel 2792, 4/8544. The Hospital Associations of NSW passed a resolution, in February 1944, that a certified nurse be appointed to all Aboriginal stations. The Board decided the matter should stand in abeyance and in the end nothing was done. Nursing Sisters were directly employed by the Board, and teachers by both the Education Department and the AWB to work on stations.

¹²³APBM, Business Sheet, 10/5/1939, 4/8544

other duties as matron'.¹²⁴ The number of requests for additional pay for attending confinement cases, lodged by over-worked and under-paid station matrons increased from 1940s on.¹²⁵

The following chapter analyses further the role of some of the non-Aboriginal women employed by the Aborigines Welfare Board in the period of cultural assimilation. The chapter describes the special responsibility given to white women by the Aborigines Welfare Board to monitor and intervene in the domestic life of Aboriginal people. Some of the limits to the role that such women took, as well as their motivations and desires in their work with Aboriginal people in the context of the gendered administration of the assimilation policy of the post world war two period, are considered. During the time of the Aborigines Welfare Board the New South Wales administration adopted a new public discourse and new strategies in their approach to the 'problem' of 'half-caste' communities. However, the place of Aboriginal and white women in the public imagination in New South Wales and the undercurrent of sexuality which informed Aboriginal policy and administration, constituted an integral part of the overall complex of ideas, policy statements, and cultural iconography from the official period of 'assimilation' in New South Wales.

¹²⁴ APBM, Business Sheet, 10/5/1939, 4/8544

¹²⁵ AWB Special Bundles 1920-57. Management of reserves, wards and appointments to the Board, 9/2406, AWB Station Reports and Returns, see especially 1942-48 and Matron's Report, Bulgandramine, 1st June, 1939, 4/8544-4/8545

CHAPTER FOUR

Boundary Riders: Women Employees and The Aborigines Welfare Board, 1945-1969

The welfare caused us so much loss and pain. When can we start our grieving? How long are we going to have to grieve? And sometimes I think about how they don't want to spend any money to put things right - but how much did they spend taking the kids away? How much did it cost them? How many of them got jobs and supported their families by taking ours away?¹

In the decades that immediately followed the Second World War white women acted as 'lady' welfare officers, as Matrons at the Board's children's Homes and stations, as teachers and nurses on the stations, and, later, as witnesses and government representatives at the 1965-67 Parliamentary Inquiry which contributed to the end of the Aborigines Welfare Board (see chapter seven). As in other colonial contexts, the figure of the white woman in New South Wales was mobilised, as we began to see in the first chapter, in both a literal and symbolic way by the 'colonial' administration to facilitate so-called 'racial' distinctions, and efforts to modernise bureaucratic control.² As this chapter sets out to explore, assumptions about white women's special responsibility for socialising Aboriginal women and children, regulating their sexuality, attending their births, and educating about cleanliness and hygiene, contributed to their important (and largely forgotten) role within the administration of the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board. In the history of colonialism, as Ann McClintock argues, other than the stories of missionary women, 'for the most part the story of women's work... has been shunted to the sidings of history'.³ The increasing standardisation of women's employment by the Board was endorsed by the administration at a time when a cheap, but expanded staff was needed to enact the increased attempts at surveillance stipulated in the Public Service Board report.⁴ Thus assumptions about the role that white women could play at what was considered the racial 'boundary' -

¹Interview (name withheld) LU, 1996

²McClintock, *Imperial Leather*. Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, Knapman, *White Women in Fiji, 1835-1930*, Kelk Mager, *Gender and the Making, Ware, 'The White Woman's Burden?' in Beyond the Pale*. pp. 3-45, Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable'

³McClintock, p. 233

⁴*AWBAR*, 1940, p. 2

training for assimilation by monitoring the domestic sphere of Aboriginal lives - interacted with an administrative stress on increased surveillance at a time of budgetary cut-backs.

Under the new bureaucracy prescribed in the Public Service Board report, the management and control of Aboriginal girls and women, specifically the control and surveillance of their domestic arrangements, was an integral part of the new 'standardised practices' of administration outlined in the preceding chapter. To enact this surveillance and control over Aboriginal girls and women, and over the domestic sphere on Aboriginal stations and in the children's Homes, white women played significant roles within the re-formed administration of the Aborigines Welfare Board. The work of some of these women such as the Matrons employed with their husbands on Aboriginal stations around the state, Ella Hiscocks, the longest-serving Matron of the Cootamundra Girls Home, and the women who worked as teachers employed at the segregated Aboriginal schools run by both the Aborigines Welfare Board and the Education Department, are revealing of the emphasis on the domestic sphere, under assimilation policy. The roles they played within the administration, and the conditions they worked under are revealing of the ways that constructions of white femininity interacted with assimilation in policy and practice.

The stories of some of these women show something of the pressures on white women in these positions, as they negotiated questions of 'race', gender and class in their daily work. The women discussed here did not leave collections of letters or journals. Their days were full with attempts to fight dirt, order domestic environments, 'train' and educate Aboriginal women and children, and in some instances openly criticise the Board's authority. These women's historical traces, in the memories of Matron Hiscocks, the report forms of the station Matrons, and the critical correspondence and defense of two teachers at Kinchela are revealing of the different ways that self-representations and bureaucratic presentation created spaces in which ideas about the mission of white femininity cross cut with racial administration and efforts to control Aboriginal people.

'The Ideal Woman': Station Matrons

It is indeed difficult to find for this position the ideal man, married to the ideal woman - Mr Bate, 1937⁵

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Board employed white women to act as Matrons, and occasionally Matron-Teachers (most often it was Manager-Teachers) on the Aboriginal stations it ran around the state.⁶ The job of station Matron was open to women only if they were the wife of the manager. As one ex-Matron from Brewarrina station recalled, 'We were a "package deal".⁷ Essentially, the Matron came with the manager. Station Matrons were paid for three or four hours a day but in reality were expected to be on call at all hours and were paid considerably less than their manager husbands. In 1940, the manager at Cumeragunga for example, was paid a salary of £304 per annum for his work on the station.⁸ The Matron was paid an annual salary of twenty-five pounds.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the most immediate consequences of the reconstitution of the 'Protection' to the 'Welfare' Board, for Aboriginal people on government stations, was an increase in bureaucratic procedures associated with the surveillance of the domestic sphere.⁹ To this end station Matrons were expected to take special responsibility for monitoring and reporting on Aboriginal women and children in their homes, or "dwellings", as they were more often referred to in Board reports and correspondence. Women working as station Matrons were significant agents in articulating

⁵NSWPD, 9/11/1937, p.26, 12/8749B

⁶In 1940 there were 22 Aboriginal stations in NSW, see *Aboriginal Reserves in New South Wales; a Land Rights Research Aid: A Listing from Archival Material of Former Aboriginal Reserves together with Information required to Access them*, prepared by A. McGuiggan, NSW Ministry for Aboriginal Affairs: *Occasional Paper, no. 4*, The Ministry, Sydney, 1983

⁷Taped interview, Amy Cockburn, ex-matron, Brewarrina Station, Newcastle, 20/11/97

Board regulations enforced this 'Package deal' tying the matrons role on the station tightly to her husbands. If, for example, the manager applied for leave Board regulations required the matron to reside off the station during that time and take unpaid leave. *AWBM*, 11/11/1950, 4/8545

⁸Appendix 'A'. APB, Administrative Staff, PSB Report, p. 37-38

⁹see also Barry Morris, 'Dhan-Gadi resistance to assimilation', in Ian Keen (ed) *Being Black, Aboriginal Cultures in 'Settled' Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1994, pp. 33-62, also *Domesticating Resistance*, pp. 130-132, and Goodall, 'Assimilation Begins in the Home'

and conducting, what has been identified as an administrative project of sustained surveillance and control aimed at Aboriginal women and children.¹⁰

Constant surveillance of domestic life by white women acting as Matrons provided detailed information about every Aboriginal woman and child living on Aboriginal stations, sent weekly to the central, all-male Board. The systematic collection of this information introduced under the Aborigines Welfare Board, was part of the administration's attempts to increase standardised practices for Board staff. In the debate leading up to the appointment of the select parliamentary committee to inquire into and report on the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board in 1937, questions about the qualifications and abilities of Board managers and Matrons were raised on a number of occasions.¹¹ The comment made by Mr Bate about the difficulty of finding 'the ideal man married to the ideal woman' exemplified the individualistic approach to criticisms of the Board during the late 1930s. A large part of the proceedings of the Inquiry were focused on the behaviour of 'field staff', and both Managers and Matrons were called to give evidence of their work. Jack Horner has described these proceedings as a 'witch-hunt' which sought to place the blame for any criticism at the feet of individual staff members, rather than at the policy and bureaucracy as a whole, as Aboriginal activists had hoped.¹² The bureaucratic practices that were introduced in the wake of the 1937 inquiry acted to enhance the powers of Board staff to intervene, correct and control the behaviour of station 'inmates' as they were frequently termed.¹³

Moves to regulate the work of managers and Matrons on Board stations had first been noted in the Aborigines Protection Board minutes of 1939, a few months before it was replaced by the Welfare Board. In 1941, under the directions of the Public Service Board report, the duties of both the manager and Matron were codified in the *Manual of Instructions to Managers and Matrons of Aboriginal Stations and Other Field Officers* which was distributed across New South Wales.¹⁴ The new *Manual of Instructions*, part of

¹⁰Jane Haggis makes a similar point in regards the role of white women in the British Protestant missionary societies in south India, in 'Good wives and mothers'

¹¹NSWPD, 9/11/1937, 12/8749B

¹²Horner, *Bill Ferguson*, pp. 48-54

¹³The term 'inmates' appears in reference to both the Boards' Children's Homes and stations, see APB & AWB Minutes Books, 1929-46, and AWB Station Reports and Returns, [hereafter SR&R] 1942-48

¹⁴*Public Service Board Report*, 1940, p. 24

the wider attempt to modernise the administration of Aborigines, included a clause which spelt out the rights of both the manager and Matron to enter Aboriginal houses on the station at any time.¹⁵

New standardised Managers' and Matrons' report forms were introduced with the manual. These report forms were to be sent weekly to the Sydney Board which had little other formal method of monitoring the day to day work of its expanded field staff employed throughout the state. The Board placed great stock by these reports which were emblematic of the new standardised bureaucracy.¹⁶ Staff were admonished for the late return of their diaries and report forms, and in some cases disciplinary action, resulting in the removal of a Manager and Matron for late return of forms, was undertaken by the Board.¹⁷ The detail required in these report forms indicates that managers and Matrons were expected to exercise close and detailed surveillance over Aboriginal station residents, in keeping with methods of 'scientific management'.¹⁸ The Manager's daily diary, recorded each of his working hours along the task undertaken that hour, a work diary for any Aborigines employed on the station, and a monthly report. The monthly report gave a head count of residents at the start and end of each month, the names and dates any marriages on the station, detailed any families or individuals admitted for permanent residence during the month, was required to account for families who left the station, listed the number of 'dwellings' and external conditions of these, reported on any Aborigines suitable for apprenticeship, and detail their age, sex and 'caste', numbered and named any visitors to the station during the month, and reported on the 'general conduct' of residents.

In addition to the details recorded by the Manager, the new *Manual of Instructions* had specific directives that codified the role that Matrons were expected to play on the stations. Matron's were instructed to record details specifically on Aboriginal women, adolescents and children and were required to conduct twice-weekly, but random inspections

¹⁵ See also Barry Morris, 'The Deterritorialisation and Scientisation of State Control', part 7.2, Chapter 7, *Domesticating Resistance*, pp. 163-167

¹⁶ *AWB SR&R*, 1942-48, 4/10743.1-4/10749.2

¹⁷ 'Management of Murrin Bridge Aboriginal Station', *AWB Special Bundles*, 9/2406.6, A55/761 (1955-57) *SR&R*, 4/10744.2

¹⁸ Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home*, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982

of all the houses on the stations.¹⁹ The regulations codified in the *Manual of Instructions* included advice to Matrons about how to effectively conduct their patterns of surveillance of Aboriginal women and their domestic lives:

The women folk, with the knowledge that the inspection is to be made, can prepare their homes and have them bright and clean on that particular day. The inspection of homes, should therefore, be irregular, particularly in those cases where it is suspected that the occupants of any home are inclined to 'polish up' for the occasion.²⁰

By instructing Matrons to add the element of surprise to their patterns of surveillance over the domestic lives of Aboriginal women, the Board hoped to influence domestic behaviour when outside of the purview of the Board's staff. Barry Morris argues such techniques were designed to impose a 'more effective regime of reform on the individuals, for monitoring and surveillance act to break down existing patterns of behaviour so that new ones can be constructed'.²¹ The aim of such regulations was to 'internalise self-government' rather than to continue to maintain external forms of control'.²² The random nature of the checks of the Matron reinforced the Board's goal of influencing Aboriginal people's day to day lives and behaviour at all times, in the presence of 'whites' or not. These random techniques of surveillance, carried out by Matrons on Aboriginal stations across the state were hoped to have a lasting impact on the behaviour and identification of Aboriginal individuals, specifically, in this case, Aboriginal women.

To enable the Board to check this was being undertaken, the Matron was required to list, each week, her 'random' days of inspection of each of the 'dwellings' and include an inspection report of each of the homes. These included sub-headings on the cleanliness of the 'dwellings', the 'behaviour and attitude' of the mother, and the health of children.²³ The Matron was also required each week to detail the diet of the mothers and children, as well as reporting on a general category of Aboriginal mothers' 'baby care' aptitude. It was the Matron's responsibility to report back to head office about school attendance, the amount

¹⁹AWB, *Manual of Instructions*, 1941, p. 3

²⁰AWB, *Manual of Instructions*, 1941, p. 2

²¹Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, p. 132

²²Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, p. 132

²³AWB, *SR&R*, Matrons Report Form, 4/10743/1-4/10749.2

of instruction in sewing and domestic work given by the Matron that month, the number of girls who attended these classes, as well as report on the 'leisure activities' of the station residents.²⁴

The report forms reveal that often to 'instruct' in domestic skills, station Matrons would use Aboriginal girls and women as un-paid domestic labour on the stations. Under the category seeking details of domestic and sewing instruction, the Matron at Burra Dee Dee station reported that school girls were being used each morning to assist with preparation of the mid-day meal for the Manager and Matron.²⁵ Similarly at Cowra station in the 1940s the Matron noted each week that Aboriginal girls had been made to clean the schoolroom as part of their domestic 'instruction'.²⁶ The Matron at Bellbrook station in 1947 recorded that 'as per school syllabus' girls had been shown how to sweep, dust and the clean windows.²⁷ Some Aboriginal girls and women resident on the stations remember resisting this un-paid labour by refusing to turn up to the 'classes' in sewing and domestic instruction.²⁸ Attendance at these 'sewing and domestic classes' by young women was often low anyway as a high proportion of girls were removed to the Cootamundra Home, and to domestic service positions throughout the state, for apprenticeship and 'training'. The Matron at Boggabilla from 1946- 48 noted simply that there were 'no young girls, not of school age on station'.²⁹ In other ways Aboriginal women who were resident on the Board's stations attempted to resist the Matron's attempts at random surveillance. At Bellbrook station for example, in August 1947, four female residents were reported to the central administration by the Matron for closing 'dwellings' during inspection times.³⁰ In response to such behaviour the Matron at Bulgandramie, for example, urged the Board to issue an 'Expulsion Order' against an Aboriginal woman resident on the station for 'disorderly' behaviour.³¹ The expulsion order was approved and duly signed. The Aboriginal woman was informed by the manager that if, after three months, her conduct was reported to be

²⁴ see 'Details of organised sport on station', sub-section, *AWB* Report Form, 4/10745, 17/6/1942

²⁵ *AWB, SR&R*, Burra Dee Dee, Matron's Report, 1940, 4/10744.3

²⁶ *AWB, SR&R*, Cowra, Matron's Report, 1942, 4/10745.3

²⁷ *AWB, SR&R*, BellBrook, 1946-48, 4/10743.1

²⁸ Interview DF, 14/1/1994, Interview YH, 11/2/98

²⁹ *AWB, SR&R*, Boggabilla, 1946-48, 4/10745

³⁰ *AWB, SR&R*, BellBrook, 1948-1952, 4/10772

³¹ APBM, Item 12, 8/3/1939, 4/8544, Reel 2792. Managers had the main authority over expulsion orders

satisfactory, an application by her for permission to return would receive the Board's consideration.³²

Aboriginal people resisted the day-to-day humiliations meted out to them by the station Matrons who could, because of the particular role that white women were encouraged to play in surveying the domestic sphere, be more directly intrusive in 'domestic' matters than the manager. William Cooper, in a letter of protest to the Chairman of the Board about conditions at the Cumeragunga station noted especially the complaints of Aboriginal women about the Matron's authority over their lives:

The manner of Mrs McQuiggan to the women is most offensive. She goes to the homes when she likes and says what she likes. If things don't suit her she bounces the women. If they pick her up for the way she speaks the rations are stopped or, if they are old people, their curry and pepper are stopped.³³

In the absence of a trained nurse at the station Mrs McQuiggan, like other white women employed as Matrons on Aboriginal stations, was expected to take responsibility for the health of all children and women on the station.³⁴ Neglect in the role particularly disturbed Aboriginal residents as it involved their children's lives. Serious mistakes amongst under-qualified, over-worked and unknowing Matrons were not unusual. Pat Keating, wife of the school-teacher at the Brewarrina Aboriginal station in the 1960s recalls an incident where a young, in-experienced Matron on the Brewarrina station fatally under-estimated the seriousness of a child's condition. Approached by a young mother with a sick child the Matron responded:

I told you how to treat her. And there's no way you're going to town today... I know what you want to do. You want to go to that big party on the river bank. I wasn't born yesterday so don't

³² APBM, 8/3/1939, 4/8544

³³ Cooper to the Chairman of APB, Premiers Department Files, 28th November, 1938, 12/8749 B

³⁴ AWBM, 2/1940, 4/8544

try those tricks on me. Take her home; feed her. If you're still worried tomorrow, come back and see me in the morning.³⁵

The baby's parents, refused a lift to hospital or access to the station vehicle by the Matron, set off on foot in the middle of the night, to take the child into the town hospital. Pat Keating remembers: 'This is the worst part. Cathie and her boy-friend walked into town and the baby died on the way. We sat in stunned silence by the thought of that terrible journey'.³⁶ Mistakes, amongst over-worked and inexperienced Matrons could not have been unusual. Keating noted the attitude of another women employed by the Board to oversee domestic lives of Aboriginal women on the 'mission':

She did not attempt to disguise her scorn for the blacks and apparently thought that her mission in life was to keep her unfortunate charges from ever coming to the notice of the outside world. Any complaints about their treatment she regarded as treachery to the Welfare Board. It was evident that in her eyes the Aborigines existed only to support that body, not the other way around.³⁷

Station Conditions

As station Matrons were given primary responsibility for reporting on homes and families the poverty of conditions in the domestic sphere is starkly obvious. The contradictions between the Board's rhetoric around improving, 'training' and modernising Aboriginal domestic lives and the reality of conditions of stations was recorded by station Matrons in their weekly reports. In 1946, the Matron at Bellbrook reserve, for example, noted that 'the lack of water was a hardship for women wanting to keep their houses clean'.³⁸ In a later report she stated that 'water from school tanks [was] being rationed for drinking only'.³⁹ Lack of sewerage on the Board's stations caused particular problems and was a source of concern in some Matrons' reports. After some rain, the Matron at Brungle

³⁵Interview with Pat Keating, Newcastle, 20/11/1997, see also Pat Keating *Worlds Apart. Life on an Aboriginal Mission*, Hale & Iremonger, Marrickville, 1994, pp. 144-145

³⁶Not her real name. Interview with Pat Keating, see Keating, *Worlds Apart*, pp.146-147

³⁷Pat Keating, *Worlds Apart*, p. 28

³⁸*AWB, SR&R*, Bellbrook, January 1946, 4/10743.1

³⁹*AWB, SR&R*, Bellbrook, June 1946, 4/10743.1

Station reported in 1947 that there were 'no sanitary services this week owing to [the] boggy nature of ground, residents doing own sanitation'.⁴⁰ As seasons changed from summer to winter some Matrons became more forceful about the reality of impoverishment on the Board's stations:

[R]ecent heavy rains with driving winds have made most of the homes un- inhabitable, and in many even beds could not be kept dry. About twelve homes are in deplorable condition and far from weather-proof. These [homes] are not included in approved renovations and occupants are asking for something to be done... all have little children.⁴¹

The Matron's special responsibility for children and the frustration many experienced in the face of severe impoverishment were a repeated theme in some reports:

Cannot stress too strongly people's condition in these old homes. Shrunken, open boards and broken or rotted and open eaves are terrible on these days of frost and bitter winds. Infants and tiny children in all homes and too dangerous to give them their daily bath.⁴²

Some Matrons were acutely aware that domestic conditions were of such an impoverished standard that children's health and ultimately lives were threatened. The Matron at Cabbage Tree Island wrote in her report in 1947: 'one child to hospital due to living conditions. Can anything please be done to improve old homes?'⁴³ These reports tend to contradict the Board's official line that children were removed 'for their own good' from parents who 'neglected' to care for their children correctly. Cases of neglect could be found all over the State, but this was not parental neglect. As Matrons' reports vividly detail, the neglect of homes and health which impacted drastically on children, as well as their parents, was the neglect of the central administration, not the Aboriginal parents.

Placed in a position to report on the daily conditions and domestic lives of residents on Aboriginal stations, women acting as Matrons were amongst the few non-Aboriginal people

⁴⁰ *AWB, SR&R, Burnt Bridge, November 1947, 4/10744.2*

⁴¹ *AWB, SR&R, Cabbage Tree Island, June 1948, 4/10745.1*

⁴² *AWB, SR&R, Cowra (Erambie), August, 1942, 4/10745.4*

⁴³ *AWB, SR&R, Cabbage Tree Island, April, 1948, 4/10745.1*

who witnessed the full-extent of impoverished conditions on Board stations. In their weekly reports, Matrons could show the contradictions in Board policy and the economic and social circumstances experienced by Aboriginal people living on the stations.⁴⁴ But as white women, these employees were expected to symbolise the civilising potential of Western culture, as they had been understood to do within nineteenth and twentieth century imperial contexts around the world.⁴⁵ In particular, these women were instructed to carry out an assimilationist cultural agenda directed at transforming the identities and practices of Aboriginal individuals and communities across the state.

Matron Ella Hiscocks and the Cootamundra Girls Home

The job of Matron-in-charge at the Board's Cootamundra Girls Home was one of the significant roles taken by a non-Aboriginal women working for the administration. Ella Hiscocks, Matron of the Home, from 1945 to 1967 was a long-standing employee of the post-War Aborigines Welfare Board. In recognition of her 'work among Aboriginal children', at the end of her career in 1967, she was awarded a Member of the British Empire (MBE).⁴⁶ Ex-inmates of the Cootamundra Girls' Home remember her 'work among Aboriginal children' a little differently.⁴⁷ Many have mixed memories of Hiscocks, who acted partly as a 'surrogate mother' to hundreds of Aboriginal girls removed from their parents. During her time as Matron of the Cootamundra Home, Ella Hiscocks developed a substitute mother/daughter relationship with one Aboriginal ward in particular, who had been removed from her family and placed in the home when only a few months old.⁴⁸ A significant memory retained by the Aboriginal girl, now a grown woman, is of each night from about the age of six, before she went to bed the Matron would sit with her and make her pull her nose, 'stroke my nose down the side saying it would make it straight'.⁴⁹ In this small and intimate example is a clue to the ways that the rationale that led to the

⁴⁴see Gillian Cowlishaw with Anna Cole, *Murdi Stories of Bourke*, (forthcoming) for Aboriginal experiences on Brewarrina station and Bourke reserve in north west NSW

⁴⁵Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: Knapman, White Women in Fiji*, Mager, *Gender and the Making Ware*, 'The White Woman's Burden?' *Beyond the Pale*, Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable', Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, Strobel, *European Women*

⁴⁶ 'Final Episode in Outstanding Woman's Story', *The Cootamundra Herald*, Wednesday, March 22, 1967, p. 1

⁴⁷Interview D. E. tape 2, 1998, Debra Jopson, 'Home Ties', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Features, May 19, 1998, p. 13, Personal testimonies Hankins, "The Missing Links", and Link-up & Wilson, *In the Best Interest ?*

⁴⁸'Final Episode in Outstanding Woman's Story', *The Cootamundra Herald*, Wednesday, March 22, 1967, p. 1

⁴⁹Interview with C.E, Hankin, 'The Missing Link', p. 4.5.5.

establishment of homes such as Cootamundra, infused the daily actions and inter-actions of the Board's employees, such as Hiscocks. Individuals working for the administration may have believed themselves to be 'humane' in their relationships to Aboriginal wards. Yet in their day to day work, and in their attitudes towards Aboriginality, they contributed to a daily undermining of the self-perception and identity of the children and young adults in their care. Thus memories of Hiscocks' humanity are matched with accounts of emotional abuse and the unremitting repression and deprivation experienced under her strict rule.⁵⁰ One woman told how as an adult she had finally 'forgiven Matron' who had 'held her spirit captive all her adult life'.⁵¹ She recalls visiting her in a nursing home in the town of Cootamundra in 1998, where Ella Hiscocks, in a state of advanced senile dementia now resides: 'She lies there now looking very undignified' recalled the ex-ward of the state with some relief.⁵²

This double-bind in the positioning of women in the administration impacted on their self-representations and analysis of their role in the assimilationist project, as some of the details from Matron Hiscock's working life reveal. Born in rural New South Wales, Ella Hiscocks began her career in 1922 as a teacher in charge of the segregated school at the Pilliga Aboriginal Reserve, in the north west of the state. During her employment as teacher, she lived alone in town, riding out each day on a bicycle to the Aboriginal reserve. Her work there as a young, single woman, gave her a lasting impression of conditions experienced on the Aborigines Protection Board reserves during the 1920s. Her memories of the people she met and worked amongst at that time, recalled the impoverishment and ill-health experienced by many Aboriginal people resident on Protection Board reserves and stations. In an interview recorded in the 1980s she remarked that many of the Aboriginal people at the Pilliga reserve were 'half-starved'.⁵³ This first-hand impression of conditions on Aboriginal reserves, contributed in future years, to her ambivalent relationship with the administration during the course of her career with the Board.

⁵⁰Hankins, 'The Missing Link', chapter 'Punishment and Antagonism', pp. 4.4.1- 4.4.8.

⁵¹Name withheld, Interview 2, 1998

⁵²Name withheld, Interview 2, 1998

⁵³Thank you to Peter Read for recommending this interview he conducted in 1980 (before Hiscocks developed senile dementia). Interview with Ella Hiscocks by P. J. Read, 1980, lodged at Institute of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Studies (AITSIS), Listening Room, Canberra[hereafter Read Interview, 1980]

From the Pilliga reserve school, she moved to Dunoon Road, near Lismore and was again put in charge of an Aboriginal school there. She married, and partly because of her influence, her husband, a farmer's son with little prior involvement with Aboriginal people and no formal training in book-keeping or management, became manager of an Aboriginal station at Caroona, south of Quirindi, New South Wales.⁵⁴ The employment of men like Hiscocks' husband reflected the idea held by the Aborigines Protection and Welfare Boards, that all white people naturally possessed apparently 'racialised' skills for living which they could pass on to Aboriginal people.

At this time Ella Hiscocks became the Matron of the Aboriginal station at Caroona, a position only open to her because of her status as wife of the manager. From Caroona, the husband and wife team were moved to Cumeragunja by the Board, where they stayed for three years. Upon the premature death of her husband she was forced to return to work as a teacher at the Aboriginal school in Lismore. Over the next few years, she taught at Aboriginal segregated schools in Lismore, Tuncester, Yass and Coraki.⁵⁵ In 1945 Lipscombe, the chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board asked Hiscocks to fill in at the Cootamundra Girls' Home, 380 kilometers south west of Sydney for three months.⁵⁶ Under threat of a transfer 'way outback' by the Department of Education, and without recourse to her husband's income or the role of wife of a station manager, she took the position in 1945 for three months.⁵⁷

Hiscocks recalled that she took the position reluctantly when it was first offered to her.⁵⁸ She had been to the Cootamundra Girls Home once before escorting a young Aboriginal girl to the institution from an Aboriginal station and had not been impressed by what she had encountered. Of her first impression of Cootamundra Home in the early 1940s she remembered 'I could have known it by the smell of it'.⁵⁹ Despite her initial reluctance, she remained as the Matron at Cootamundra Girls Home for over twenty years, until her retirement in 1967.

⁵⁴Station Reports and Returns, Quirindi, 4/10747.4, Read Interview, 1980

⁵⁵State School Records, SR 10/6626, 110/7912, 10/8262.2, 10/5528

⁵⁶Read Interview, 1980, *AWBM*, 16/2/1945, 4/8544

⁵⁷*AWBM*, 25/4/1945, 4/8544

⁵⁸Read Interview, 1980

⁵⁹Read Interview, 1980

Working for the Board

In an interview recorded after her retirement Ella Hiscocks stressed her disagreements and frustrations with the Sydney-based Aborigines Welfare Board and the miserable economic conditions she worked under in the 1940s through to the 1960s.⁶⁰ The long hours she worked, her heavy work-load, the isolated geographic location of the Home and the slow bureaucratic procedures associated with the centralised Welfare Board were the focus of her recollections of her working life in the early 1980s.⁶¹ In her time at the Cootamundra Home, Hiscocks was responsible for an average of forty girls at any one time, ranging in age from as young as a few months to sixteen years old.⁶²

The Home itself was in the old town hospital, a feature that disturbed Hiscocks and engendered well-remembered feelings of isolation.⁶³ The school room where she taught each day had literally been the old isolation ward of the hospital and Hiscocks remembered this with dismay: 'It was terrible... It was a terrible job to try and work it on your own'.⁶⁴ Aboriginal women incarcerated in the institution as young girls also recall the associations between the isolation of the old hospital and sickness and death.⁶⁵ One of the most feared punishments, for example, was being locked alone in what was believed to have been the hospital morgue.⁶⁶ Several woman recall being traumatised as girls by long hours spent locked in that section of the building as punishment by Hiscocks and other staff members.⁶⁷

⁶⁰Read Interview, 1980

⁶¹Read Interview, 1980

⁶² *AWB SR&R*, Cootamundra, 4/10745.2, see also Link-Up & Wilson, *In the Best Interests*, Hankins, 'The Missing Links'

⁶³Read interview, 1980

⁶⁴Read interview, 1980

⁶⁵Interview DE, tape 2, 1998, Debra Jopson, 'Home Ties', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Features, May 19, 1998, p. 13, Personal testimonies Hankins, 'The Missing Links', and Link-up & Wilson, *In the Best Interest ?*, Interview DE, YH, 1997, 1998 (names withheld)

⁶⁶A small building, away from the main building was generally believed by the girls held at the institution to be the hospital's old morgue, see Hankins, 1982, p. 4.4.3

⁶⁷Interview DE, YH, 1997, 1998 (names withheld)

As well as the many tasks required in the day to day running of the institution, Hiscocks remembered her broader role in the maintenance of each girl's 'moral welfare' which, she argued required vigilance and a ceaseless work roster.⁶⁸ She remembered herself alone in her responsibilities, stressing that while all the other staff would only work their set hours she was on call 'night and day'.⁶⁹ In her description of the exhausting and ceaseless nature of her work within the Home Hiscocks represented herself as a victim of the Board's restricted budget and time-consuming bureaucratic processes. Reflecting on her status within the administration Ella Hiscocks stressed her dependency on what she remembered as an inefficient central administration. She remembered in particular the way the bureaucratic processes of the Board interacted with the mainstream, 'white', welfare administration to frustrate her efforts to improve life for the girls at the Home.

The supply of both food and clothing at the Cootamundra Girls' Home came from mainstream state welfare agencies.⁷⁰ Food was ordered each week from a central government store, and Hiscocks had to submit each week exact quotes for every individual item she wanted.⁷¹ Hiscocks remembered this angrily as it made for an unnecessary amount of work on top of her already excessive daily responsibilities.⁷² Having to order each item and wait for delivery from a central government store over-complicated the process of buying food, a process which could, if Matron Hiscocks had been entrusted by the Board with her own account, have been bought more simply in the nearby town of Cootamundra. Clothing for the Home was supplied by the Prisons Department. As well as being of poor quality it was often inappropriate for the young girls living at the Cootamundra institution. Shoes, for example, were infrequently too big and Hiscocks recalls on more than one occasion that they 'didn't match up'.⁷³ Even in organising sport and recreation for the girls Hiscocks remembers being hamstrung by a central bureaucracy:

⁶⁸Read interview, 1980

⁶⁹Read interview, 1980

⁷⁰*AWB SR&R*, Cootamundra, Monthly Returns, 1947-1948, 4/10745.2

⁷¹*AWB SR&R*, Cootamundra, Monthly Returns, 1947-1948, 4/10745.2

⁷²Read interview, 1980

⁷³Read interview, 1980

I'll tell you something else that made me mad... the children liked sport and I had to send down to the Board for permission to take them anywhere... They'd take a long time to get back... sometimes the children would miss out because of it.⁷⁴

Working in isolation from the Sydney-based Board, Hiscocks formed other allegiances outside of the central administration. In seeking to improve the clothing ration the Matron recalled turning to authority figures in the local community. She remembers prevailing, unsuccessfully, on the local town Doctor to get him to add his weight to her complaints to the Board about the poor quality of clothing issued to the girls at the Home.⁷⁵ Hiscocks did receive support from locally based professional and religious women's clubs during her employment at the Cootamundra Home. In an article published in the *Cootamundra Herald* on the day of her retirement, Hiscocks praised the Cootamundra section of the Business and Professional Women's Association, the Country Women's Association and the Church of England's Women's Guild.⁷⁶ Of these organisations Hiscocks said, 'I only had to mention something I wanted, and one or more organisation would respond'.⁷⁷ Hiscocks' support from local women's organisations indicates the awareness and endorsement of the work of the Cootamundra Girls' Home amongst prominent women in the rural community.

Clean and Moral

Dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt,
it exists in the eye of the beholder
- Mary Douglas, 1978⁷⁸

Keep your bodies and minds clean, for by doing so you will help to form a wholesome personality.
Assume the dignity and carriage which are your heritage and your right
- Mrs Irene 'Inspector' English, 1955⁷⁹

⁷⁴Read Interview, 1980

⁷⁵Read interview, 1980, see *AWB Minutes*, 1949, item 4, Matron's request, 4/8545

⁷⁶(no author stated), 'Final Episode in Outstanding Woman's Story', *The Cootamundra Herald*, Wednesday, 22/3/1967, 1967, p. 1

⁷⁷*The Cootamundra Herald*, 22/3/1967, p. 1

⁷⁸Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London & Henley, 1978 (ed), p. 2

⁷⁹'Message to our People', *Dawn: A Magazine for the Aboriginal People of NSW*, March 1955, p 2

Amongst Matron Hiscocks' complaints about the poverty of the administration and her ceaseless workload, two common themes emerge from her memories that are particularly significant to her gendered experience of working for the colonial administration. Hiscocks' memories of the Home frequently revolve around two key themes - 'cleanliness' and 'morality'. Frequent reference to the morality of 'cleanliness' and the possibility of Aboriginal girls 'going bad' or 'getting into trouble with the opposite sex' form a central theme in Matron Hiscocks' memories.⁸⁰

From her very first impressions - that she would have 'known it by the smell of it' - Hiscocks ordered her memories of her work at the Home through the prism of cleanliness. Hiscocks remembered some of her victories at the Home, in improving the standard of education and living conditions in these terms. During her time as Matron of Cootamundra, Hiscocks conducted a concerted campaign to get the Aboriginal girls from the Home accepted at the local 'white' state school. She recalled lobbying the Principal of the local high school, the local Parents and Citizens group and the Department of Education's school inspector until she was successful in convincing the school to take the fifth and sixth form girls, and eventually girls of all ages in 1950.⁸¹ One of her most persistent and persuasive arguments for why the school should take the girls from her Home, said Hiscocks, was that 'her girls' were as 'clean as local white girls'. She recalled that she finally got the girls accepted at the school after she had asked the school inspector: 'why the students can't attend the local school? They're *cleaner* than a lot of the white girls'.⁸²

In framing her argument to the school inspector in these terms Hiscocks was engaging in what Mary Douglas, in her seminal text *Purity and Danger*, describes as a 'dialogue of claims and counter-claims to status' in which ideas about cleanliness, dirt and pollution are crucial.⁸³ Wherever ideas of dirt are prominent, argues Douglas, their analysis discloses a play upon 'profound themes' - reflection on dirt involves, amongst other things, reflection

⁸⁰Read interview, 1980, Matron Hiscocks at *NSW Joint Parliamentary Inquiry upon Aborigines Welfare, 1965-67*, 4th session of 41st Parliament, NSW Joint volumes of Papers, vol. 5, NQ 3228.94401 8 SRL

⁸¹Read interview, 1980, *AWBM*, 13/4/1948, 4/8545, *AWBM*, 25/4/1949, 4/8545. In later years the school began taking girls of all ages from the institution.

⁸²My emphasis. Read interview, 1980.

⁸³Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 3

on the relation of 'order to disorder... form to formlessness'.⁸⁴ In Douglas' analysis dirt is 'matter out of place'.⁸⁵ Such a formulation implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order:

Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.⁸⁶

Douglas argues that our 'pollution behaviour' is the reaction which 'condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications'.⁸⁷ In this case, the 'cherished classifications' are Matron's own self-presentation, and self-identification, as the victimised, not as the victimiser, and the idea that the Board acted in the best interests of the children it removed from their families. How did the Matron's own sense of order interact with the assimilationist goal of re-ordering the lives and identities of Aboriginal wards? As an agent of the state, working at the 'boundary line' between black and white children, the Matron reflected a wider cultural system of classification. Her memories and associations with cleanliness and dirt are revealing of the system or order of beliefs that structured the processes at the core of the assimilationist policies and practices of the Aborigines Welfare Board. The Matron's exhausting, and futile efforts to keep the young Aboriginal girls at Cootamundra 'clean' and free from dirt, coincided with a bureaucratic system that identified black as dirty and in need of expunging and assimilating into a white culture and identity.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, have combined the insights of Douglas with the writings of Bakhtin and Bourdieu to relate attitudes towards 'pollution' and 'purity' to the production of identity and status within society.⁸⁸ They argue that the process of identity construction, and the wider process of categorisation of the 'other' is intimately related to attempts to 'purify' and cleanse. In short they argue that the 'ordering mechanisms of social classification' are intimately related to ideas about cleanliness and filth:

⁸⁴ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 44

⁸⁵ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 3

⁸⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 35

⁸⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 4

⁸⁸ Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1986

Exclusion necessary to the formation of social identity... is simultaneously a *production* at the level of the Imaginary, and a production... of a complex hybrid fantasy emerging out of the very attempt to demarcate boundaries, to unite and purify the social collective.⁸⁹

The Matron's particular role in the production and demarcation of boundaries between white and black, clean and dirty, coincided with the broader assimilationist project of the state, and ideas about white femininity. Cleaning was women's work and in the context of the racialised discourse about the 'deprivation' and 'filth' of Aboriginality, Matron Hiscocks had a big task to perform. In Mary Douglas' terms, under such a set of conditions eliminating dirt is not a 'negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment'.⁹⁰ The constant dirt experienced by the Matron offended against the order of her world and to the order she was expected to impart in the world of her Aboriginal charges.⁹¹ Efforts against dirt were thus a 'positive' effort to organise the environment.⁹² The Matron strove hard to participate in the constant cleaning and constant re-ordering of the identities of the wards of the state, entrusted to her surveillance and supervision. In chasing dirt, in constantly seeking to tidy, the Matron was not simply governed by an anxiety to purify, but was attempting to positively re-order her environment - and the girls identity - seeking to make both conform to an ideal of white female domesticity being promoted as the key to the successful assimilation of Aboriginal people.

In the example of schooling, above, the girls' cleanliness represented for Matron her ability to civilize her charges adequately for entrance into the mainstream education system. Maintaining such a level of cleanliness was a constant, never-ending battle for Hiscocks. She remembered angrily that to get to school each morning the Board supplied the Home with an old covered truck, 'liked they used in the war'.⁹³ Each morning on the way to school the dust thrown up on the children in the back of the open truck threatened Matron's tireless efforts to keep the children clean. When interviewed in the 1980s, Read commented to her that, in winter, the girls must have been very cold on the back of the

⁸⁹ Stallybrass & White, *The Politics and Poetics*, pp. 193-194

⁹⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 2

⁹¹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 16

⁹² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 2

⁹³ Read interview, 1980

open truck. Matron Hiscocks appears to get angry with the line of questioning and she cuts short his comment pre-emptorily replying: 'you know what the dust is like. By the time they got down to school their navy blue tunics would be grey'.⁹⁴

Throughout the interview, in her presentation of herself as victim to the Board's vicissitudes Matron Hiscocks seems happy to respond to the questions about her work conditions and difficulties with the Board. The interviewers obvious interest in discussing the bad conditions experienced at the Home colludes with the Matron's self-representation as a victim to under-staffing and centralised control. But the question about the cold seems to disturb Matron Hiscocks' reminiscences of her own victimisation at the hands of the inefficient Aborigines Welfare Board. However, the issue of her positioning within the administration, and the impoverished conditions experienced by the girls in the Home leads in this case to her focus on the dust, rather than to a criticism of the ambitions of the Sydney-based male Board. Her response to Read's question by alluding to the dust shows something of the way that, in Douglas' words 'uncleaness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained'.⁹⁵ The 'pattern' in this instance was Hiscocks' belief that the 'polluting' factors which interrupted the Board's best efforts to uplift the girls was the random element of dust or dirt. At the same time as Matron was working ceaselessly, day and night to civilise and whiten the girls in her care, stroking their Aboriginal noses to turn them straight for example, these same girls were driven into town on the open back of the truck, like cattle, like 'blacks'. It was the dust that disrupted the pattern of Matron's beliefs about the civilising influence of the Board and of her own beneficent interventions in the lives of the girls in her Home.

The focus of Matron Hiscocks' complaints about the administration was directed at a generalised sense of 'over-work', or random dust. Direct criticism of Board members, or policy itself was not a part of the Matron's discourse. A widow throughout the twenty-two years she worked as Matron of the Cootamundra Home, Hiscocks fondly remembered some of the men working for the Board. Inspector Donaldson, loathed and feared amongst Aboriginal people throughout New South Wales for his tactics of abduction,⁹⁶ was, in her

⁹⁴Read interview, 1980

⁹⁵Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 40

⁹⁶Horner, *Bill Ferguson*, p. 7, 18 and Hankins, 'The Missing Links', p. 2.1.13

estimation, 'a fine old gentleman... did very good work amongst them'. (Her husband had applied for the job of Inspector held by Donaldson, but died before he could begin work in that role).⁹⁷ Her loyalty and evident fondness of the men working for the Board is in an ambivalent relationship to the anger and frustration evident in her memories of the ceaseless workload to which she was subjected, the slowness of the central bureaucracy to support her basic needs such as food and clothing, and her persistent lack of isolation from the administration.

Her inability to control the dust that turned her clean girls dirty before they reached the school gate, epitomised Hiscocks' general sense of being unable to exert effective control over her environment: a feeling mirrored and exacerbated by the impact of working within the constraints of the centralised over-arching structure imposed by the Aborigines Welfare Board and its own efforts to exercise standardised bureaucratic control. Anything that increased the level of 'dirt' also increased the Matron's workload, whose job it was to 'clean' the Aboriginal girls to make them acceptable to white society. Her constant fight against dust and dirt thus represented for Hiscocks an ideological struggle that is inseparable, in her account, from her very real struggle against the deprivation and endless work she was required to do in the Home.

As with her battle against 'dirt' the pressures of Hiscocks' work within an inefficient bureaucracy frustrated the Matron in her efforts to maintain strict supervision over the sexual experiences and 'moral welfare' of her charges. As the only employee at the Home who could drive, one of her duties was to travel out to country stations to meet prospective employers of young apprentices when they reached the age of fifteen.⁹⁸ Due to work pressures at the Home, she remembered that she had to abandon the practice of interviewing a prospective employer before taking the young 'apprentice' to work for them: 'In the end I'd take the girl out with me and if everything was in order I'd leave her there'.⁹⁹ She remembered only one occasion where she decided against leaving the young woman. Asked if she ever got the feeling the young apprentices were over-worked or abused in some way she replied flatly, 'No'. Ex-apprentices sent out to work as domestic servants recall that

⁹⁷Hankin, 'The Missing Links', p. 2.1.13

⁹⁸ Read interview, 1980

⁹⁹ Read interview, 1980

often the Matron was the only contact they had with someone outside the household they worked in, whom they could tell of the physical, and often sexual abuse they experienced in these positions.¹⁰⁰ It seems then, that Hiscocks' workload militated against her enforcing the high 'moral standards' she was expected to oversee. Yet Hiscocks expressed an interest in the role she sought to play in 'reforming the girls' and ironically saw the removal of young Aboriginal girls from sexual threat as one of the main reasons they were taken from their Aboriginal communities.¹⁰¹ She recalled in detail the time she was instructed to accompany a young woman to a remote Aboriginal station, where she was to be left, in punishment for repeatedly running away from domestic service positions. Hiscocks remembered her own, and the young woman's distress. The apprentice, recalled Hiscocks 'cried all night' and the Matron recalled that she 'cried too'.¹⁰² By morning, Hiscocks, in a rare moment of open disobedience, had decided against the Board's instructions, and refused to leave the young woman at the Aboriginal station. In explaining her actions Hiscocks said: 'I couldn't have left her... I would have felt like I was throwing her to the dogs. She was just of that age and all the boys would have been after her'.¹⁰³ Ex-apprentices have since told how being returned to an Aboriginal station, although disorienting and frightening after years away, could provide a much needed source of community after the isolation exploitation of domestic service.¹⁰⁴ In this instance, Hiscocks sent the young woman to work as a domestic servant for a friend of the hers in the country. This example is revealing of the Matron's perception of a predatory Aboriginal male sexuality on Aboriginal stations, and also shows something of her merged identity with the young Aboriginal children and women in her charge. But to 'save her' from those Aboriginal 'boys' Hiscocks had sent the young woman to another domestic service position, isolated once again from an Aboriginal community.

Hiscocks' fears about Aboriginal stations and reserves, expressed in sexual terms, are contradicted by her own experience of working on these stations before she was married:

¹⁰⁰Interview VG, 1994, Personal testimonies Hankins, "The Missing Links", and Link-up & Wilson, *In the Best Interest ?*, Tucker, *If Everyone Cared*

¹⁰¹Read interview, 1980

¹⁰²Read interview, 1980

¹⁰³Read interview, 1980

¹⁰⁴Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot'

Very seldom... you'd come across a girl who'd get in trouble on the settlement and have an infant or anything like that you know. The law amongst them was very strict on that count.¹⁰⁵

Hiscocks appeared to have had no understanding of the gendered dimension of the removal policy or the long-term cultural and social purpose furthered by the Board in removing girls from their communities. While assimilation policy stressed the importance of training Aboriginal women to 'merge' with whites, Hiscocks commented, contradicting her expressed fears about Aboriginal male sexuality: 'The pity is few of them marry the dark men. You know the full-bloods are very upstanding. I know only one girl who married a dark man, he was a Kinchela boy'.¹⁰⁶ To justify the separation of Aboriginal girls from their mothers, Hiscocks relied heavily on nostalgic recollections of the 'progress' made by 'her' girls and on ambivalent, but largely negative attitudes towards Aboriginal mothering. For example, she could express confusion and grudging acknowledgement of the importance of their Aboriginal mothers to 'her' girls:

One girl, she became a trained nurse... her mother came, she was a terrible woman, but she came to the Home and that girl saw her coming up the path and ran towards her and threw her arms around her and made such a fuss of her... she's still a mother you see... but that girl, afterwards she worked with the Flying Doctors as a nurse for a long while.¹⁰⁷

However, in this recollection the strong, loving emotions felt by the daughter for the 'terrible woman' were not as important as her success and individual progress as a nurse with the Flying Doctors. In another instance reflecting on the role of the Board in removing children from Aboriginal stations, Hiscocks remarked: 'The parents were never asked. The police would come and take the girls... it was a terrible thing to have done'.¹⁰⁸ The confusion between her own experience working on Aboriginal communities, and the pervasive ideology which emphasised Aboriginal women's worthlessness as mothers, the dangers of 'moral degradation', and predatory nature of Aboriginal male sexuality form a contradictory mix in the Matron's memories. Describing her time as a teacher on Aboriginal reserves, she remarked:

¹⁰⁵Read interview, 1980

¹⁰⁶Read interview, 1980

¹⁰⁷Read interview, 1980

¹⁰⁸Read interview, 1980

[T]hat's one thing with a settlement, you never saw any of them being thrashed. The only unkindness was there was no food and that wasn't their fault. There was no food... a lot of malnutrition. You were restricted you couldn't give the people rations except the old people unless they were working on the settlement, there was no money around anywhere those days.¹⁰⁹

Her lived experience of Aboriginal communities was mixed with, but continually contradicted by a 'pattern' or system of meaning in which Aboriginality was an inferior identity, and whiteness the goal and desire. Asked again about the causes of malnutrition amongst the Aboriginal people she worked with, she replied it was because, 'they only thought of today'. Thus despite her own experiences of life on Aboriginal reserves which she contrasted favourably with institutional life, she concluded ambivalently in the late 1960s:

I do not think that any institution can equal the natural home life. But these children are not getting a natural home life. Because dark people naturally live unto the day they do not look after tomorrow even, and very often they would be hungry and they would not get a natural life in that respect. I think they are very much better off in an institution than they would be in some of their home lives.¹¹⁰

These contradictory statements are evocative of a consciousness caught between a rationalisation for the role she played in the separation of children from their families, and an understanding of Aboriginal communities gained from her years in the field. Yet her sense of Aboriginality as an inferior identity framed her conscious views about her role in the systematic removal of Aboriginal girls from their families and communities.

Towards the end of her long career at the Cootamundra Girls Home in 1966 Hiscocks came before the Parliamentary inquiry 'upon Aborigines Welfare' touring New South Wales (discussed in chapter seven).¹¹¹ The theme of young Aboriginal women's sexuality was persistent in both the questions and answers exchanged between Hiscocks and the

¹⁰⁹Read interview, 1980

¹¹⁰Read interview, 1980

¹¹¹ *The Joint Committee of the Legislative Council & Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines Welfare, Part I- Report & Minutes of the Proceedings, Parliamentary Papers, vol. 5, 4th session 41st Parliament, 1966*

parliamentary representatives.¹¹² Their exchange is evidence of the way that, as recent post-colonial writing has argued, sexual control is fundamental to the way racial policies are secured and colonial projects carried out.¹¹³ (see Introduction). The committee appeared to be seeking an efficient, 'modern' and mechanistic way of dealing with what appeared to them to be a self-evident 'problem' - the sexuality of single Aboriginal women.¹¹⁴

These girls are going to Sydney, finding a job and ending up in bother... Where is this thing to be tackled? What machinery have we set up to give these girls guidance?¹¹⁵

The committee asked Hiscocks to comment on what happened to the girls when they left the Cootamundra Home. Hiscocks replied that all the girls ended up pregnant within a short time after leaving the Home: 'The same thing happens to the whole lot of them, they go to Sydney and in no time they are in trouble, as I told you, and the baby arrives.'¹¹⁶ When questioned if the fathers are 'white boys', Hiscocks replied: 'Mostly the whites, a terrible lot of the sailors I think. They meet every boat that comes in pretty well'. In Hiscocks' explanation it was the lecherousness of white men that created the circumstances under which the young women got pregnant: 'you only have to get on a train, and a few men will get in the train and they will never let up on them if you are not with them... they are only prey for the men there'.¹¹⁷

Members of the Parliamentary inquiry ignored Hiscocks suggestion that white men showed an extra interest in young Aboriginal women and attempted to get to the bottom of the girls' 'moral degeneration' upon leaving the home.¹¹⁸ In the ensuing questions and answers they concluded that the number of girls 'getting into bother is tied up with intellectual capacity and the fact that 'most Aborigines are amoral not immoral'.¹¹⁹ Dismissing her

¹¹² *Joint Committee*, pp. 508-515

¹¹³ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*

¹¹⁴ For further discussion on 'single-ness' and race, see Catriona Elder, "It was Hard for us to Marry Aboriginal": Some meanings of Singleness for Aboriginal Women in Australia in the 1930s', *Lilith*, no. 8 (Summer 1993), pp. 114-138

¹¹⁵ Mr C.J Earl, *Joint Committee*, 1966, p. 9222

¹¹⁶ Hiscocks, *Joint Committee*, 1966, p. 9164

¹¹⁷ Hiscocks, *Joint Committee*, 1966, p. 9165

¹¹⁸ *Joint Committee*, 1966, pp. 9094-9276

¹¹⁹ *Joint Committee*, 1966 p. 9019

own, earlier opinion that white men were culpable for much of the 'bother' the girls got themselves in, Hiscocks reverted to a culturally-essentialist explanation of the young women's high pregnancy rates concluding that '... amongst aborigines themselves there is no courtship... I do not think it worries them at all'.¹²⁰ The confusion between her experience of the events she described and the way she represented these to the Committee is a significant feature of the Matron's recorded testimony and of her memories of her work in the Home.

Directly contradictory statements are frequent in Hiscocks' recorded testimony, underlining the ambiguities of her position within the administration. She was part of a system which believed Aboriginality itself was an aberrant condition to be replaced with an 'assimilated' identity suitable for white society yet at times her own emotional connection to the 'girls' in her care, and her previous experience as a single woman working on Aboriginal reserves contradicted her official role. Her memories of her time at the Home, and the contemporary testimony recorded during the 1960s reflect and enact the particular shifting intersections between 'race', 'class' and 'gender'. Hiscocks is a contradictory and complex character, her memories revealing of the impossibility of acting humanely while supporting the systematic denial of Aboriginal culture and identity, in the context of a policy of assimilation. Matron Hiscocks' long experience with Aboriginal people and her limited sympathy with them, were in constant conflict with her role as a functionary of the Board. As such Hiscocks embodied some of the most abiding contradictions in the 'colonial' administration's economy of white female labour. She was protected by racial privilege but not by economic security. She was inferior in the gender hierarchy and class hierarchy of mainstream white culture but superior in racial hierarchy. She lodged among 'black girls', on their way to a life of service, but she was not one with them. The isolation experienced by the Matron, the slowness with which central office responded to her requests, and the indignities of being made constantly to rely on outside state agencies make her in many ways an abject figure. Marginal, in terms of power to control her working life and conditions, but necessary to the colonial state, she is representative of the boundary and limits of women's role in the domestication of colonisation.¹²¹ As a final, ironic addendum,

¹²⁰Hiscocks, *Joint Committee*, 1966, pp. 599-605

¹²¹On similarities with role of white governess in South African colonies, see Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, pp. 258-300

the Aboriginal 'daughter' she adopted at the Home as a baby, and towards whom she had shown her most human affection, became, as an adult one of the first and most outspoken public figures to expose and damn the policy of Aboriginal child removal, and the use of institutions such as Cootamundra in the state-sanctioned and systematic destruction of Aboriginal family and community.¹²² Ella Hiscocks is a thought-provoking character, an embodiment of the 'peculiar intimacies' that form the subject of much post-colonial study (see Introduction).

Teachers and the Aborigines Welfare Board

This final section focuses on women as teachers in the Aboriginal school located at the Kinchela Home for Boys. The examples below show how constructions of white femininity interacted to undermine some women's attempts to criticise conditions experienced by Aboriginal children in the 'care' of the administration, and to challenge the Board's authority. In 1947 a Miss Nellie Young, the assistant school-teacher at Kinchela Aboriginal Boys' Home was accused by the manager of Kinchela, Mr Rossiter of interfering 'repeatedly' with the running of the Kinchela Home.¹²³ In turn Miss Young, the school teacher, was requested by the Superintendent of Primary Education, to 'submit a report regarding the many accusations made by Mr Rossiter'.¹²⁴ In her reply to the Superintendent she described the violent treatment of young boys in the Kinchela Home and her own 'humane' feelings which had led to her 'interference':

I heard from my class-room the screams of a boy in the kitchen of the Boys' Training Home. He was being corporally punished. His cries were so heart-rending that, acting as would any person laying claim to humane feelings, I went over to the Home and protested to those who were responsible for its infliction against such punishment. I also suggested that there are surely other methods of dealing with the boys when they are disobedient... On two other occasions I had seen or heard treatment of the boys which did not appear to me to be justifiable, regardless of the offense committed.¹²⁵

¹²²Coral Edwards joined with Peter Read to start *Link-Up*, an organisation that works to reunite stolen generations of Aboriginal children with their families

¹²³Mr Rossiter, Manager Kinchela to Mr Lipscombe, Superintendent *AWB*, August 21, 1947, A 2471, Chief Secretaries Department

¹²⁴Miss Young, Teacher, *Kinchela* Aboriginal School, Complaints regarding Administration, A47/2471

¹²⁵Miss Young to Superintendent, 12/11/1947, *AWB*, *Special Bundles*

In arguing that she acted 'as would any person laying claim to humane feeling' Nellie Young was suggesting that the manager at Kinchela could not, in fact, 'lay claim' to such feelings. In order to contest existing methods of punitive control being undertaken at the Home the school teacher drew on the traditional feminine attributes of sympathy and feeling as her defense against 'interfering'.

Miss Young was supported in her criticisms of the running of the Kinchela Boy's Home by the Teacher-in-charge of the school, Miss Cooke. Cooke had already angered the manager of Kinchela with her varying criticisms of his administration, and his treatment of the boys at the Home.¹²⁶ She had tried to show that like the young Aboriginal women on Board stations who were being 'trained' by performing un-paid domestic work, boys at Kinchela were treated as an un-paid child labour supply for essential services around the Home.¹²⁷ In 1946 the school teacher wrote to the Superintendent of the Aborigines Welfare Board to inform him that the manager was keeping senior boys back from school every Monday to do the laundry: 'The home has been without a laundress for nine months... you will understand that the boys are missing valuable lessons, is there anything that can be done to relieve this situation?'¹²⁸

In challenging the idea that un-paid menial labour was as good for the Aboriginal boys as a morning in the class-room, Cooke highlighted the distance between the official emphasis on the 'training' of Aboriginal wards for assimilation and civilisation and the way they were treated inside the institutions. The Board did nothing to rectify the situation. Letters to her own Department of Public Instruction were also ignored.¹²⁹ In other matters raised by the two female school teachers there is evidence that the Department of Education ignored the teacher's requests and, in some cases openly sided with the Manager of Kinchela. In one example, Miss Cooke engaged in a protracted series of requests to the Manager of Kinchela, to get access to a key to unlock a room attached to the school house. In the teacher's

¹²⁶Mr Rossiter, Manager Kinchela to Mr Lipscombe, Superintendent *AWB*, August 21, 1947, A 2471, Chief Secretaries Department

¹²⁷Miss Cooke to Superintendent of Primary Education, 12/11/47, *AWB*, *Special Bundles*

¹²⁸Miss Cooke to *AWB*, 2/2/46

¹²⁹Miss Cooke to Superintendent of Primary Education, 12/11/47, Files 9/2406.4, A51/1079

words, 'we could well do with the room for a store-room, we have none'.¹³⁰ The manager refused her the key repeatedly, because he 'wishes to retain charge of this building' in Miss Cooke's opinion, and resented her authority over the school. After repeated requests for the key from the teacher were refused by Rossiter, he referred the matter to the District Inspector of Schools who wrote back directly, suggesting he 'take no notice of Miss Cooke's request' and that there was no necessity to again forward 'this childish request'.¹³¹ Mr Rossiter was happy to explain to the Aborigines Welfare Board that in other matters of dispute between himself and the school teachers the local school Inspector took his side:

During the past six months both Miss Cooke and Miss Young have interfered repeatedly in the administration of the Home. They have attempted to give instructions to the Home staff, criticised the way the boys have been dressed, have interfered with the work of the attendants, entered Home buildings and numerous other things. Miss Young has also charged myself and others on the staff with cruelty to the boys and admits she discussed and informed people outside the Home that the boys were not well treated. I have informed the local School Inspector about this interference and he states that he will take action if the matter is official brought to his notice by you or his Department. I object strongly to these actions of both Miss Cooke and Miss Young and request that the matter be referred to their Department and they be instructed to confine their activities to their teaching in school and during school periods.¹³²

Asked by the Aborigines Welfare Board to respond to Mr Rossiter's accusation that she 'discussed and informed people outside the Home that the boys are not treated well', Miss Young referred, in her defense, to her inability to contain her emotional expression and described in detail the abuse she argued was experienced daily by boys at the Home:

I was standing on the road outside the Home when I distinctly heard the cut of a cane, followed immediately by a scream of pain from a child. I judged this to have been repeated 15 or 16 times. (The following Monday the child himself told me he had received 15 cuts of the cane. This was administered by Mr Rossiter.) A minute or so after this ceased, the bus to Kempsey arrived. I was

¹³⁰ Miss Cooke to Superintendent, A51/1079, p. 2

¹³¹ Miss Cooke, Teacher-in-Charge, *Kinchela* Aboriginal School, Complaints regarding Administration, 9/2406.4, A47/2471, Mr Rossiter to Superintendent, Dec 16th, 1947, *AWB*

¹³² Mr Rossiter, Manager *Kinchela* to Mr Lipscombe, *Superintendent AWB*, August 21, 1947, A 2471, 9/2406.4, Chief Secretaries Department

so disturbed by this incident, that I could not keep back the tears. Therefore, when I reached Kempsey it was necessary for me to give to my friends who met me some explanation of my red and swollen eyes, and general sadness of countenance.¹³³

Miss Young, crying to herself on the bus, believed that her expression of feelings would serve as her defense against the Manager's allegations of her 'interference'. It was a similar response given by Ella Hiscocks recalling how she had 'cried her eyes out' all night before deciding to openly disobey the instructions of the central Board. The defense of sympathy and feeling would be turned against the female school teachers as their on-going criticisms became increasingly offensive to the order and self-representation of the male Board and personnel.

While Miss Cooke maintained a critical correspondence with the Board during her time as Teacher-in-charge at the Kinchela Home, in defending her actions to both the Education Department and the Aborigines Welfare Board she stressed the emotional impact of impoverished conditions at Kinchela on herself, and her assistant teacher of working under the conditions:

I have certainly criticised the way the boys have been dressed for school at times, for on many occasions the clothing has been so dirty and ragged that both Miss Young and I have felt depressed at having to teach children in such attire.¹³⁴

In one letter she apologised for 'hard feelings which seem to have arisen', between her and the manager and reported to Superintendent Kendall from the Department of Education, that she would 'certainly do my best to overcome same'.¹³⁵ But more 'hard feelings' arose between the Manager and Miss Cooke when she attempted to stop the removal of one of the young boys - accused of having an aberrant sexuality - from the Home to a mental hospital. Miss Cooke's objections to the child's fate were reported by the Manager, who complained of her attempts to directly challenge his authority and the authority of other officials: 'I have informed Miss Cooke that... such interference is a criticism of myself...

¹³³Nellie Young to Superintendent, re 'Mr Rossiter's Letter', IC/PFS 47/138/34684, 9/2406.4

¹³⁴Miss Cooke, 24/12/47

¹³⁵Miss Cooke to Superintendent of Primary Education, 12/11/1947, A47/2471, 9/2406.4, p. 2

also of the G.M.O, Dr Quinn who signed the certificate and also of the Superintendent to whom this matter was referred.¹³⁶ In Rossiter's complaints against Cooke to the central office, he emphasised her emotionalism and what he saw as her over-involvement with the boys. He complained that Miss Cooke was too empathetic with the children, and that this interfered with her good judgement: 'She objects to the transfer of this boy and considers he should never have been sent to such a place... She informs me she cannot sleep for thinking of him and has had three nightmares due to same'.¹³⁷

In this context the teacher's compassion for the child was represented as a sign of ill-judgement and disorder. In defending himself against both women's allegations to the Board, the Manager represented his arguments as based on 'scientific', rational explanations to dismiss all their charges as 'baseless'. Mr Rossiter turned to a laboured and exact, 'scientific' explanation of the events to dismiss the women's accusations:

With reference to Miss Young's charge of cruelty... the full facts of this case... Miss Young claims she was standing on the road outside the Home and heard a cut of a cane followed by a scream of pain. This was judged to have been repeated fifteen or sixteen times. I have carefully measured the shortest distance from the road to the room where the boy was punished ['with three cuts on the hand'] and the minimum distance is 200 (two hundred) feet with large building and a number of trees in between the two points. I claim that no person could hear the "cut of a cane" at a distance of 200 feet and that this shows deliberate and provocative lying.¹³⁸

Mr Rossiter's defense relied on numbers, facts and measurement. How could such accuracy be faulted by two over-emotional women? In the end Miss Cooke's objections to the young man's incarceration in a mental hospital, and her outrage at the poverty and ill-treatment of the boys, were ignored by senior personnel in the Education Department. Mr Rossiter, the manager, was encouraged by the inaction of the Department of Education to whom both school teachers had written with their criticisms of the Home and standard of education. The Superintendent of the Aborigines Welfare Board supported Rossiter's

¹³⁶Mr Rossiter to Mr Lipscombe, 'Urgent', August 21, 1947, A 2471

¹³⁷Mr Rossiter, Aboriginal Boys' Home, Kinchela, to *AWB*, 16/12/47

¹³⁸Mr Rossiter to *AWB*, 16/12/1947, A47/2471, p. 2

defense on the grounds that the women had no supporting evidence for their claims and that the Department of Education had chosen not to act:

It is my opinion that the charges made by either of the Teachers cannot be substantiated and should therefore be disregarded. In the circumstances, it is recommended that no further action be taken at the present time, or until some comment is received from the Education Department.¹³⁹

'Some comment' was received from the Education Department shortly after - the Chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board noted:

Mr Inspector Jacobs (Education Department) called on me today and in general conversation he made passing reference to the above matter. He indicated that, so far as Miss Cooke is concerned, he could handle any of her complaints and entreaties.¹⁴⁰

The final word on the matter came from Mr Rossiter, the Manager. His response to the accusations of the teachers showed that, quite simple, their femininity disqualified them from being able to teach or 'interfere' with his administration of the Home. In his own emotive response the manager concluded:

I claim that... the charges are baseless and spiteful and that in neither incident do they claim to have seen anything but that they heard the swish of a cane 200 feet away or listened to the tales of boys who are not "George Washingtons" and that because they are the only ones who "love the dear little boys" every one else are "fiends and sadists". It is quite apparent that these are the ravings of two spiteful and hysterical old maids. I would like it to be noted that I have always stressed the desirability of a Male Teacher for the boys.¹⁴¹

Finally, the example of these two women, who attempted to criticise the Welfare Board's institutions from 'inside', reveals the collusion between the Board and the Department of Public Instruction who casually and consistently defended a male staff member of the Aboriginal Welfare Board against the 'hysterical' accusations of their own female teachers.

¹³⁹Mr Rossiter to *AWB*, 16/12/1947

¹⁴⁰The Chairman, *AWB*, Miss C.F.M Cooke, Teacher-in-charge, Aborigines School, Kinchela. Charges against Manager, Mr V. Rossiter, 2/2/1948, 47/2471

¹⁴¹Mr Rossiter to *AWB*, 16/12/119947, A47/24471

In expressing their grave concerns about the administration of the Board's Home at Kinchela, Miss Young and Miss Cooke, were threatening the self-presentation of the Board as a benign and civilising force in the lives of the Aboriginal boys and young men it had institutionalised. In highlighting the use of boys as menial labour during school hours, their 'dirty and ragged' clothing, the use of corporal punishment, and protesting the removal of one child to a mental institution they directly, but ineffectively, challenged the Board's authority. Of course women teachers at Aboriginal schools did not all represent a homogenous group. Indeed, in May 1940, the Aborigines Welfare Board received the second written complaint from Aborigines at Yass, about the conduct of their teacher, Miss E. Herbert, who, they argued, was hindering rather than facilitating their education.¹⁴² In this case the Board responded by focusing on attitudinal changes required of the female employee. The Board resolved that Miss Herbert: '[A]gain be written to and the advice previously given re-iterated: the necessity for her to exercise tact and forbearance in her contacts with Aborigines to be strongly urged upon her'.¹⁴³

By 1966 the Board was employing six female welfare workers.¹⁴⁴ In their public statements about staff of the Aborigines Welfare Board the head office still chose to stress the persuasive, pedagogic role of these officers, who on paper at least, represented the 'helping' and 'encouraging' arm of the administration:

Before the appointment of the Welfare Officers the vast majority of Aborigines had little contact with the Board and regarded it merely as an administrative body in the capital city. The advent of the Welfare Officer has given them a more personal contact and helped them to understand that the Board exists rather for their help and encouragement than merely to control.¹⁴⁵

At the time of the Board's final dissolution in 1969, six additional female welfare officers for country districts, and another female area welfare officer, were being called for by the administration. White women were still seen, in the mid-1960s, to have a particular role to

¹⁴²*AWBM*, 28/11/40, 4/8544

¹⁴³*AWBM*, 28/11/40, 4/8544

¹⁴⁴Ten male Area Welfare Officers were also employed including a senior welfare officer who was a university trained social worker, *AWBM*, 3/4/68, 4/8548

¹⁴⁵*AWBAR*, 1954, p. 2

play in the administration of Aboriginal people. In extensive questioning of Richard Kingsmill, the last Chairman of the Aborigines Welfare Board, Mr Sommerlad, MLA, wanted to know why a women was still not currently a member of the Board. 'Is there not a special need to have a woman member although this has not been done? Is there any reason this has not been done?'¹⁴⁶

The failure of the white women employed by the Board to meet both their own, and the Board's expectations, and the impact on the Aboriginal girls and young women who were their 'special responsibility' are revealed in the stories of some of these workers. These instances show that women's role as Board employees and their apparent role as special 'protectors' of Aboriginal women and children were fundamentally irreconcilable, not simply because of the individual failure of white women employed by the Board but because the intent of the state agency was to destroy self-identifying, Aboriginal individuals and communities. Therein lay the essential incompatibility between the role of benign protectors, that women were apparently employed to fulfil, and what they could, and did, in fact, achieve.

¹⁴⁶Mr Sommerlad, *Joint Committee*, 1965, p. 4

CHAPTER FIVE

Dawn of a new Era? Gender, Identity and State Representations, 1952-1969

This strategy of colonialism needed no country, for the space it sought to own and conquer was the
minds of whites and blacks
- bell hooks, 1995.¹

What better way to take our culture than to re-make our image?
- Haunnani-Kay Trask, 1993.²

The Aborigines Welfare Board's emphasis on surveillance, analysed in the previous chapters, coincided in the early 1950s with the publication and distribution of a monthly magazine; *Dawn: A Magazine for the Aboriginal People of New South Wales* (1952-1969).³ Increasingly in the 1940s and 1950s, Board members and newly appointed district welfare officers ventured out of the metropolitan head office as a focus on 'out-reach' took hold within the administration. For example in March 1952, four Board members and a district welfare officer visited Moree, Boggabilla, Collarenebri and Mungindi, in an attempt to 'see for themselves' Aboriginal lives.⁴ These visits were part of the broader patterns of surveillance stipulated in the *Public Service Board Report* published in 1940 and incorporated into the administrative practice of the Aborigines Welfare Board over the following years (see chapters three and four).

Stuart Hall argues that popular media available in the post-war period constructed a definition of what race was, what meaning the imagery of race carried, and what the 'problem of race' was understood to be.⁵ In the post-war decades in Australia, the particular 'problem of race', as this thesis argues, coincided with representations and administrative practices aimed *specifically* at women. An important feature of the magazine format, noted

¹ 'Teaching Resistance the Racial Politics of Mass Media', *Killing Rage Ending Racism*, Penguin Books, New York, 1995, pp.108-118

² *From A Native Daughter. Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii*, Common Courage Press, Maine, p. 149

³ The magazine was produced by the Aborigines Welfare Board within the Chief Secretaries Department, with publishing support from Associated Newspaper Ltd., see *Dawn*, January, 1952, p.1

⁴ AWBAR, 1952/3, p. 2

⁵ Stuart Hall in 'The Whites of their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media' in George Bridge & Rosalind Brunt (eds), *Silver Linings. Some Strategies for the Eighties*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1981

by other analyses of post-war media, was that it was directed principally at a female readership.⁶ Andree Wright, describes how the post-war magazine format was targeted at women, as consumers, 'girlfriends', wives and mothers.⁷ New and improved home products, and new and improved 'techniques' for feminine beauty, house-work and infant care were directed at women during the 1950s, in a process which saw women become, in Kereen Reiger's words, the 'experimental sites of modernity'⁸ (see chapter three). In their 1958 Annual report, the Aborigines Welfare Board concluded that: '*Dawn's* columns have been more and more utilised to educate mothers in the rudiments of baby welfare and domestic hygiene'.⁹ Two features of post-war Australia - an increased focus on mass media, and the promotion of techniques for creating the modern self - took particular forms in relation to race and gender during the 1950s and 1960s 'assimilation years' as this chapter seeks to explore.

In issuing the *Dawn* magazine the Board hoped to create a new medium of popular culture aimed specifically at the Aboriginal population of New South Wales.¹⁰ Mukerji and Schudson argue that an increasing understanding of the power of popular culture as a means of social control was a marked feature of 'modernising' state agencies in the post-world war two period.¹¹ The development of *Dawn* reflected this increasing interest in the uses of mass media, and the mobilisation of popular culture, in 'modern' attempts at social control of the Aboriginal population. In this light post-colonial theory has challenged notions of

⁶Andree Wright, 'The Women's Weekly. Depression and War years Romance and Reality', *Refractory Girl*, no. 3, Winter, 1973, Meaghan Morris, 'Things to do in Shopping Centres', in Susan Sheridan (ed), *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism*, London, Verso, 1988, pp. 193-225, Marilyn Lake, 'Female Desires: The Meaning of World War Two', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 95, October, 1990, pp. 267-285

⁷Wright, 'The Women's Weekly'

⁸Reiger, *The Disenchantment*, see also Lees & Senyard, *The 1950s*.

⁹*AWBAR*, 1958, p. 4

¹⁰Television was not introduced to Australia until 1956 and in most cases Aboriginal people, particularly those living on stations and reserves, were amongst the last to get regular access to television sets. In a *Dawn* story appearing in June, 1966 p. 5, entitled 'TV brings new life to station' the area Welfare Officer, Mrs K. Robinson remarked 'Television's the best thing that ever happened to people on this station', Radio, a more popular form of mass media at that time, did not have the same graphic and vivid ability to 'capture' images of Aboriginal people as the magazine format did.

¹¹Chandra Mukerji & Michael Schudson, 'Introduction', *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991 p. 8-10, see also Graeme Osborne & Glen Lewis, *Communications Traditions in 20th century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, for discussion of this development world-wide see Nicholas Garnham, 'Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass-Communication', in Richard Collins, James Curran, Nicholas Garnham, Paddy Scannell, Philip Schlesinger & Colin Sparks (eds), *Media, Culture & Society. A Critical Reader*, Sage Publications, London, 1986, pp. 9-33

the autonomy of the aesthetic realm and popular culture, helping to gain acceptance for the argument, advanced on a number of fronts since the 1960s, that 'culture' mediates relations of power as effectively, albeit in more indirect and subtle ways, as more public and visible forms of oppression.¹²

Mass media and 'two-way' communication

Grahame Osbourne and Glen Lewis argue that the impact of the Second World War, both on increasing technologies, and understanding, of the power of propaganda, had a lasting influence in the 're-construction' decades of the 1950s and 1960s Australia.¹³ For example, a significant post-war development in the production of mass media in Australia was the establishment of the Australian Government Film making unit in 1945. The first sponsored and national program of Australian government film, argues Albert Moran, both reflected a changed post-war Australian society and filmically intervened in its construction.¹⁴ In a similar fashion the publication of *Dawn* magazine by the Aborigines Welfare Board both sought to reflect Aboriginal life around the state, and to intervene in the construction of images of that society in a photographic and textual performance of knowledge about Aboriginality.

The numerous photographs that appeared in *Dawn* were part of the administration's gendered representation of Aboriginal life in New South Wales, devised for a predominantly Aboriginal, but also a non-Aboriginal readership. The development of the magazine can be read partly within a western empirical tradition in which to visualise a culture or society becomes synonymous with understanding it.¹⁵ The photographic journalism of *Dawn* afforded the Aborigines Welfare Board the illusion of penetrating the lives of Aboriginal communities across the state, in ways that did not compromise the administration's illusion

¹²For a good discussion of these debates see Bart Moore-Gilbert, 'Postcolonial Criticism or Postcolonial Theory', in his *Postcolonial Theory. Contexts, Practices, Politics*, Verso, London, New York, 1997, pp. 5-33

¹³Osborne and Lewis, *Communication Traditions*, 1995, p. 68

¹⁴Albert Moran, *Projecting Australia. Government Film since 1945*, Currency Press Ltd., Australia, 1991

¹⁵Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Object*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1983, p. 106; John Berger, *About Looking*, Pantheon, New York, 1980, p. 48; Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays in Photo Works, 1973-1983*, Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, pp. 193-268; Catherine Rogers, 'Photography and Anthropology. Looking Back at the Camera', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, 1995, vol. 7, (1&2), pp. 28-40 argues having an accurate representation of something was seen to be a substitute for reliable knowledge of the thing. Seeing something clearly, as Rogers argues, does not imply understanding'.

of control or mastery of the Aboriginal 'problem'.¹⁶ Photographs held the promise of providing mechanical and therefore objectively sound, factual knowledge.¹⁷ Photography, argues Ann McClintock, has operated in some colonial contexts as an 'illusory fantasy of managing'.¹⁸ Similarly Johannes Fabian argues that photography creates an illusion of 'objectivity' while in fact inscribing the social world with symbolism:

Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle presented to an observer who takes up a 'point of view' on the action, who stands back so as to observe it and, transferring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, conceives of it as a totality intended for cognition alone, in that all interactions are reduced to symbolic exchanges.¹⁹

This high point of view, as McClintock, argues - the panoptical stance - is enjoyed by those in privileged positions in the social structure, to whom the world appears as a 'spectacle, stage, performance'.²⁰ In her study of the cultural forms associated with imperialism Ann McClintock argues that mass photo-journalism, a characteristic of industrial modernity, sought to both survey and simulate experience.²¹ Through this medium 'experience took on the character of a spectacle'.

A similarly significant introduction to the culture of Australian mass media, coinciding with the first editions of *Dawn* magazine, was the fledgling development of the market research industry in the capital cities.²² The establishment of the first Australian Public Opinion Poll in 1941 and the development of the techniques of advertising were significant development in Australian public culture, mass media and government.²³ John Metcalfe, the principal librarian at the State Library in New South Wales, published an influential essay in 1943 entitled 'Mass Observation and the Public Opinion Polls' which helped stake out a new terrain for the application of modern methods of government. According to

¹⁶Very often the photographs appeared randomly in *Dawn*, unattached to relevant text

¹⁷McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, argues that photography had been used as an instrument in racial science since the 1860s to produce 'factual' knowledge of racial 'types', 'specimens', and 'tribes'. p. 128

¹⁸McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 129

¹⁹McClintock, *Imperial Leather* p. 122

²⁰McClintock, *Imperial Leather* p. 122

²¹McClintock, *Imperial Leather* p. 122

²²Osborne & Lewis, *Communications Traditions*

²³Osbourne & Lewis, *Communications Traditions*

Metcalfe, by the 1940s, opinion polls had become 'symptomatic of democracy and the application of science to society'.²⁴ The McNair Public Opinion research organisation, established in Sydney in 1952, the same year that the *Dawn* magazine was launched by the Aborigines Welfare Board, argued that new ways of reaching the population through media were a 'critical device' for providing the Australian nation with what was termed 'two-way communication' between populace and politicians.²⁵

In line with the new language of public opinion polls, the Board argued that *Dawn* magazine could play a central role in a 'two-way communication' between the state and the Aboriginal public. In the first edition of the magazine the Chief Secretary announced in his opening address: '[T]his monthly publication is intended to serve as a means of enabling the Board and the Aboriginal people to learn to know one another better.'²⁶ The Board stressed that the magazine was to be sent 'free into the home of every aborigine in the state' and for nearly two decades, the Welfare Board urged Aboriginal people of New South Wales to embrace the magazine as 'their own' and to ensure they got their free copy simply by writing to the magazine, or by requesting one from the station manager if they lived on an Aboriginal station.²⁷ As late as 1967, the editor of *Dawn* was reminding its readership that the magazine 'costs you nothing' and encouraging people to get their free copy by writing to the editor.²⁸ The magazine was produced monthly, fully subsidised by the administration at a time of budget restrictions, and as it proudly, and regularly liked to claim, 'went into every Aboriginal home across the state'.²⁹

A magazine directed at Aboriginal people could go further, and with more regularity, than Board members. Right into the homes in fact of potentially all the Aboriginal people across the state. The view that *Dawn* could play a part in facilitating the process of surveillance of, and knowledge about, the Aboriginal population in New South Wales was expressed regularly by senior bureaucrats and Board members.³⁰ Mr C. A Kelly, Chief Secretary of the

²⁴John Metcalfe, 'Mass Observation and Public Opinion Polls', *Australian Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 4, 1943, p. 4

²⁵McNair Survey, Sydney quoted in Osborne & Lewis, *Communications Traditions*, p. 68

²⁶*Dawn*, January 1952, p. 1

²⁷see various advertisements and announcements to this effect in *Dawn* 1952-1968

²⁸*Dawn*, August, 1967, p. 13

²⁹*Dawn*, August 1952, Chairman's editorial re Mr R. G Menzies shortage of funds in Commonwealth of Australia, p. 1

³⁰see for example *Dawn*, March, 1952, p. 18

Board in the 1940s wrote in the 'second birthday issue' of the magazine, that, the magazine was effective in bringing him the activities of Aboriginal stations which he could not personally visit due to pressures of time and distance.³¹ Premier Cahill commented in the same issue that through *Dawn* the 'community as a whole' was 'developing a new understanding of and sympathy' for Aboriginal people. He also thought that the magazine was, in his words, 'exercising a strong and beneficial influence among the descendants of the original Australians in their wide-flung little groups and communities'.³² In particular, commented Premier Cahill he was particularly impressed 'by its profusely illustrated content' and the 'Roving Cameraman' segment.³³ Similarly Superintendent Lipscombe, a longstanding advocate of the introduction of 'scientific' strategies of government, saw an important role for the magazine in reaching the increasing number of Aboriginal people who lived off the Board's reserves and stations:

[F]or some years past, the Board has been aware of the need for keeping in closer and more continuous touch with our aboriginal people, particularly those who live away from stations where the Managers and Matrons are always at hand to offer help and advice.³⁴

As Aboriginal people increasingly left reserves and stations for metropolitan centres in the post-war years, the magazine acted partly as a government attempt to identify a body of Aborigines across New South Wales that it could 'modernise' and 'assimilate' to meet the demands of a changed post-war society. The first issue of the magazine in January 1952 argued that *Dawn* 'will provide a long felt need in the social life of the aborigines...it is unique...it is the only magazine in the Southern Hemisphere produced exclusively for aborigines'.³⁵ The name of the magazine was intended to convey a break with the past, a turning from the dark into the light. In the metaphor of the *Dawn*, allusions to 'dark' turning to 'light' were evocative of the earlier discourse of breeding out, where it was hoped dark skin would turn to light through gradual 'absorption' of the Aboriginal population. 'The title *Dawn* is significant', wrote Clive Evatt, the Chief Secretary and Chairman of the Board at the start of 1952,

³¹*Dawn*, January, 1954, p. 4

³²*Dawn*, January 1954, p. 2

³³*Dawn*, January 1954, p. 2

³⁴*Dawn*, March, 1952, p. 12

³⁵*Dawn*, January, 1952, p. 3

[I]t suggests the opening of a new era, the heralding of new light and progression from the old to the new. As the *Dawn* ushers in the new day, inviting us to apply ourselves to the tasks and responsibilities of life, so *Dawn*, appearing for the first time in the first month of the new year, 1952, represents a further step in your progress toward that goal which has been set - your assimilation as a race, with the general community.³⁶

1950s

While the magazine tirelessly promoted assimilation, the early 1950s were constructed in *Dawn* as a new era both of government control and of Aboriginal social 'evolution'. Social evolutionism, the theory at the basis of assimilation policy, took for granted the inferiority of Aboriginal people and culture. At the same time, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers were encouraged to think of the policy and practice of state racism in personal terms. In a birthday message to *Dawn* from Premier Cahill in January 1955, readers were reminded:

It is to be remembered that we all have a common origin, that spear and stone axe were the providers of food and the weapons of defence of the white man also, long ago. It just happened our development was earlier. The Australian aborigine today can share in all progress...all that is required is the urge.³⁷

Differences between Aboriginal and white communities were identified in *Dawn* as a result of inherent prejudicial feelings rather than with the state policy of assimilation that had systematically broken down self-identifying Aboriginal communities. Severe and life-threatening impoverishment on Aboriginal reserves and stations managed by the Board for example, was represented as a result of a traditional Aboriginal lifestyle that the Board sought to uplift to modern, white standards. A common image in *Dawn* was of 'Aboriginal shacks' being replaced by 'European style housing'. This representation, dismissed the effect of previous administrative policy to confine and then expel Aboriginal people to reserves and stations (see chapter two). It ignored as well the lack of basic social security payments to residents, the unequal pay for Aboriginal workers and the extreme poverty on the Boards

³⁶Chief Secretaries address, *Dawn*, January, 1952, p. 2

³⁷*Dawn*, January, 1955, p. 1

reserves due to its own under-funding. Aboriginal people's experiences of the decade contrasted widely with such representations that appeared with regularity in the magazine.³⁸

Jeremy Beckett has identified the ambivalent project of the 1950s assimilation era, committed to 'assimilating' Aborigines by 'inviting 'them to share in a life of social equality and material comfort, organised around the family home'.³⁹ This dominant discourse co-existed with another discourse that represented Aborigines as 'essentially different and unassimilable'.⁴⁰ In this ambivalent project of both defining and excising Aboriginal identity throughout the 1950s, as this thesis seeks to show, gender played a crucial role in defining who could, and who could not, be assimilated in these terms. This ambivalent discourse had a particular impact on representations of Aboriginal masculinity and femininity at this time, as the following section illustrates. This section considers some of the different representations, (predominantly visual but some textual) of femininity, and to a lesser extent masculinity, in the Aborigines Welfare Board's monthly publication, *Dawn: A Magazine for Aboriginal People*, produced between 1952 and 1969.⁴¹

***Dawn* and representations of Gender**

The first editions of the *Dawn* magazine ran to around thirty pages. Regular features included a 'Letters page', 'Home Hints' section providing, largely, housekeeping ideas for women, and 'Along the Mail Route' which contained news of births, deaths and marriages as well as miscellaneous 'gossip' about Aboriginal communities across the state. 'Our Roving Cameraman' that presented photographs of Aboriginal people from around the state was a regular feature of the magazine as was the bizarre segment entitled 'Now you Know', sometimes called 'Did you Know' and appearing in later editions under the title 'Around the

³⁸For example, interviews, Lester Bostock, Marrickville, 5/2/97, 2/11/97; Kevin Cooke, Tranby, Glebe, 16/2/95; Herb Simms, La Perouse, 22/4/98; Lavinia Howey & Eunice Peachy, Dubbo, 8/97; see also Nancy Rooke, 'My Memories of the 'Fifties', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2, December, 1993, pp. 8-9; and interviews with Pat & Lucy Eatock, Ray Blisset with Samantha Weir, 'The Red Scare: Aboriginal Organisations, the Communist Party and ASIO', in Diane Plater (ed), *Other Boundaries. Inner-City Aboriginal Stories. Part one of an Aboriginal history of the Leichhardt Municipality of Sydney*, Bagnall Publishing, 1993, pp. 95-133

³⁹Mrs McMahon's Mistake. Charles Chauvel's Jemma and the Assimilation Policy', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2, December, 1993, pp. 15-19

⁴⁰Beckett, 'Mrs McMahon's Mistake', p. 15

⁴¹In 1970 the magazine became *New Dawn* (see chapter eight)

World'. This segment specialised in printing obscure and factually spurious information about 'primitive' or African peoples, and also about women and Aborigines. The August 1954 edition included a piece on 'Men of Tasmania':

Men of Tasmania (an island off Australia) never learned how to start a fire for over six hundred years. Lightening gave them their first flame and they lit one stick to another for 500 years!⁴²

The August 1964 'Did you Know', informed the reader that '[w]omen's vocal cords are shorter than those of the male. They are higher pitched and require less air to agitate. As a result, women are able to talk more with less effort'.⁴³ Such caricatures and representations of women and Aborigines were indicative of the way entrenched ideas about biological determinism, of both race and gender, were presented casually as 'information' in the popular forum of the magazine.

Until 1969 the magazine was produced by a white male editor, in close contact with Board members who would contribute written feature stories, editorials and advice. Station matrons and managers would occasionally write a feature article addressing an issue of Board policy or expressing their attitudes towards the Aboriginal people amongst whom they worked. When the magazine, reflecting wider changes in the administration of Aboriginal affairs, became *New Dawn*, the first female editor of the magazine was employed: a white woman named Cora Waltham who, through her work with the magazine met and married Kevin Gilbert, who became a well-known Aboriginal activist and writer.⁴⁴ By the late 1960s the magazine, *New Dawn* was offering a range of possibilities, and discourses that were not available in its first decades of publication (see final chapter).

Between 1953 and 1970 (the year *Dawn* became *New Dawn*, see chapter eight), a survey of the cover photography of *Dawn* shows that the highest single category was a representation of female Aboriginal youth.⁴⁵ Sixty-two percent of all covers featured

⁴²*Dawn*, August, 1954, p. 14

⁴³*Dawn*, August, 1964, p. 16

⁴⁴Interview with Herb Simms, 22/4/98

⁴⁵Survey by author, 1999. Thanks to George Butler for collation and statistical support

Aboriginal women or Aboriginal children or teens with no adult males.⁴⁶ A comparative survey of covers depicting female adolescents to male shows that sixty percent of covers were representations of a female Aboriginal teenager indicating that Aboriginal women and teens were the most likely target of the magazine. A cover shot was two-thirds as likely to represent a white woman, usually accompanied by an Aboriginal child, as a white male.⁴⁷

Aboriginal Masculinity

Three common and inter-related representations of Aboriginal masculinity can be located in the *Dawn* magazine. Aboriginal men were often associated with sports, or they were represented as both elderly and traditional, or they were associated with disability and death. The editorial in the first issue of the magazine published in 1952, combined elements from these tropes, implying that Aboriginal sporting prowess relied more on a pre-industrial animalistic natural talent than on the ability and dedication of the sportsman:

Properly trained the Australian aboriginal should be able to swim faster and jump higher and further than the white man. With his keen eyesight which can spot a school of fish in a line of breakers half a mile off shore, he should be a keen tennis player, marksman or golfer...⁴⁸

In post-war Australia, images of powerful, athletic white masculinity and athleticism featured in celebrations of key modernisation projects such as the building of dams and power stations.⁴⁹ Such associations illustrated common ideas of man taming nature, making them masters of the world.⁵⁰ Alternately, images of Aboriginal men in *Dawn* depicted them as 'traditional' and even as victims to this modern world. In the November 1952 issue, a feature article described how an Aboriginal sportsman had had both legs amputated by a train. This image of the train, a significant symbol of modernity in the colonial world,

⁴⁶This over-representation of photographs of women and children in the overall photograph archival collection of the NSW Aboriginal Protection and later Welfare Boards is noted by Carol Cooper, 'The Aboriginal Welfare Board Photographs', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1985, no. 1, p. 65

⁴⁷Author's survey, 1999

⁴⁸*Dawn*, Jan 1952, p. 12, note that throughout *Dawn* the word Aboriginal is spelt with a small 'a' rather than write sic after each quote from *Dawn* I have left the quotes as they stand. It acts also as a constant reminder of the way in which Aboriginal Australians were considered in the magazine inferior to white 'australians'

⁴⁹Thomas Sear, 'Give me a Man Who's a Man among Men': Masculinity, Work and Ethnicity in Australia 1945-1965', paper presented at Australian Historical Association, Sydney University, July 1998

⁵⁰see Johnson, *Modern Girl*, Sear, 'Give me a Man'

dismembering the Aboriginal sportsman had an emasculating overtone. In the late 1960s, Lionel Rose, the winner of the world bantam weight championship in Tokyo appeared on the cover of *Dawn*. He, like the other Aboriginal men who were feted for their sporting ability, was well aware of the political circumstances that framed his glory. Rose asserted 'this is one Aboriginal boxer who will not die broke or finish up a tent fighter'.⁵¹

Aboriginal men were subject to ridicule in the magazine's regular comic strip throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The comic strip featured a coloured man being regularly humiliated by a young child or a woman. Comic depictions of men being humiliated, or made to look stupid by women were a feature of some mainstream comics of the 1950s and 1960s, such as the *Dagwood and Blondie* series. These 'comic' descriptions, and segments such as the 'Merely Male' section of *Australian Women's Weekly*, sent up men's flaws to reverse established power relations between male and female. These reversals usually operate in a similar way to carnivalesque that creates a space for the temporary reversal of what are in fact entrenched power relations.⁵² In the context of the gendered assimilation policy, analysed in the previous chapters, the comic strip acted to confirm existing power relations in which Aboriginal men were seen as peripheral to the 'modern' world.

A dichotomy between the Aboriginal male and the 'modern' city was depicted on every cover of *Dawn* for a decade. The mast-head showed a sketch of a 'full-blooded' Aboriginal man gazing away from the modernist city. The header image was reminiscent of the common 'One Pound Jimmy' picture which circulated on postage stamps and a variety of merchandise during the 1950s.⁵³ (Portrait-style porcelain plates and ashtrays were amongst the most common). 'One Pound Jimmy' depicted the head of an elderly Aboriginal man, gazing off to a distant point and represented the mute and noble 'savage'.⁵⁴ A young Aboriginal man appeared on the cover of the February 1958 issue. His torso was naked, mirroring the image of the old man of the magazine's mast-head. The young man was seen

⁵¹*Dawn*, May, 1968, p. 1

⁵²Leslie Deveraux & Roger Hillman (eds), *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology and Photography*, University of California, Berkely, 1995; Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilisation: The Carnavalesque in eighteenth century English Culture and Fiction*, Stanford University Press, California, 1986

⁵³Lynette Russell, 'Going Walkabout in the 1950s: Images of 'traditional' Aboriginal Australia', *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1994, pp. 4-8

⁵⁴Russell, 'Going Walkabout', p. 5

staring out to a distance from behind trees, a boomerang held up in his hand. The caption on the inside cover reads, 'Is he looking out in wonder at the Atomic World?' (Fig. i)

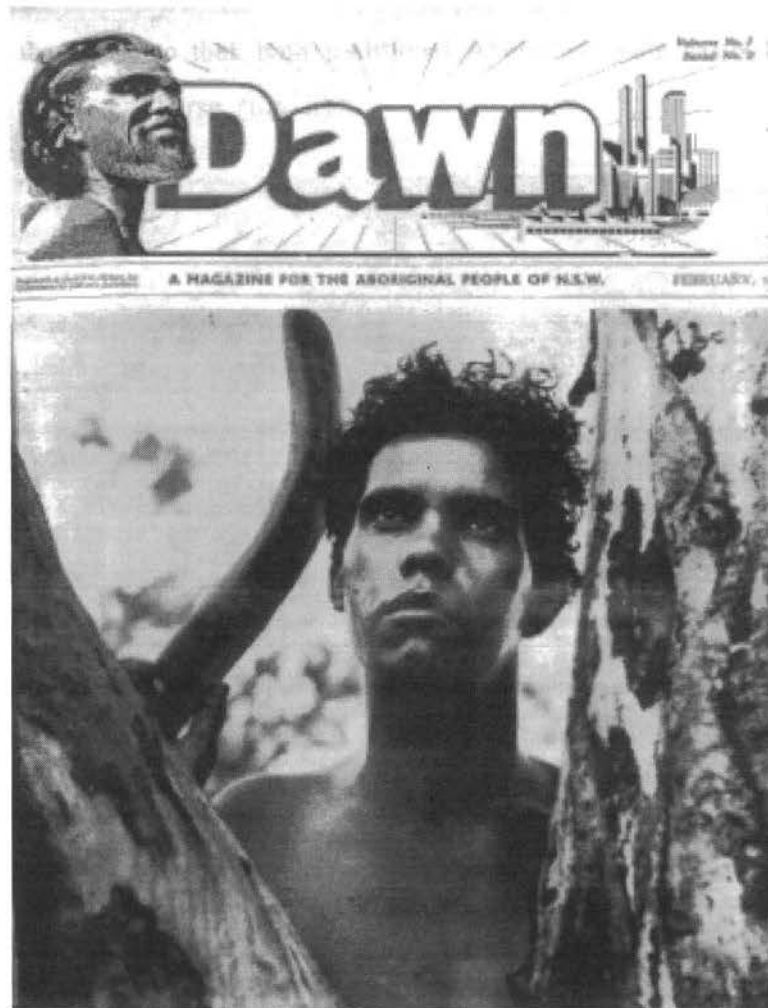


Fig. i Atomic World

In this representation the young Aboriginal man is represented as a silent, and distant on-looker to the wonders of modernism and the nuclear age. Similarly, a dark-skinned young Aboriginal man in a loin-cloth was featured on the cover of the June 1959 edition and described as '[f]ree from the worries of the civilised world the young nomad wanders blissfully... looking for a succulent lizard'. Such representations of young Aboriginal men in *Dawn* showed them as naked nomads 'wondering' and 'wandering' about the civilised white world.

The cover image of 1953, the year of a Royal visit to Australia shows an Aboriginal man, naked except for pants, seated on the ground, holding a spear and wearing a crown of gum

leaves. A photograph of a young Queen Elizabeth on a horse is placed at the centre of the page. The Aboriginal man sitting on the ground turns to look up to her. She salutes him under a larger-than-life illustrated crown. The usual masthead of the magazine was placed at the bottom of the page, so that both traditional Aboriginal male heads look up to the youthful Queen astride her horse. (Fig. ii).

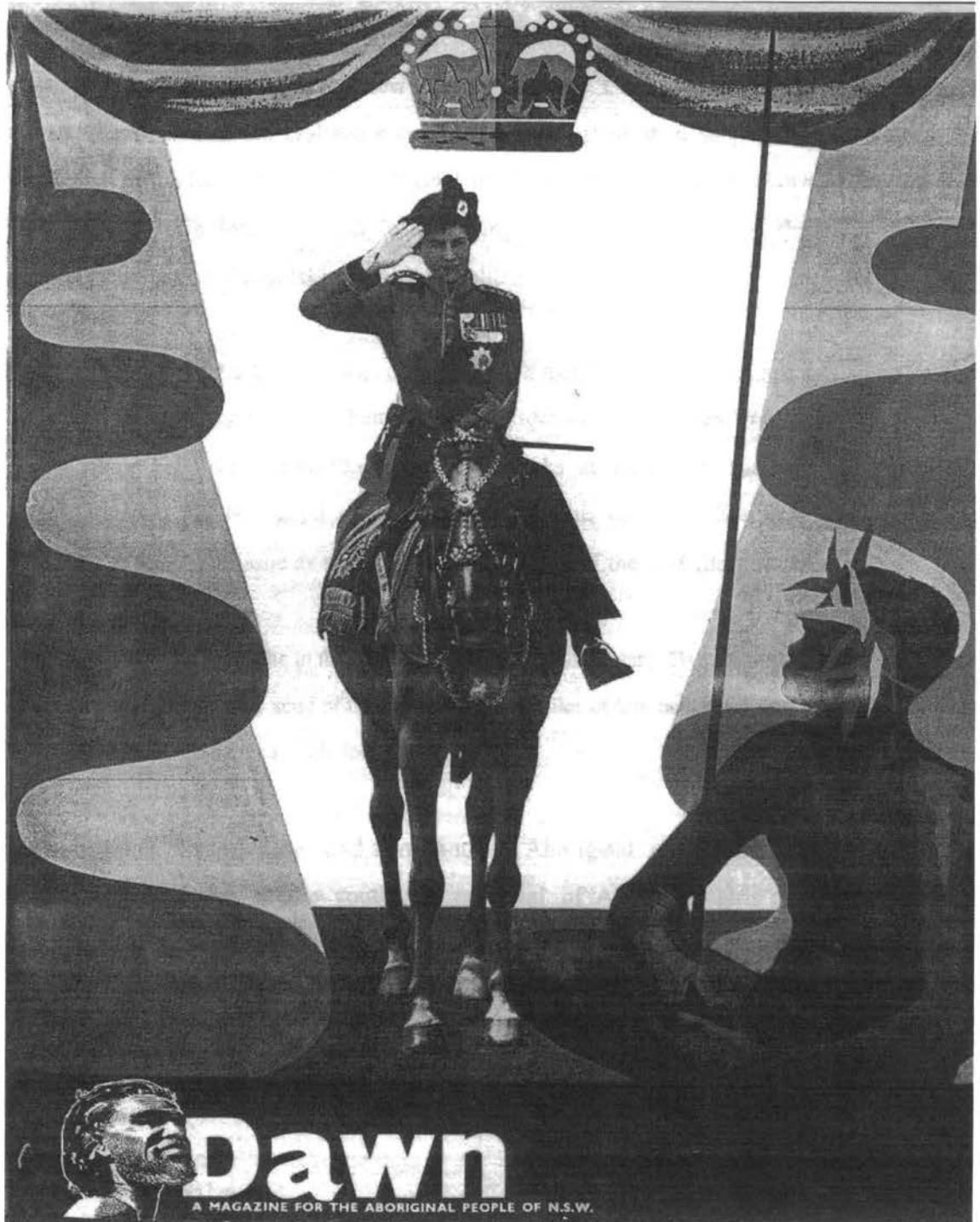


Fig. ii

In a typical story, the modern, industrial city was described as one of 'virginal beauty' and contrasted with the supposedly out-dated world of Aboriginal men. *Dawn* highlighted the new Ronson Lighters and Supertrim Electric Shavers factory, opened in 1959 by the Minister for National Development - on 'virgin land in beautiful Lane Cove' which had invited members of the public to come along and 'marvel at the new factory'.⁵⁵ While being shown around the 'marvel' of the production of electric shavers, visitors were also invited to enjoy a 'realistic display' of Aboriginal men re-enacting the 'long ago art' of Aboriginal fire-making to contrast this with the new Ronson lighters: 'Contrast the modern methods with old as exemplified in the realistic aboriginal display set up in a section of the factory by three men from La Perouse.'⁵⁶ Aboriginal men were represented in *Dawn* as having lost their role within a 'long ago' culture and being able to aspire only to the role of benign manual labourer on the outskirts of metropolitan centres.

Bob Timberry from La Perouse was described as 'a nice bloke' who 'perhaps has some of the dignity of his great grandfather, King Joey last ruler of the Illawara Tribe'⁵⁷ 'Now 56, with grizzled hair but bright child-like eyes, Bob works at Farleigh's Tannery along Coward Street, Mascot. He is a good worker and liked by his mates'.⁵⁸ Similarly Fred Foster is described in the same issue as a 'full-blood' descendant of the 'last Illawarra tribe':

Now working at a lathe in the Australian Paper mills in Botany Bay from his factory window he looks out on the grey scud of the bay and beyond miles of low land that, further than the eye can stretch, once belonged to his folk.⁵⁹

Juxtapositions between the traditionalism of Aboriginal men were contrasted in the magazine with images of the youth and potential of Aboriginal girls and young women. While the inside sleeve might describe their 'cover girl', as 'typical of the modern generation of our old Australians', or as a symbol of the 'youth and beauty of the modern generation of aborigines'⁶⁰ (Fig. iii) the back cover of the August 1965 issue, for example was a close-up

⁵⁵ *Dawn*, 1959, p.2

⁵⁶ *Dawn*, 1959, p.15

⁵⁷ *Dawn*, February, 1952, p. 16

⁵⁸ *Dawn*, February, 1952, p. 15

⁵⁹ *Dawn*, February, 1952, p. 3

⁶⁰ see for examples inside sleeve of *Dawn*, November 1955, Sept 1957, June 1960, Sept 1960

photograph of an elderly man with a caption,' In his younger days he could 'be an emu' -run as fast as an emu- but now he's in hospital at Orange. [This] recent photo study...shows that time in the long run is the only winner.⁶¹ In contrast the cover for the following month showed a familiar image of a young Aboriginal girl sitting next to a white doll's cot. The caption read, '(the) hope for the future of the modern nation'.⁶² In these juxtapositions representations of Aboriginal men were contrasted with Aboriginal girls, teenagers and women. Aboriginal men, seen to exemplify the 'long ago days' were contrasted with assimilated Aboriginal femininity.



OUR COVER

Our very beautiful Cover Girl this month is Veronica Hughes, of Goolagong. Veronica symbolises the youth and beauty of the modern generation of aborigines.

Fig. iii Modern Generation

⁶¹ *Dawn*, August, 1965, back cover

⁶² *Dawn*, September, 1965, front cover

In contrast to Fred Foster and Bob Timberry, depicted staring out at land once owned by their ancestors, from the factory window, Aboriginal girls and young women were represented as excited witnesses, and occasionally eager participants, in the modernisation of Australian industry and politics. Familiar tropes in *Dawn* represented groups of adolescent Aboriginal women in high school uniforms ready to 'catch the bus' to school, at the opening of new developments such as the first 'immense' electrical lighthouse and outside Parliament house in Canberra - 'the first aboriginal group to go to Parliament'⁶³ (Fig. iv). Young Aboriginal women were repeatedly pictured bearing witness to these developments in modern Australia. Aboriginal men were afforded a different role. The cover of August 1962 depicts three young Aboriginal women, dressed in the modern fashions, complete with gloves and handbags, pointing and laughing at an image of male Aborigines in traditional dress performing a corroboree. (Fig. v)



Fig. iv

⁶³*Dawn*, September, 1960, p.1



Fig. v

Representations of Aboriginal Femininity

According to *Dawn*, opportunities were open for Aboriginal women in higher education and in 'scientific' and public areas, and most importantly in the home. One of the most obvious themes in *Dawn* was its stress on the home as the site of modernity and assimilation. 'Home management' was a key to assimilation.⁶⁴ The outgoing chairman Mr C. J. Buttsworth declared in his farewell speech printed in the March 1958 edition of *Dawn*, that 'above all' he hoped that:

⁶⁴*Dawn*, 1956, p. 4

[E]very boy and girl would make it their determination not to be residents of community settlements but to be industrious and thrifty and win their way to an independent life as Australian citizens.

Repeated associations were made between Aboriginal women and home as the central symbol of assimilation:

The provision of so many modern homes in Aboriginal stations throughout the state opens up a new world for the Aboriginal woman of today. She can now enjoy the same amenities, the same comforts and the same pleasures as her white sister. From the dirt floor of a bark gunyah to the polished linoleum of a modern hygienic cottage it is a big step for many Aboriginal women to take...but with the patient and ever ready help of station managers and matrons she will find it is not a difficult one after all. ⁶⁵

A typical feature story linked the transformation of the adolescent Aboriginal girl, into the developed Aboriginal woman, via the move into a home in town. The article 'Twenty-first with a difference', for example, printed in the May 1968 issue of the magazine, told the story of one young Aboriginal woman transformed from 'scrawny' teenager into a 'beautiful, composed, sophisticated young lady'. Her transformation hinged on her move into a house:

When she was seventeen Sandra Connors had no reason to expect that her twenty-first birthday would be much different to others. Celebrating in a rusty iron out of town shanty is quite a bit less than gay. But in the past four years her life has changed so much that now the early years must be just a bad memory. In 1961 the Armidale Area Welfare Officer described her as a 'scrawny young girl' - now she is a beautiful, composed, sophisticated young lady highly thought of by the Inverall people and particularly her employers...the transformation began in 1964 when the Christian Youth Council built a house on Aborigines Welfare Board land...⁶⁶

Moving into a house built by the Christian Youth Council with state government support was stipulated as a marker of the Aboriginal woman's maturity. Often women were depicted

⁶⁵ *Dawn*, January 1956, p. 14

⁶⁶ *Dawn*, May 1968, p. 14

in *Dawn* being literally handed the key to the new home. Aboriginal men were frequently left out of this picture. (Fig. vi).



Fig. vi

As Lesley Johnson and others have argued the 1950s and 1960s were marked by an explosion of interest in re-forming and monitoring young women.⁶⁷ In these decades in Australia, 'modern' notions of personhood and individuality began to be understood as forms of identification culturally available to and socially desirable for women.⁶⁸ The mobilisation of (white) women in the 'scientific project' of post-war modernity was one of its defining features, argues Johnson (and created the conditions for the emerging women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s). Johnson argues that during the 1950s and 1960s the state mobilised women as a group to be 'standard bearers' for modernist innovations in the home and domestic sphere. Johnson investigates this argument specifically in relation to the construction of a white female subjectivity, but the same argument has a particular urgency when applied to Aboriginal women living in metropolitan centres in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁶⁷ Johnson, *The Modern Girl*, p. 5

⁶⁸ Johnson, *The Modern Girl*, p. 8

Anne McClintock argues, in her analysis of the culture of imperialism, that colonial women, excluded from direct action as national citizens, are often subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as it's 'boundary and metaphoric limit'.⁶⁹ Young Aboriginal women were encouraged to think of themselves as 'sisters' to the white women, who were changing the face of the Australian nation. Parallels were drawn between the advances being made by white women in the public domain and the new opportunities available to young Aboriginal women. When the Armidale Public Hospital began to admit Aboriginal women as trainee nurses in 1952, *Dawn's* editorial represented it as a triumph of the individual over prejudice, and of the sisterhood of white and Aboriginal women:

This simple and friendly action has swept away years of evil and prejudice and opened the way for our aboriginal girls to take their place alongside their white sisters in the field of science.⁷⁰

Whether adjusting the crown on the head of the young Aboriginal woman or adjusting her military hat, white woman appears as central to the 'training' of the modern Aboriginal woman (Fig. vii & Fig. viii).



Fig. vii

⁶⁹ *Imperial Leather*, p. 154

⁷⁰ *Dawn*, April, 1952, p. 4



Fig. viii

Representations of Aboriginal men as the proletarian descendants of once royal predecessors - 'King Joey of the last Illawarra tribe' - contrast with the image of young Aboriginal women being literally crowned by the white establishment. The crowning of nineteen-year-old Sue Davis as the Floral Fiesta Queen at Casino in 1962 is an illustration of the differing approach often taken to Aboriginal men and women in the magazine. The feature described a 'robed and crowned Sue' - a stenographer with a Casino law office being named 'Fiesta Queen' with 'a Mayoral kiss'.⁷¹(Fig.ix) The Mayor Alderman Manyweathers remarked at Sue Davis' coronation: 'Deep down in our hearts everyone felt what a wonderful thing it would be for Sue to win - and now she has won'.⁷² If Aboriginal men were seen to have a limited role to play in modern Australian society, Aboriginal women were depicted in *Dawn* participating in ceremonies ensuring their acceptance by white society.

⁷¹*Dawn*, November, 1962, p. 3

⁷²*Dawn*, November, 1962, p. 3



Fig. ix

Johnson describes how 'youthful, feminine loveliness' became a key image in post-war Australia - a young nation full of 'hope and promise'.⁷³ Images of the innocent, youthful femininity of the 'migrant girl', for example, were utilised in the mass media and government publications, to defuse a sense of threat of the foreign as dangerous in Australia. Tania Verstak, daughter of Russian immigrant parents was crowned Miss Australia in 1961 and went on to win the Miss International Beauty contest a year later. She was hailed by Federal parliamentarians as an 'ambassadors' for the nation. As Johnson argues, Verstak played an important role in providing a symbol of resolution to the troubled image of the nation within Australia. As an immigrant she was different, but as an example of demure, gracious femininity she fitted in, a pleasure to have 'among us'.⁷⁴ Similarly, in *Dawn* Aboriginal women were described as 'ambassadors', incorporated into the post-war nation with the additional resonance of representing 'old Australians'.⁷⁵ Aboriginal men were represented differently in this symbolic order. The full-page article which described

⁷³ Johnson, *The Modern Girl*, p. 142

⁷⁴ Johnson, *The Modern Girl*, p. 141

⁷⁵ see *Dawns* 1953-69

Sue's coronation added at the end that, 'perhaps the happiest person in the huge crowd which packed Walker Street for the crowning ceremony was Sue's father, Mr Sid Davis'. Sue's father is depicted as just 'one of the 3000 strong crowd' who amidst cheers and clapping watched as his 'shy' daughter was acclaimed Fiesta Queen. Depicted as just one of the crowd, Sue's father watches from the street as his daughter is crowned and kissed by the white Mayor. (While his daughter is crowned Queen, Mr Davis has no standing as a member of the royal family in this picture).

Sex

Overt sexualisation of the young indigenous woman that has formed a theme in both colonial government and post-colonial criticism (see introduction and chapter one) was repressed in the discourse of assimilation in New South Wales. In the *Dawn*, however, there were narrative and photographic moments when the sexualisation of Aboriginal women implicit in ideas of biological, and later cultural assimilation was made plain. A lurid fictional story published in the 1956, the 'Hands of Kalene' told the tale of a 'shapely lubra Kalene' who is raped and mutilated by a bushranger. The violence of the language in the short story and the explicitly sexual references are moments of rupture in the overwhelmingly cheerful, smiling images of young, assimilated, modern Aboriginal women in *Dawn*;

The noise of the driving rain and the grim song of the flooded river muffled the whimpering of Kalene...[she] was painfully conscious of the throbbing agony of each broken bone and every jagged cut. Sobbing moans came from between her lips that were bloody because she had bitten them when Lomax began his brutal pounding... The way she had fought him had merely increased his hunger for the lubra he had found far from the security of her tribe... his taming methods were savage.⁷⁶

Graphic sexualisation of Aboriginal women appeared both in fictional writing, and in photographic series in *Dawn*. A typical photo series represented Aboriginal men as infants or boys and Aboriginal 'ladies' as objects of beauty and sexuality. The 'ladies', who were often young girls, were regularly pictured in their bathing costumes. Teresia Teaiwa argues

⁷⁶*Dawn*, 1955, p. 10

that the post-war ideal of the feminine was 'young, sexually available and on display in the swimsuit'.⁷⁷ Teaiwa's analysis of the American nuclear testing programme on Bikini Atoll in 1946, and the launch months later of a skimpy swimsuit by French designer Louis Reard inspired by the explosion, connects the politics of colonialism with the politics of sexism. In this case she argues that representations of colonised young women in bikinis, worked to elide the 'horror of the bomb' and compounded the feminisation of the Pacific region.⁷⁸ Other studies of the representation of 'colonised' women, particularly in the Pacific area have shown how indigenous women have been consistently 'sexualised'.⁷⁹ The enduring image, of what Patty O'Brien calls the 'Pacific Muse' - the slender, long-haired, sexually available young woman - has altered over time to accommodate the current economic and ideological concerns of the colonising culture but remained a constant theme in colonial history.⁸⁰

The desirability of young Aboriginal women to white men was depicted as key to their acceptance into white society throughout the pages of the magazine. In 1952 a twenty-two year old white American man, pen friend of an Aboriginal girl through the *Dawn* magazine, sent a suggestion to the letters page: 'that you might sometime have a beauty contest to determine the most beautiful aboriginal girl. I believe it would help stimulate interest.' The editor of *Dawn* thought this kind of interest would be warmly welcomed by the Aboriginal readership and commented: 'This is a very nice letter and should indicate to the aboriginal people how the white people of this great country think about them... and how the white peoples of the free countries of the world also think.' At its most obvious, the magazine

⁷⁷ Teresia K Teaiwa, 'bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans', *The Contemporary Pacific*, vol. 6, no. 1, Spring, 1994

⁷⁸ Teaiwa, 'bikinis and other s/pacific n/oceans'

⁷⁹ Stoler, 'Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender, Race and Morality in Colonial Asia', M. di Leonardo (ed), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Post-modern Era*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991; Margaret Jolley, 'The Politics of Difference: Feminism, Colonialism and Decolonisation in Vanuatu', in G. Bottomley, M. de Lepervanche & J. Martine (eds), *Intersexions*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, pp. 52-74; Patty O'Brien, 'The Gaze of the Ghosts: European Representations of Aboriginal Women in NSW and Port Phillip, 1800-1850', in J. Kociumbus (ed), *Maps, Dreams, History: Race and Representation in Australia*, Braxus Publishing, Sydney, 1998, pp. 314-400; Patty O'Brien, 'The Pacific Muse: Colonial Stereotypes of Indigenous Women in the Pacific', PhD, Department of History, University of Sydney, 1998; Tzevetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: the Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard, Harper & Row, New York, 1984; Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989; Albert Memmi, *The Coloniser and the Colonised*, trans Howard Greenfield, Souvenir Press, New York, 1965; Sander Gilman, 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in late Nineteenth century Art, Medicine and Literature', in Henry Louis Gates (ed), *Race, Writing and Difference*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1985, pp. 223-262; Hazel V. Carby, 'On the threshold of the Woman's Era: Lynching, Empire and Sexuality in Black Feminist Thought', in Gates (ed) *Race, Writing and Difference*, 1985, pp. 301-317

⁸⁰ O'Brien, 'The Pacific Muse'

acted as a dating agency for white men keen to 'get in touch' with Aboriginal women. 'May we introduce Olga Kelly of Bowraville' beamed *Dawn* above a feature headed, 'Engineer Wants to Meet Our Girls. Appeals to *Dawn* for Help'.⁸¹ Young Aboriginal women readers of *Dawn* were encouraged to send a 'swag of letters' to men such as Mr Hayter, the bright young engineer with an interest in the mouth organ and gymnastics. A common image to appear in the magazine was of a picture of white male state official with one or more young Aboriginal women on their arms (Fig. x & xi).



Fig. x & xi

⁸¹*Dawn*, November, 1956, p. 2

On the other hand, images of Aboriginal men as successful husbands and fathers were under-represented in *Dawn*. An Aboriginal bride *without* her groom was as likely to appear on the cover as a picture with both husband and wife.⁸² Similarly, despite the administration's stress on the superiority of the nuclear family unit (over the extended family) rarely was an Aboriginal family group depicted in *Dawn*. Only a small proportion (about 3.5%) of cover shots depicted an Aboriginal family group with mother and father. A cover in July 1954 which showed an Aboriginal man and women together with their child was used to highlight the primitiveness of Western Australian Aboriginal people compared to those in New South Wales. Kneeling at the entrance to their 'primitive lean-to', the toddler appears almost to be suckling at his mother's breast (Fig xii).



Fig. xii

This image contrasted markedly with the images of modern, hygienic mothering and infant welfare represented in *Dawn*. A 'picture story', subtitled 'Assimilation from the cradle' which appeared in a 1962 edition exemplified the Board's approach to Aboriginal mothering. A series of photographs, with superimposed voice, showed a young female baby, which the Welfare Board staff was preparing for fostering, along with the infant's sister:

Daisy Mae, aged 18 months, and her six-months old sister, came out of the west one winter's morning recently, thinly clad but robustly healthy after a train journey of more than 300 miles...The bush babies became the property of the Welfare Board because of the inability of their parents to take care of them properly.⁸³

The two infants are brought to the Board headquarters, where they are kept and 'mothered for a day and a night' by two women welfare officers, who are described washing the 'grime' off the babies and making them 'immaculate' to be collected by their foster parents the next

⁸²In fact a bride without her groom was three times as likely to appear on the front cover

⁸³*Dawn*, September 1962, pp. 8-9

day. The 'bush babies', described as the 'property' of the Welfare Board, were 'robustly healthy' despite apparently not having been taken care of by their parents 'properly'. The passive tense is used to describe the removal of the children. They simply 'came out of the west one winter's morning' as if spirited there by their own good fortune. This representation of the easy availability of Aboriginal children to the Board and its staff is a striking feature of the images and text in *Dawn*. One striking image which seems to sum up this approach, shows a collection of 'mug shots' of Aboriginal infants, arranged to appear as if floating like a bunch of balloons, ready to be distributed amongst white hands (Fig. xiii).⁸⁴

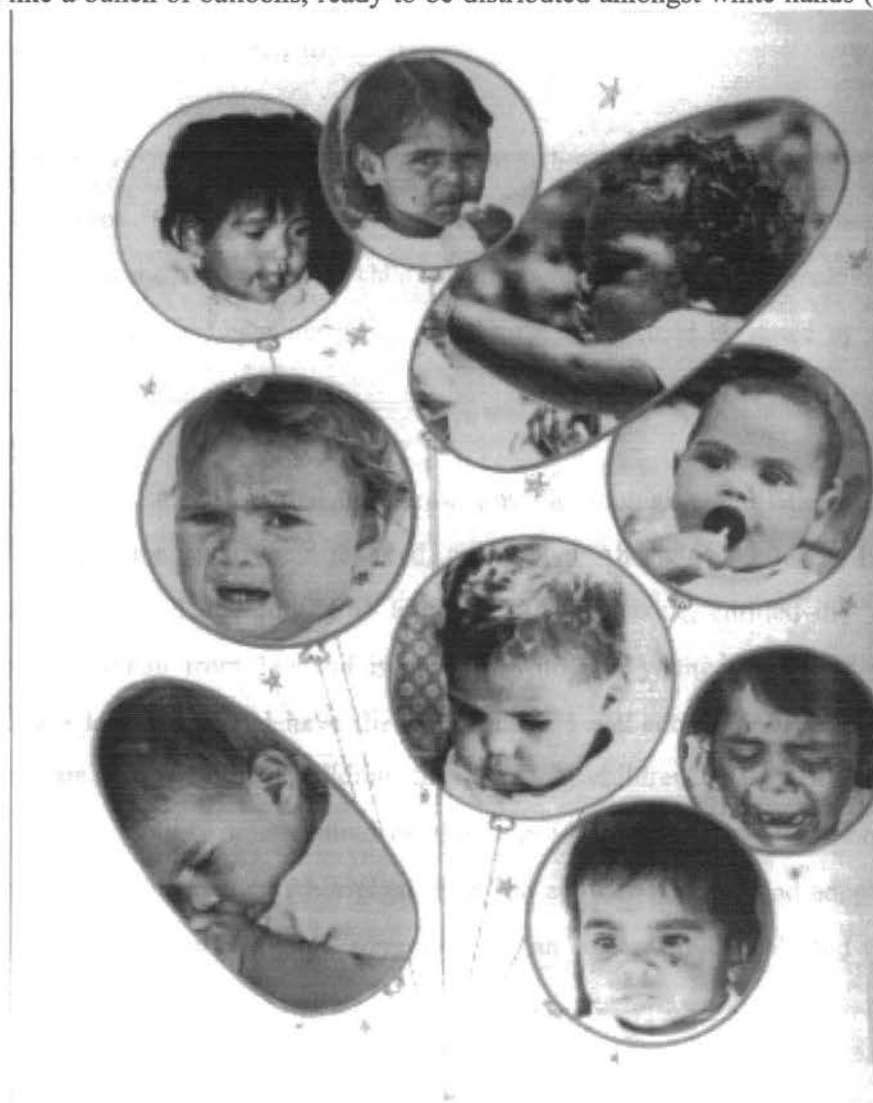


Fig. xiii

⁸⁴To the long-standing policy of removal and institutionalisation of Aboriginal children in the 1950s the Aborigines Welfare Board had begun to promote the individual fostering of, so-called, 'neglected' Aboriginal children by white families, See Wilson & Link-up (NSW), *In the Best Interests*, pp. 93-97

A familiar representation of white women, such as the women welfare officers in the picture story above, depicted them as substitute mothers to Aboriginal children. Photographs, and 'picture stories' were utilised in *Dawn* to normalise the policy of child removal and the increasing use of white foster parents throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Numerous images and feature articles told of the benefits to both children and parents of fostering and adoption. Aboriginal mother's were represented as the junior partner to the white mother - who represents seniority and experience. A typical article describes the Aboriginal mother willingly signing over her child to the white women, knowing that the 'European' woman will do a better job:

The little Aboriginal girl was playing happily in Sydney's Botanic Gardens until she fell and grazed her knee. "Mummy, Mummy", she cried, and ran to the older of the two women watching her...The younger of the women, the child's natural mother, saw then that it would be best for the child if she signed the adoption papers so that the child could be raised by the European woman⁸⁵

A common success story reported in *Dawn* was the mutual assimilation of European immigrant women along with their fostered, or adopted Aboriginal children. In an article and photograph featured in a July 1964 edition of the magazine, entitled the 'Meaning of Assimilation', a woman from Holland is pictured with two young Aboriginal girls. She is quoted saying 'I love them. If I have the opportunity I will adopt another. The more the better...They are not Aboriginal children, they are MY children'.⁸⁶ (Fig. xiv) Mrs Wieke Duyker, also from Holland was featured on the June 1964 cover with her four and a half year old 'son', Terry Duyker, an Aboriginal child she and her husband had adopted at three months old. 'Terry is now becoming something of an expert in Dutch' read the cheerful caption.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Dawn*, July 1967. p. 1

⁸⁶ July, 1964, back cover, original emphasis

⁸⁷ *Dawn*, June, 1964, inside front cover



THE MEANING OF ASSIMILATION

Among the general public in Melbourne there is a widespread misunderstanding of the meaning of the term 'Assimilation'.

Mrs. Vandellier arrived in Australia from Holland eight years ago with her husband and two sons, Nick (over 20) and Billy (under 10).

She has since adopted four Aboriginal children, Majorie (11), Ruby (12), and Billy (14).

Of the three nearest members of her family, Mrs. Vandellier said: "I love them. If I had the opportunity I will adopt another. The more the better."

"They are not Aboriginal children—they are my children."

The photo (shown) shows Mrs. Vandellier with Majorie and Billy.

Fig xiv 'The more the better'

Jedda

A well-known representation of a white woman's adoption of an Aboriginal child that made news and reached a mass audience during the 1950s was Charles and Elsa Chauvel's film *Jedda*.⁸⁸ The story of *Jedda* tells of a young Aboriginal woman, brought up by a white station owner's wife, who succumbs to the 'black magic' of an out-lawed tribal man. The Chauvel's depiction of *Jedda* as representative of the primitive feminine, as an embodiment of atavistic forces, what the film calls her 'tribal instincts' is in an ambivalent, oppositional relation to the images promoted in *Dawn* in the name of assimilation. The Chauvel's approach exemplified both in the film *Jedda* of 1954 and their BBC 'documentary' series

⁸⁸See Katrina Schlunke, 'Imaging the Imagined: Stories of *Jedda*', Symposium on *Jedda*, *The Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 9-13; Beckett, 'Mrs McMahon's Mistake', 1993, p.16

Walkabout of 1959, was to emphasise what they called the 'stone age' attributes of Aboriginal people in the late 1950s.

Referring to the production of the *Walkabout* series, Charles Chauvel claimed that he, Elsa, and the accompanying crew had 'for four years...literally followed in the footsteps of the Stone Age men and women with our cameras'.⁸⁹ The Chauvel's juxtaposed the primitiveness of Aboriginal Australia with the progress of white Australia. Their images in *Walkabout* and the sexually fraught images of *Jedda*, represented the young Aboriginal woman's body as a metaphor for her country, penetrable and observable by the voyeuristic eye of the camera. Patty O'Brien, in her study of colonial stereotypes of the feminine suggests that in the Chauvel's images, Aboriginal women were represented as 'mid-twentieth century savages, arrested and out of place in the dynamism of post-war progress'.⁹⁰

These images of naked, female 'savages' offer a contrast to the image of the modern, light-skinned, assimilated Aboriginal woman promoted in the *Dawn*. Thus, in the magazine's coverage on the making of *Jedda*, (the film was the first feature in colour made by an Australian company, and amongst the first to use Aboriginal people in lead roles)⁹¹ the magazine focused on the ordinariness of the female 'star', Rosalie Kunoth-Monk (re-named as Ngarla by Elsa Chauvel, for the film's publicity). The magazine stressed the woman behind the image, outstanding for her 'hard work and good living'. While the film had depicted the folly of trying to 'tame' the primitive sexuality of the Aboriginal girl, Kunoth-Monks' life as a nun after the making of the film were stressed in *Dawn's* coverage.⁹² The magazine represented Kunoth as a highly successful, 'assimilated Australian' able to bring positive publicity to other Aboriginal people:

⁸⁹Charles & Elsa Chauvel, *Walkabout*, W. H Allen, London, 1959, p. xi

⁹⁰'Colonial Stereotypes and Indigenous Women in the Pacific', PhD Department of History, University of Sydney, 1998, p. 373

⁹¹Michael Rietiker for the Australian Film Commission, 'Picture the Primitive: The 1950s, Film and Television and Indigenous Australian,' Symposium on *Jedda*, published in *Olive Pink Society Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 2, December 1993, pp. 4-8

⁹²*Dawn*, October 1954, pp. 10-13

Our cover girl this month is Ngarla Kunoth, star of the film JEDDA. Ngarla has proved herself to be a very talented actress as well as a charming young Australian woman and there is no doubt she will bring a great deal of favourable publicity to the aboriginal people of this country.⁹³

The emphasis in *Dawn* was the opposite of 'star-making' or exceptionalism, focusing instead on the ordinariness of Ngarla, and her co-star Robert Tudawali: 'Bob and Ngarla are two typical Australians, hard working and good living. They are a credit to their race and both of them feel that by their portrayals in Jemma they may have advanced the cause of the Australian Aborigine just that much further along the road.'⁹⁴

Disruptive inhabitations, alternate representations in the *Dawn*

She added with a laugh, "quite nice as white people go".

- *Dawn*, June 1954

In June 1954 a twenty-one year old Aboriginal woman who had worked for five years as a telephonist to save money for a world trip, reported to *Dawn*: 'Once the rather snobbish people who refused to speak or associate with our race used to hurt me very much but I guess I have outgrown that. I am really very proud of my colour and will never deny to anyone that I am an Australian Aboriginal.'⁹⁵ Questioned about her engagement to a white man of Randwick she said ' He is really very agreeable', and added with a laugh, 'quite nice as white people go'.⁹⁶ In introducing *Dawn* magazine the state government had opened up an oppositional space where articulate Aboriginal women and men could introduce alternate images and representations of themselves, and their relationship to white people. While the magazine was produced by the Board, and the content to a large extent controlled by the administration, it became itself a contested site, a space for oppositional discourse and representations. Jane Jacobs, and other post-colonial scholars argue that colonised groups subvert power, not simply through 'stark opposition' but also through 'disruptive

⁹³ *Dawn*, Oct 1954, cover

⁹⁴ *Dawn*, Oct 1954, pp. 8-9

⁹⁵ *Dawn*, June, 1954, p. 5

⁹⁶ *Dawn*, June 1954, p. 6

inhabitations of colonial constructs' (see introduction).⁹⁷ There were a multitude of ways that Aboriginal women and men 'inhabited' the pages of *Dawn*.

These varied contributions to *Dawn* from Aboriginal readers indicate the complicated and ambiguous effects of the magazine. For example, public expressions of support for the assimilationist agenda of the Board were encouraged in the letters page. Residents of reserves and stations were encouraged to write in to *Dawn* with suggestions of how assimilation could be more readily achieved. Many Aboriginal people reading and writing in to the magazine regarded the 'Letters to the Editor' segment to be a very different kind of forum than anticipated by the Board. By October of 1952, nine months after the first edition was published, the magazine had received so many written complaints about government staff and conditions on reserves and stations from Aboriginal writers around the state, that the editor had to include a warning on the letters page:

While... most sympathetic to these complaints, I must point out he [the Editor] is not in a position to judge the right and wrongs of such matters and can only suggest that people wishing to complain against the administration do so by letter to the Superintendent of Aborigines Welfare.⁹⁸

Non-Aboriginal readers of *Dawn* can also occasionally be found voicing their disagreements with the Board in this forum. In June 1959 a letter was sent in by a non-Aboriginal woman who had been given a copy of the magazine by an Aboriginal friend. She wrote, 'Fully half of it is white folk buttering themselves with all the good that was being done by them for the coloured people, and how grateful those coloured people should be'.⁹⁹ She went on to highlight the enormous distance between the alleged opportunities afforded Aboriginal people by the administration and the actual circumstances of economic deprivation experienced by Aboriginal people around the state. What good was the advice offered regularly in the 'Home Hints' section she argued, if the economic circumstances of Aboriginal women and their children was such as to make the advice farcical: "Wrap gold

⁹⁷Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*, p. 14

⁹⁸*Dawn*, October 1952, p. 19

⁹⁹*Dawn*, June, 1959, p. 1

and silver shoes. When your trousseau linen starts wearing ..." This advise was useless and an insult. She wrote:

Our handful of aborigines at Yamba are in great trouble. A lethargic white population has allowed them to be tossed out into a swampy marsh land which has become quite uninhabitable during the 40 odd inches of rain we've had since Christmas. No water supply other than a pump situated in the midst of a bog-hollow evil smelling brown stuff as all Ti Tree swamp water is. The heat, mosquitoes, sand flies, the place is too terrible...¹⁰⁰

The superiority of white culture and colonial rule, normalised in the discourse of assimilation, was also challenged in longer articles in *Dawn* such as that written by Tom McKenzie, an Aboriginal worker on a dairy farm in Kangaroo Valley. McKenzie wrote a long, articulate reply to a feature story written by station matron, Mrs Norah Foster, which was published in 1956. Norah Foster's article had repeated the familiar argument that Aboriginal people had nothing holding them back from full equality but their individual efforts, emphasising the need for thrift and abstinence. Norah Foster argued that 'except concerning the matter of drink (and this is covered by the exemption certificate) they do have the same rights'.¹⁰¹ In response McKenzie pointed out the segregation of Aboriginal people in cinemas and in swimming pools in country towns: '[A]borigines are forced to sit in a separate part of the theatre irrespective of how clean or well behaved they are. This is a straight out colour bar'.¹⁰² McKenzie's reply to the matron reversed some familiar tropes of *Dawn's* assimilationist agenda. In his reply, modernisation was not the essential and superior development depicted in government accounts. His writing questioned the usual hierarchical relationship assumed between the peaceful civilisation of white culture and the barbaric primitivism of pre-contact Aboriginal culture. Directing his reply to an Aboriginal readership, he wrote:

White people have invented machines that will move faster than sound, but they have also invented the atom bomb that will blow up whole cities, killing guilty and innocent alike...In the

¹⁰⁰ *Dawn*, 1959, p. 1

¹⁰¹ *Dawn*, p. 1 & p. 17

¹⁰² *Dawn*, April 1956, p. 1

first half of this century they have either been at war or in constant fear of war. In two world wars whole countries were laid waste and millions and millions lost their lives.¹⁰³

Norah Foster's article had concluded with a list of the benefits of white society for Aboriginal people and the question to Aboriginal readers 'What have you given to us?' McKenzie answered her query with a response that alluded to the loss of land and the destruction brought to individuals and communities by industrial modernity:

Our forefathers gave you a lovely country which God had given to them. For countless ages it nourished our people in sunshine and health...without the roar of trains, the rattle of trams and all the mad rushing that drives so many people to drink or into mental homes which our people did not need.¹⁰⁴

Finally McKenzie contextualised Foster's denial of the structural nature of the economic impoverishment of the Aboriginal community, 'I agree with Mrs Foster's advice on thrift' wrote McKenzie dryly '...but I doubt if staying home from the pictures would get me the Holden car I'd like.'¹⁰⁵ McKenzie's article represented a challenge to some of the common assimilationist associations made - between modernity and progress, impoverishment and individual failure and white culture and peaceful civilisation.

Dawn also acted as a public forum for young Aboriginal writers, some of whom became well-known as activists in the 1970s. People who appeared as teenagers in *Dawn* as essay competition winners, young fiction writers and top scholars became familiar names during the black-power movement in Australia. The winner of the adult section of the 1968 National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC) essay competition was Mr Kevin Gilbert and his poems appear on many pages of the magazine in the late 1950s, alongside the poems of the Kath Walker, later to become Oodgeroo Noonuccal. A special prize was given to Gordon Briscoe, now a well-know Aboriginal activist and historian and a young Mr Paul Coe, won a scholarship and said that one day he would 'like to become an art teacher'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³'How an Aborigine sees Things', *Dawn*, August 1956, p. 1

¹⁰⁴'How an Aborigine', p. 1

¹⁰⁵'How an Aborigine', p. 1

¹⁰⁶ *Dawn*, 1958, p. 3

While the magazine sought to play a role in the 'domestication' of Aboriginal resistance to its policies, this too could be subverted to some extent by the Aboriginal readership. *Dawn* magazine had been used by the Board to respond to the Aboriginal campaign against the child removal policy (voiced publicly by Aboriginal parents and activist organisations, with some support from white humanitarian organisations, since at least the early 1920s).¹⁰⁷ In response to these demands the Board had minuted an agreement in the late 1940s to allow selected Aboriginal adults from stations around the state to visit the Cootamundra and Kinchela Children's Homes.¹⁰⁸ In 1949 it rescinded this previous decision and approved instead of a set of photographs of each of the two homes being distributed to Aboriginal stations.¹⁰⁹

Relatives of Aboriginal children at the two homes have, ... sought information relating to the homes, the Board has arranged for a series of photos to be taken showing the various aspects of the daily lives of the children'.¹¹⁰

These promised photographs appeared three years later in the third issue of *Dawn* magazine, under the heading 'Happy Homes'. The Cootamundra Girls Home was described as a 'veritable haven for many'¹¹¹ and the Kinchela Home, (known today for its brutality)¹¹² was described as a 'Home from Home' and as 'more of a country club' than a boy's home.¹¹³ The promise of 'facts' that surrounded the technology of photography was used in this case in an attempt to diminish parental concern for their children.¹¹⁴ These photographs, published in *Dawn*, are described by Aboriginal people today as one of the ways they could keep track of their children, their nieces, nephews and grandchildren in the hope that one

¹⁰⁷ see Jack Horner, *Bill Ferguson Goodall*, 'A History of Aboriginal Communities'

¹⁰⁸ AWBM, Jan 1949, 4/8545

¹⁰⁹ AWBM, Jan 1949, 4/8545

¹¹⁰ *Dawn*, March, 1952, p. 14

¹¹¹ *Dawn*, December, 1954, pp. 22-23

¹¹² see previous chapter, also HREOC inquiry established the brutality of Kinchela, see also Report into the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Link-Up (NSW) & Tika, *In the Best Interests of the Child*,

¹¹³ *Dawn*, 1958, 1959, p. 3 & 4

¹¹⁴ On photography and 'Facts' see Michael Taussig, 'Physiognomic Aspects of Visual Worlds', in L. Taylor, (ed), *Visualising Theory. Selected Essays in Visual Arts Representation, 1990-1994*, Routledge, New York, 1994, p. 207

day they would be re-united. Coral (now Oomera) Edwards' film *It's a Long Road Back* documents the significance of these photographs to her family from whom she was removed and taken to the Cootamundra Girls Home at five months.¹¹⁵ In the final minutes of the film, Coral asks her cousin Daphne if she had ever thought about her 'all those years' and Daphne replies by describing the family at home cutting out her photograph from *Dawn* magazine. Coral Edwards concludes her journey back to her family:

All those years I'd spent in that home [Cootamundra] thinking no-one cared. All the time these people had been cutting pictures out of a magazine and keeping them and reading *everyone* as they came through.¹¹⁶

Princess Lillardia

In another example of 'disruptive inhabitations', Margaret Tucker, removed as a child by the Aborigines Welfare Board in New South Wales (see chapter two), repeatedly sent letters and photographs to *Dawn* concerning her work as an advocate for Aboriginal people at a national and international level. She, appeared regularly in the magazine under the title 'Princess Lillardia' of the 'ancient Ulupna tribe of the Murray River District, the daughter of Queen Yarmuk'. This royal title tied Tucker to a lineage of Aboriginal 'nobility' and challenged the Board's association between once proud 'Kings' and their 'commoner' survivors that depicted Aborigines in the 1960s as ragged survivors of a 'once proud' past. Margaret Tucker, on the other hand, made her contemporary connections with royalty clear. A *Dawn* feature story written by Sylvia Cust, which appeared in the October 1963 issue, described Tucker's visit to Tonga at the invitation of Queen Salote. Salote was famous at the time for her broad and populist appeal within the Commonwealth - remembered widely for riding in an open carriage, in the rain, at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Significantly, Queen Salote was the only recognised black Queen in the Commonwealth and the ancestral ruler of an island that had avoided the worst excesses of systemic colonisation.¹¹⁷ By the late 1950s Margaret Tucker was active in international politics, raising the national profile of Indigenous Australians. In 1957 she was photographed as

¹¹⁵Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1983

¹¹⁶Her emphasis, Coral Edwards, *It's a Long Road Back*

¹¹⁷Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, Verso, London, 1995

Princess Lildardia handing a boomerang to the wife of the foreign minister of Indonesia at an Asian Assembly for Moral Re-armament in the Philippines.¹¹⁸ In the May 1958 issue of *Dawn* photographs sent to the Board from Margaret Tucker's journey to America for another Moral Re-armament conference offered alternative representation of Aboriginality than that of assimilation. The 'Moral Re-armament' movement¹¹⁹ was widely associated with anti-communism, a fact that would have encouraged the publication of these photographs of Tucker's international journey in *Dawn* magazine. But anti-communism was not fore-grounded in Tucker's own account of her international visits.¹²⁰ Tucker highlighted the possibilities available in the international forum for promoting an Aboriginal nationalism, and for making links between the racist oppression of people in various parts of the world. In her autobiography Tucker recounts using the Moral Rearmament forums to raise the similarity between American-African slavery experiences and the apprenticeship practices of the Australian government.¹²¹

The photographs and accompanying text for the journey both to the Philippines and America show Margaret Tucker representing a national body of Aboriginal Australians, along with other national representatives from around the world (Fig. y). This representation did not conform to assimilationist thinking about the future of Aboriginal Australians. Margaret Tucker's self-representation, in the forum of *Dawn*, can be read as a contribution to the nascent pan-indigenous national identity, before its popularity in the 1970s. In a letter sent to the Board ostensibly to thank them for publishing her photographs on her overseas work, Tucker alludes openly to the hostility and suspicion felt by many 'grateful', 'respectable', 'assimilated' Aboriginal people, who she was seen to represent, towards the white establishment during the assimilation years. In the white Australian dream of assimilation, Aboriginal people gratefully accepted the hand of white superiority. At the middle of the *Dawn* Margaret Tucker succeeded in expressing something of the reality for Aboriginal people behind the assimilationist mask. Tucker described for

¹¹⁸*Dawn*, November, 1957

¹¹⁹Moral Rearmament was a Christian ethics movement at its peak in the immediate post-war years until the 1950s, see William Bragg et al, *Moral Re-Armament*, SCM Press, London, 1938; Graeme Cordiner, *End of Survival and Beginning of Living: A Handbook for Christian Living in the Twenty-first Century*, Effective Living Publications, Gladsville, New South Wales, 1995

¹²⁰Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared. An Autobiography of Margaret Tucker*, Grosvenor Books, Melbourne, 1977, pp. 184-187

¹²¹Tucker, *If Everyone Cared*, pp. 184-187

Dawn the 'bitterness, suspicion and hatred of our white brothers' held by many.¹²² Other statements of the anger and pain felt by Aboriginal women at the conditions they experienced growing up in Australia made their way into the pages of *Dawn*, wrapped in apparently benign outer-coatings. A powerful rallying call by Mrs Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), was published in an early edition of the magazine. A 'young Mrs Kath Walker', after service with the WAAF in World War Two was described by the editor as a 'housewife with a flair for writing'.¹²³ Kath Walker's poem was an indictment of the white system and its impact on Aboriginal men, in the form of a rallying call to Aboriginal people to avenge the death of Albert Namatjira.¹²⁴

But Fame was short and death was swift
You strangled in rules the white man's gift;
The laws they made were cruelly unjust,
They trampled your pride into the dust.

Namatjira your race is standing near,
To right the wrongs of many a year;
Humiliated man, of peace bereft,
We march with pride to avenge your death.

Ironically, the poem, with its concluding line 'we march with pride to avenge your death' was printed underneath photographs of marching girls from the Moree Company of the Girls Life Brigade. Such an unconscious juxtaposition illustrates the uncanny ways in which *Dawn* opened up oppositional spaces, acting to distribute images across the state of New South Wales that had different effects than intended. Within such a context, poetry and fiction in *Dawn* acted within the rational, pedagogic contours of the magazine as a point where the unspoken could be said and Aboriginal women utilised this forum to tell counter-narratives against the dominant state discourse.

¹²²*Dawn*, December, 1959, p. 21

¹²³see *Dawn*, 1956, p. 8, see also Kathie Cochrane with a contribution by Judith Wright, *Oodgeroo*, University of Queensland Press, 1994

¹²⁴Namatjira - famed painter exempted from the Act, he was convicted of supplying alcohol to a fellow Aboriginal, jailed and subsequently died.

The story of the 'Red-Lily Waterhole' told to Michael Sawtell, a member of the Aborigines Welfare Board and printed in an early edition of *Dawn* is a final example of the way fiction and story-telling could break out of the rational, assimilationist project of the magazine.¹²⁵ The story told of an Aboriginal woman whose child had been stolen by a 'giant and cruel crocodile'. Many other Aboriginal mothers witnessed the terrible event and began to wail, cut themselves and cover themselves in ashes to show their sorrow. The bereft mother in desperation and anger took a sharp shell and dived deep into the waterhole to attack the crocodile: 'The other mothers knew that with the sharp shell she was trying to rip open the soft under-belly of the crocodile. As they watched, hoping against hope, blood coloured the clear water and they knew both she, and the crocodile, were dead'.

The story, with the theme of child removal, the weeping, anger and finally the retribution of the Aboriginal woman, is told graphically, resonating with the context of child removal and Aboriginal mother's wide-spread anguish at the time. Read metaphorically, this story is one example of the way that *Dawn* magazine exposed the soft-underbelly of the 'great crocodile'. In the story, the blood that coloured the clear waters of the red-lily waterhole was not only that of the Aboriginal mother, but also of the crocodile. So, within the parameters of a series of repetitive stereotypes and tropes of Aboriginal women and men, *Dawn* magazine created a forum which offered oppositional representations, within the context of an assimilationist agenda which sought to eradicate a self-identifying Aboriginal community. In relation to the assimilationist agenda of the Aborigines Welfare Board, *Dawn* magazine thus highlights a recent theme in post-colonial research that cultures of power and domination never fully realise themselves (see introduction).

Other images of Aboriginal women resident on stations and reserves establishing community services and organising public dances, weddings and baby shows seemed, on the surface, to celebrate the assimilation and progress of these individuals. Such images also provide a record of the ways that people made Aboriginal stations a place for family ceremony, and a place to start new families - activities which ran counter to the intentions of breaking down Aboriginal stations and reserves, that began to be articulated by the Board as the way forward for assimilation, particularly in the 1965-67 Select Parliamentary Committee (discussed in chapter seven). Many of these sustaining activities on the stations

¹²⁵'Red Lily Waterhold', told to Michael Sawtell, *Dawn*, August, 1952, p.3

and reserves were achieved by enlisting the support of white women in rural areas, frequently women from the conservative Country Women's Association.¹²⁶ The January 1962 issue of *Dawn*, for example, reports on a 'willing band of ladies' who had opened the community hall at Walgett station after years of closure.¹²⁷ Nine months later, the October 1962 issue of *Dawn* recorded the historic opening of a public bathroom, Baby Health centre and Gillawarra Gift shop at Purfleet Station near Taree, on New South Wales's mid-North coast. Aboriginal author and long-term activist, Ella Simon, worked as the president of the Country Women's Association, Purfleet branch, at the time of the opening and was central to the successful establishment of the new facilities on the station. In her autobiography *Through My Eyes*, Simon details the long and often devastating battle fought by her family to remain on the station during the 'dispersal' and 'assimilation' years.¹²⁸ Simon recalls that the opening of the Gillawarra Gift shop provided a focus around which pride in the station's Aboriginal community could be expressed publicly. On the day of the opening a concert and 'corroborree' featuring local artists and performers from the Purfleet 'mission' was held and a community dance took place that evening. In the longer-term the Gift shop provided an ongoing economic focus for the community. *Dawn* disseminated information across the state about the work of women such as Ella Simon and is today a valuable record of some of the differing representations of Aboriginal women's lives under the assimilation policy.

In 1968, as the Welfare Board was under pressure to disband, *Dawn* became a quarterly and then re-emerged as a monthly magazine entitled *New Dawn*. The 'new' in the title signals the end of the Welfare Board and the handing over of its responsibilities to the Child Welfare and Social Welfare Department which continued to publish the magazine until 1975 (see Chapter seven). In reading *Dawn* it is clear that, in the post-war years, the cultural politics of representation articulated with the other assimilationist strategies of the Aborigines Welfare Board, described in the previous chapters. *Dawn* magazine was one important cultural site within the policies and practices of the administration.

¹²⁶see Helen Townsend, 'CWA and Aboriginal issues', in *Serving the Country. The History of Country Womens Association of New South Wales*, Doubleday, Sydney, New South Wales, 1997

¹²⁷January, 1962, p. 20

¹²⁸Simon, *Through My Eyes*

This reading of *Dawn: A Magazine for the Aboriginal People of New South Wales*, shows the particular ways that assimilationist ideology impacted in gender-specific ways on Aboriginal people, constituting women as the ideal subject of assimilation. Repetitive images of both Aboriginal women and men, in the 1950s and 1960s, were promoted and publicised by the Aborigines Welfare Board and these were resisted in 'uncanny' ways in both text and iconography. In 1965, three years before the demise of the Welfare Board the Chairman estimated that the magazine had a circulation of 15,000 sent direct to Board-controlled Aboriginal reserves and stations throughout New South Wales. In addition, an unrecorded number were circulated within the Sydney metropolitan area and in country towns.¹²⁹ By focusing on the gendered nature of the images and themes in *Dawn* the 1950s and 1960s assimilation policy can be seen to be marked by a continuing mobilisation of images of Aboriginal femininity as the 'answer' to the Aboriginal 'problem'. Ideas about the role that Aboriginal women were to play in making the transition from primitivism to modernity contributed to the veracity of emerging public identities that arose out of the decades of the 1950s and 1960s which mobilised 'women' as a category central to modernisation. One of the striking images of feminised assimilation to grace *Dawn* was the Aboriginal debutante.¹³⁰ (Fig. xiv) Her adolescence, on the verge of maturity, became a symbol of one way to solve the 'Aboriginal problem' in the post-war decades. The following chapter analyses the symbolic and political implications of this public performance of Aboriginal femininity that received favourable coverage in mainstream media throughout the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. Finally, in the ambiguity between the production and reception of the magazine, lay a productive tension facilitating conditions for the emergence of other public forms of Aboriginal identity that became popular in the 1960s and 1970s as the final chapters explore.

¹²⁹Kingsmill evidence, *Select Parliamentary Inquiry*, 1965

¹³⁰This remains consistently high throughout both the 1950s and 1960s

CHAPTER SIX

The Aboriginal Debutante



Fig. xv

In July, 1968, the recently elected Prime minister of Australia, John Gorton, wearing evening dress, assessed a line-up of twenty-five young Aboriginal women in the Sydney Town Hall.¹ Aboriginal author, Ruby-Langford Ginibi who attended the event with her daughter, Pearl, remembers how the young Aboriginal debutantes, dressed in white frocks of varying design, stood silently in the main ballroom as the nation's newly-elected leader looked them over:²

¹*Sydney Morning Herald*, July 16, 1968, p. 4

²Ruby Langford-Ginibi, pers comm, August 1994, see also Langford-Ginibi, 'The Debutante Ball', in *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, 1988 pp. 126-141

Pearl was twenty-second out of twenty-five debs... [A] grey-haired man walked up to Pearl and clicked his heels in salute and took her hand. He led her to the middle of the floor and the band struck up and away they waltzed. I couldn't see very well from my seat so I asked someone, 'Who's that man dancing with Pearl?'. Next day it was all in the newspapers. Pearl had made history being the first Aboriginal ever to dance with the Prime Minister. I was so proud and later Gorton wrote me a letter.³

... For your daughter to get up there and dance with the man that ran this bloody country was a great high. I just felt real pleased that this had happened to my daughter, in my little handmade dress that I'd got from the Smithos⁴

Ruby Langford-Ginibi also remembers that not long after the night of the dance, Pearl's fourteen year old brother was arrested, and charged with petty theft, whilst playing with cricket equipment he had taken with friends from an open shed at Newtown High School. It was from the Daruk Training Home, where he had been sent for six months for his first 'offence', that he came to his favourite sister's funeral on Christmas Eve that same year, 1968.⁵ Pearl Langford, the young debutante, had been killed in a hit and run car accident a few months after the memorable evening. Langford-Ginibi recalled, with pain, how her fourteen year old son was kept handcuffed and supervised throughout the entire church service and funeral:

(Pearlie) had a large funeral... I buried her with my father because I couldn't afford a plot of my own. Nobby was brought back to the house from the boy's home. A fourteen year old boy handcuffed for his sister's funeral. The officer sat with him in the mourning car and later they took him straight back to the home. He wouldn't let anyone mention her name. He locked Pearl away in the back of his mind.⁶

The story told by Langford-Ginibi, of the experiences of her teenage daughter and son, in Sydney in the late 1960s, illustrates the theme of the previous chapters, of the contrasting

³Langford-Ginibi, *Don't take your Love*, p. 141

⁴Pers comm, Oct 1994

⁵Langford-Ginibi, pers comm, October 1994, see also 'The Debutante Ball', p. 141

⁶Langford-Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love*, p. 141

ways that Aboriginal female, and male youth, have been drawn into the project of assimilation in post-war Australia. Langford-Ginibi's memories also highlight the contradictions between the public presentation of successful assimilation, represented in official depictions of the Aboriginal debutante, and the reality of the every day lives of Aboriginal women and men and their children in the late 1960s and 1970s. In this chapter the Aboriginal debutante and the emergence of the Aboriginal debutante ball, as both a symbol and as an event, is analysed to explore some of the complexities and contradictions of assimilation in both metropolitan Sydney and rural Australia.

Feminist cultural historian, Kathy Peiss, argues in another context that in resistance to dominant ideologies, throughout history women drew on tradition (like the culture of the domestic economy or the beauty culture) and re-appropriated hegemonic cultural forms to suit their purposes.⁷ Her work argues that women have often responded to social oppression not by trying to change their political status, but by demonstrating their ability to retain some control over their own actions via popular cultural forms and popular representations of women.⁸ Other cultural critics argue that in under-estimating the importance of certain forms of popular culture - because of the seemingly frivolous, and often 'feminine' nature of particular events and symbols - the operation of larger structures of power remain masked.⁹ Other work, in particular, the cultural historians, Robert Darnton and Le Roy Ladurie have set an important precedent in describing instances in which popular or 'elite' culture has been mobilised in 'uncanny' ways for political protest.¹⁰ They show that oppressed groups did not always openly resist the dominant culture itself, or contest fundamentally the social hierarchy in which they lived. However in their choice of symbolic actions they intervened directly in the relations of power and domination that caused them harm in their day to day lives. In their analyses Darnton and Ladurie use particular examples of cultural symbolism to access the 'political intelligence' expressed in

⁷Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 1998

⁸Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, p. 15

⁹Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1998; Andrea Cornwall & Nancy Lindisfarne (ed), *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, Routledge, New York, London, 1994; Frances Bonner et al (ed), *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*, Polity Press in Association with Open University, 1992; Cambridge, England, 1992, Susan Sheridan (ed), *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism*, Verso, London, New York, 1988; Chandra Mukerji & Micheal Schudson, (eds), *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1991, p. 15; Lisa Rado (ed), *Modernism, Gender and Culture: A Cultural Studies Approach*, Garland Publishing, New York, 1997

¹⁰need ref Darnton and Le Roy Ladurie

such acts. Symbolic protests, argue Darnton and Ladurie, were not the actions of 'dumb, rude peasants' (if such a thing existed) these were the acts of 'shrewd readers' of political relations and cultural symbols'.¹¹ Similarly, interventions and resistance to the states' attempts in Australia to define identity for Aboriginal women and men, in the 1950s and 1960s, arose in many, and unexpected, ways. 'Shrewd readers' of the *Dawn* magazine for example, had their own responses to the predominant place of adolescent and young-adult Aboriginal women in the state representation of successful assimilation.

Following the work of these historians of popular culture, the approach in this chapter, is not to seek out a forgotten or 'lost' cultural form for theoretical appraisal, (indeed Aboriginal debutante balls are still popular today, see below) nor to give a purely ethnographic record of the cultural activity of, what Robert Darnton has called, 'earlier non-elites', but rather to analyse the symbolic meanings and political uses of the Aboriginal debutante in the context of the gendered process of assimilation analysed in the previous chapters. Two themes emerge in this discussion: The first highlights the ways the Aboriginal debutante has historically functioned as a vivid, symbolically portrayal of assimilated femininity and secondly, how the Aboriginal debutante ball itself became a contested site in the gendered politics of assimilation.

Debutantes

The debutante ball, since its inception in London in the mid-nineteenth century, represented a public ceremony symbolising the process of ensuring the 'suitable' marriage of the elite's daughters.¹² Anthropologist Michael Hayne's describes the debutante balls as a ritual that symbolised the introduction of the young woman into a discrete 'society' - the expectation being that the young women will marry endogenously within a particular circumscribed group.¹³ Presentation at court during the London 'season' traditionally marked a recognition of social 'suitability', and was the necessary passport to marriage within the higher echelons of English class-society. The ritual of the debutante and her

¹¹ same as above

¹² Isabel Thompson & Vicky Northy, *Coming Out: Debutante Balls*, Exhibitions Gallery, Wangaratta, Victoria, 1991, p. 2; Margaret Pringle, *Dance Little Ladies, The Days of the Debutante*, Orbis Publishing, London, 1977, p. 10

¹³ Michael Thurgood Haynes, *Dressing up Debutantes. Pageantry and Glitz in Texas*, Berg, Oxford, New York, 1998, p. 4

'presentation' to society also inferred the young women's independence from parental authority - to be replaced with their future husbands. Emily Post's popular, 1930s guide to etiquette defined the debutante as a 'young woman whose parents have agreed that she is old enough to accept social invitations to dinners and dances without them'.¹⁴ To the English gentry, argues Mary Rose Liverani, 'coming out' signalled the metamorphosis of a pre-pubescent, 'inarticulate girl' to a 'poised, witty and alluring woman ripe for marriage'.¹⁵

By the post-war decades in England the 'season' had lost its important place in the social calendar and, in 1957, an official announcement was made by the Lord Chamberlain that 'the Queen has decided that owing to her many engagements there will be no presentation parties after 1958'.¹⁶ Debutante balls did continue in England until the 1970s without the Royal presence but, Margaret Pringle estimates that by 1977 only nine dances were listed for that year.¹⁷ While, in the 1950s the ritual was becoming unfashionable in England, it was taken on with fervour by the Australian middle classes.¹⁸ Throughout the 1950s photographs and feature stories about white debutante balls were a regular inclusion in the *Australian Women's Weekly* and often dominated the social pages of newspapers.¹⁹ Liverani argues that the popularity of debutante balls during the 1950s and early 1960s can be attributed to their symbolic portrayal of the 'maturing' of the nation, as it searched for poise and position within the international community (see below).²⁰ The continuation of the deb ball in the late 1980s and 1990s, argues Ellen Jordan, represents an attempt to symbolise the reclaiming of female virginity in the face of changing mores.²¹ The deb ball has been adopted as a symbol that: 'these aren't loose promiscuous girls, but nice girls from very good homes'.²² In addition, Marie Coleman notes that these occasions are most important where there is some 'connected' community into which the young people are

¹⁴Emily Post, *Etiquette*, Funk & Wagnall, New York, 1937, p. 26

¹⁵Liverani, 'Coming Out, Ready or Not', *The Independent Monthly*, November, 1993, pp. 50-51

¹⁶Pringle, *Dance Little Ladies*, p. 34

¹⁷Pringle, *Dance Little Ladies*, p. 70

¹⁸ In Liverani's survey taken in 1993 the 'top' private schools in Sydney, such as Frensham, reported firmly 'never having done such a thing', 'Coming Out', p. 50

¹⁹Thompson & Northey, *Coming Out*, p. 3

²⁰Liverani, 'Coming Out', p. 50

²¹Dr Ellen Jordan, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Newcastle University, Pers Comm, December, 1993

²²Jordan, Pers Comm, 1993

making an entry as adults.²³ Such symbolism remains potent for many rural communities in Australia who continued to hold debutante balls throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Vickey Northey and Isabel Thompson estimate that in the Albury-Wodonga region alone in rural New South Wales, more than thirty debutante balls are organised each year during the 'season'- between May and October.²⁴

The Aboriginal debutante



Fig. xvi



Fig. xvii

The *Aboriginal* debutante represented a striking image of successful assimilation in the post-war decades in Australia. If the debutante ball traditionally symbolised the entry of young woman on to the 'marriage-market', and one proscribed within certain acceptable limits, then the symbolism of the Aboriginal debutante was evocative within the gendered context of assimilation, analysed in the preceding chapters. In the late 1930s, the suitable marriage of Aboriginal women to non-Aboriginal men had been put forward as the answer to the 'Aboriginal problem' (see chapter one). In the ritual of the debutante ball the idea of a marriage between Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men was turned into a public ceremony. The beautiful, demure young Aboriginal woman, dressed in a pretty white gown, curtsying to a white official, or being escorted to a debutante ball, on the arm of a white

²³'The Monaro's One Night of the Year', *Panorama*, March, 20, 1999, p. 7-8

²⁴Northey & Thompson, *Coming Out*, p. 4

man (Fig. xvi & xvii)²⁵ presented a powerful image of idealised assimilated femininity in the late 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. During these decades the Aborigines Welfare Board, through the medium of *Dawn*, presented the Aboriginal debutante as a metaphor for the success of the socialisation of young Aboriginal women into 'white society'.

Emphasis was placed, in the Board's coverage of these events, on the beauty and charm of young Aboriginal woman, trained to make their debut into white society by the administration: '[T]he beauty of the debs and the flower girls and their frocking was something not to be forgotten and their charming dignity during the ceremony and perfect curtsy did credit to their training'.²⁶ The male partners in this performance played only a supporting role in the performance: 'Congratulations also due to their escorts who rose to the occasion and proved themselves worthy in both dress and deportment to the lovely debs.'²⁷ The July 1962 issue of *Dawn* focused on the 'presentation' of a young Aboriginal woman, Harriet Ellis from Mungundi in New South Wales, at the Queen's Birthday Ball organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society. 'Strikingly dressed in a simply cut nylon modern gown' reports *Dawn*, 'Harriet captured a great deal of the attention at the ball which she attended with the Superintendent of the Aborigines Welfare Board'.²⁸ The ball was held at the Trocadero Club decorated for the occasion with a 'unique collection of flags and crests', presented to the Australian government by Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth.²⁹ On this occasion the young Aboriginal woman represented Australia in a debutante line of eleven which included girls from Pakistan, India, Malta, Great Britain and New Zealand. Described euphemistically, as simply the most 'colourful' event of the Sydney season, the ball, alive with cultural symbolism, reflected real and desired political relationships of the time.³⁰ (see Fig. xviii)

The eleven young women making their debut at the Queen's Birthday ball of 1962, represented countries that had once signaled the breadth of the British Empire and now reflected new post-War and post-colonial alliances and 'security agreements'. In the context

²⁵ From *Dawn*, July 1963, p. 4

²⁶ *Dawn*, July 1953, p. 19

²⁷ *Dawn*, July 1953, p. 19

²⁸ *Dawn*, July, 1962, p. 1

²⁹ *Dawn*, July 1962, p. 11

³⁰ *Dawn*, July, 1962, p. 2

of post-war de-colonisation ceremonial displays such as these were an important symbol of commonwealth unity.³¹ Nineteen sixty-two, the year of the Queen's Birthday ball, has been described as a high water mark of a time when the securities of the old British Empire had been breached by post-war political re-alignments.³² What Robert Menzies described as a strong sense of 'imperial destiny' came under intense pressure after world war two undermining assumptions about Australia's role and identity in international affairs.³³ During this time of widespread de-colonisation, what 'went wrong' for European governments with empires near Australia, was of immediate concern to the Australian government who had long counted on a predominant European influence interposed between themselves and 'Asia'.³⁴



Fig. xviii

³¹David Lowe, (ed) *Australia and the End of Empires*, Deakin University Press, 1996. Between 1945 and 1965 some sixty colonies of European empires gained their constitutional independence, p. 1

³²Lowe, *Australia and the End of Empires*, p. 3

³³ Lowe, *Australia and the End of Empires*, p. 2

³⁴Lowe, *Australia and the End of Empires*, p. 3

Ann McClintock argues that young 'colonial' women have typically been used in colonial contexts as the 'symbolic bearers of nation.'³⁵ Similarly, Carole McGranahan argues that such young women were understood to have the potential both to physically and culturally reproduce members of the nation, and acted as foci and symbols of ethnic and national identity.³⁶ Significantly, Australia was symbolised at the Queen's Birthday Ball of 1962, by a beautiful young Aboriginal woman - partnered by the Superintendent of the Aborigines Welfare Board. Thus, performances such as that organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society in 1962 symbolically re-affirmed international political alignments while providing a template for assimilation within the Australian nation. In light of the historical context analysed in the preceding chapters, this image of the Aboriginal debutante and the Superintendent of the Board, was indicative of a certain type of internal colonial relations of Australian assimilation. The image of the Aboriginal deb, at the Royal Commonwealth Society ball reveals the complicated place that race and gender played in the struggles for an Australian national identity in the post-war years. In the public spectacle of the debutante ball, in an enactment of belonging and social elitism, the complex, cross-cutting dynamics of race, gender and nation were on display.

National and local newspapers in the late 1950s also heralded the Aboriginal debutante ball as a symbol of an assimilated Australian society. An editorial from the *Adelaide Post* in 1958, for example, described the first Aboriginal debutante ball to be held there, as 'signpost to new era' of assimilation.³⁷ In November 1959, the *Cootamundra Herald* reported on a 'Historic Wedding' between a 'new Australian' from Hungary and young Aboriginal woman from the Cootamundra Girls Home.³⁸ Their marriage was seen to represent the best solution to the perceived 'problem' both of Aboriginality and immigration. In the wider historical context analysed in the preceding chapters, the overt sexuality of the young women on the cusp of suitable marriage, resonated with the policy of breeding out with its emphasis on the necessity of making 'the coloured girls as acceptable as whites'.³⁹ The

³⁵ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 354

³⁶ see Carole McGranahan, 'Miss Tibet, or Tibet Misrepresented? The Trope of Woman-as-Nation in the Struggle for Tibet' in (ed) Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk & Beverly Stoeltje, *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage. Gender, Contests and Power*, Routledge, New York & London, 1996, pp. 161-181; also Nira Yuval-Davis & Flora Anthiaas (eds), *Woman-Nation-State*, London: MacMillan, 1989

³⁷ *Adelaide Post*, July, 1958, p. 9

³⁸ *Cootamundra Herald*, p. 6

³⁹ Dr C. E. Cook, Chief Protector, Northern Territory, *Aboriginal Welfare - Initial Conference*, 1937, p. 17

coupling performed at the debutante balls of the late 1950s and early 1960s was heralded by some liberal observers in Australia in the post-war era as a solution to the 'Aboriginal problem'. In this case the marriage between 'Tessa' and 'Dezo' was seen as an exemplar of the way to resolve problems that lay at the heart of the white Australian search for national identity:

In the present time of racial strife, colour bars and lack of tolerance, Tessa and Dezo have shown the key to the problem... that they did so and their love triumphed makes us wish that their story could be told all over this country and all over the world so that others could take courage from it and do likewise.⁴⁰

The symbolism of the Aboriginal debutante and her readiness for inter-racial marriage is an under theorised aspect of the assimilation policy. Inter-racial relationships have held a particular resonance in the colonial situation as writers from Fanon to Kaplan have argued (see introduction).⁴¹ Kaplan's work on the New Guinea White Woman's Protection Ordinance shows that most often the occurrence of, or even the possibility of, relationships between white women and black men has been the subject of fears in the colonial context about the rape of the white woman by black men.⁴² In Australia, debutante balls staged by the state administration acted partly as a theatrical inscription of the Aboriginal female/white male heterosexual couple, a central unit in assimilationist ideology since the 'breeding-out' policy of 1937 discussed in chapter one. In this context the figure of the Aboriginal debutante, and the investment of the Welfare Board in this image in the 1960s, raises questions about the gendered representation of assimilation, raised in the previous chapter. The widespread phenomenon of Aboriginal debutante balls in the 1950s and 1960s represented one approach to pervasive assimilationist ideology. The idea and image of the Aboriginal debutante, and Aboriginal-run debutante balls are significant within the history of assimilation, at one level representing a graphic illustration of the theme that the young, or adolescent Aboriginal women, was the 'answer' to assimilation. The idea of the Aboriginal debutante focuses questions on the gendered nature of assimilation policy, of the

⁴⁰ *Cootamundra Herald*, p. 6

⁴¹ see for example, Stoler, 'Making Empire respectable', Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, McClintock, *Imperial Leather*

⁴² Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji, 1835-1930: The Ruin of Empire?*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston, 1986

relationship between political policy and desire, and the relationship of both to individual and cultural identity.

Coming Out. The Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs and the first local Aboriginal debutante Ball

In 1964 a new organisation, the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, was established in Sydney to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of Aboriginal migrants coming into the city, and established the first of what were to become annual Aboriginal debutante balls held in both metropolitan centres and rural areas. The Foundation focused on civic welfare for the increasing Aboriginal population migrating at that time into the city. The membership, aims and methods of the Foundation are considered briefly here, to contextualise the first, of what would become annual Aboriginal Day debutante balls.

The first public meeting of the Foundation held at Sydney Town Hall, was chaired by the Lord Mayor and attended by various members of the white establishment of Sydney, who later became patrons of the organisation.⁴³ Patrons included the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, the then Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Sydney University, A. P. Elkin (discussed in chapter three), the Vice Chancellor from Sydney University and the Commissioner of Police. The first President of the association was the Lord Mayor of Sydney himself, the first Chairman, Professor R. W. Geddes, a senior anthropologist from the University of Sydney. Reflecting the prominent place of professional anthropologists in the organisation's executive, one of the first activities of the Foundation was to set up an ethnographic survey to assess the extent of the emerging, urban 'Aboriginal problem'. The results of the survey, nominally undertaken by Dr Charles Duguid and carried out by his assistant, Mrs P. Beaseley, showed that the numbers of Aborigines in the Sydney metropolitan area far exceeded previous estimates.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Report of First Annual General Meeting of Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs* [hereafter FAA], 12 August, 1965 ML MSS A463/63

⁴⁴ *First Annual General Meeting of Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs* [hereafter FAA]: Survey and Report, 12 August, 1965, Australian Archives, A463/63

It was also agreed at the first meeting that the main goal of the organisation initially would be the building of a property in Sydney that would act as a 'centre for Aborigines'.⁴⁵ The first campaign of the new Foundation was a large-scale door-knock run by the newly emerging profession of fundraising. The door-knock campaign, 'Good will Sunday', raised £40,000 which, although falling short of the intended target, was an enormous sum at the time. Instead of building a new property, as they had hoped, the Foundation bought a pre-existing building on George Street in Sydney. With some renovations the building became known as 'The Centre', described as a 'solid three story building in the heart of the city and close to transport linked from all parts of the metropolitan area and rural New South Wales'.⁴⁶

Despite the conservative roots of the Foundation it played a recognised role in the Aboriginal community during the 1960s and early 1970s.⁴⁷ One of strengths of the organisation was its decision at the outset to 'regard as an Aborigine any person who identifies as, or is identified by others to be Aboriginal'.⁴⁸ According to the Foundation's records this definition 'so loosely phrased', was necessary because the Foundation recognised that its task was to assist in the 'solution' of social problems felt by a group of people, rather than engage in precise arguments about the degree of ancestry of particular persons'.⁴⁹ To meet the needs of the 'migrating' Aboriginal population the Foundation set up a number of active committees - 'Social Welfare', 'Education', 'Fundraising', 'Health', a 'Women's Auxiliary', and, importantly to the discussion here, a 'Dancing Group' committee. It was the Foundation's dancing committee that ran the first local community NADOC day Aboriginal debutante ball, in July 1966, at the Paddington Town Hall as a fund-raiser.⁵⁰ Any profits made from the occasion were to go towards establishing the Kirinari Aboriginal Children's Hostel, in the suburb of Sylvania. The hostel, a place for Aboriginal children from rural areas to stay while attending schools in the outlying regions of Sydney still

⁴⁵ *First Annual General Meeting of FAA*, 12 August, 1965, p. 1

⁴⁶ *First Annual General Meeting of FAA*, 12 August, 1965, p. 1

⁴⁷ Interview Lester Bostock, Marrickville, 2/11/1997; Interview Kevin Cooke, Tranby, Glebe, 16/2/1997; Interview Herb Simms, La Perouse, 22/4/1998; for discussion of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs see Peter Read, 'The Meaning of the Eyes, 1964-1969' in *Charles Perkins. A Biography*, Viking Press, Australia, 1990, pp. 81-123

⁴⁸ *First Annual General Meeting of FAA*, 12 Aug 1965, p. 3

⁴⁹ *First Annual General Meeting of FAA*, 12 Aug 1965, p. 3

⁵⁰ *Dawn*, July 1966, p. 1

functions today.⁵¹ Over three hundred people attended the well-publicised Aborigines Debutante Ball.⁵² Seven Aboriginal debutantes were presented at the ball to Mr E.A Willis, the Chief Secretary of the Aborigines Welfare Board. Aboriginal design in traditional ochre, orange, black and white was the decorative motif of the evening. The Town Hall was decorated for the occasion with an Aboriginal design motif, carried through in all decorations, most of them made by Aboriginal members of the Foundation. Debutantes' bouquets were in the shape of boomerangs and a boomerang arch was placed at the hall entrance, table place markers were golden kangaroo statuettes.⁵³ Esther Carroll, matron of honour at the ball described the occasion as a chance for public visibility of Aboriginal young women and men, a chance for young Aboriginal people to place themselves at the centre of positive attention. She argued that the debutante balls 'doesn't mean the same thing to Aboriginal people' as it did to whites and describes the balls as 'a form of getting together, dressing up, looking nice, being the focus of attention. Koori kids don't get enough of that. Some have never had the opportunity.'⁵⁴

After the success of this first ball, the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs began to run an annual, and well-attended Aboriginal debutante ball on the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee's (NADOC)⁵⁵ yearly celebrations. It was the Foundation that organised the 1968 Aboriginal Debutante Ball, at which the late Pearl Langford danced with the Prime Minister. A ball, described by David Jaggard, as 'the symbolic coming out of all Aboriginal people, following the referendum the year before'.⁵⁶ For Aboriginal people moving into the cities during the 1960s, a time of heightened contradictions between assimilation policy and lived reality. It was a time, as Jackie Huggins writes, that the 'collective unconscious' of white Australia relied on many unacknowledged ideas about 'Aboriginality' and its place in the post-war construction of a national identity.⁵⁷ Darelene

⁵¹see for example *Kirinari: Aboriginal Children's Advancement Society*, Aboriginal Children's Society, Sydney, New South Wales, v. 9, no. 3, 1976, ML Q572.991/3

⁵²Report of Annual General Meeting of FAA, 14 Sept 1966, p. 3 & *Dawn*, July 1966, p. 4

⁵³*Dawn*, August 1967, p. 5

⁵⁴Pers Comm, November, 1993

⁵⁵Interestingly, the original idea for National Aborigines Day Observance Organising Committee, Sunday, now known as NADOC week, is attributed to William Cooper. The day was first commemorated in Sydney in 1941 by the Committee for Aboriginal Citizen Rights who organised a public meeting aimed at ending the exploitation of Aboriginal domestic-servants, *NADOC News*, Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Woden, ACT, 1984

⁵⁶David Jaggard, 'Call me Old-Fashioned', *HQ*, Summer, 1992/93, pp. 109-113

⁵⁷Jackie Huggins and Rita Huggins, *Auntie Rita*, Aboriginal Studies Press, AITSIS, 1994, p. 74

Johnson argues that in this historical context passing for white, or 'masquerading' became one strategy for attaining a 'necessary distance between oneself and one's image'. In creating this distance through the masquerade of whiteness, a rejection of assimilationist discourses of Aboriginality as 'internal to some real self' could be achieved. 'Passing', argues Johnson, destroyed any fixed or singular notion of Aboriginality and re-invented it as strategic and performative.⁵⁸

Barbara Asplett, matron of honour at a Sydney Aboriginal Debutante ball held in 1993, a legacy of the Foundation's early Dance Committee, saw the event as a recognition of how far Aboriginal women had come from the days of her childhood. The closest she came to having a debutante ball out at the Burrabadee Mission in central New South Wales, she recalled, was when a benevolent white from town came out to the mission scattered talcum powder on the schoolhouse floor to aid the dancing that was supervised by the mission manager.:

That was the only time you'd see them touch a man. They never had any pretty woman's life, never any dignity as women. Never. This ball to me is more than just a bloody debutantes' ball. It's part of making our children feel good about being young women.⁵⁹

Vilma Ryan, co-compere of the 1993 ball sees a link back to pre-colonial times suggesting the Koori debutante ball is a 'modern day corroboree': 'For the kids who are a bit embarrassed about being Aboriginal, for whatever's been put on them or their families, it's just something to say 'OK, this is how we're feeling, come on up and join us'.⁶⁰ Valerie McDonald, trainee administration manager at a computer software firm sees the debutante ball as a time where everyone can come together: 'your family, all your elders and the younger generation coming through. It's very important that they are accepted'.⁶¹ Aboriginal women who chose not to 'do their deb' recognise it as a performance of white respectability which they want no part of, yet they remain openly supportive of sisters,

⁵⁸Johnson, 'Ab/originality', p. 20

⁵⁹Interview BA, 1/12/1994

⁶⁰Interview, VR, 3/8/ 1999

⁶¹Interview, VM, 4/8/1999

daughters, and even mothers who choose to come out in the 'over-forties' debutante balls which are occasionally organised by community organisations.⁶²

Playing and 'Passing' or Assimilation?

'There's a lot more behind it than what you see'

Margaret Roberts⁶³

In the late 1960s and 1970s a number of Aboriginal groups in rural towns around Australian began to organise their own local community 'deb' balls.

Aboriginal women who organised debutante balls in rural New South Wales in the early 1970s remember these events as serving multiple purposes. The first Aboriginal debutante ball held in Dubbo in 1974, was organised under the auspices of the Dubbo Aboriginal Advancement Association. Mrs Lavinia Howey and Eunice Peachy who organised the first deb ball in Dubbo, and continued to organise an annual ball over a period of twenty years, describe how the balls brought together Aboriginal girls from the three girls hostels that were in town at that time.⁶⁴ The hostels housed adolescent girls who had come in from the surrounding communities at Wilcannia, Bourke and Hay for education at the Dubbo Technical college. Because of the number of single young Aboriginal women in Dubbo, a debutante ball to bring them all together for twice weekly dance classes, amongst other things seemed, said Mrs Howey, like a 'good idea':

The first ball was at the police boys club, we had twenty-five debs... as soon as we mentioned it we got a lot of girls, we'd always get a lot of girls. After we paid all our bills that first time we ended up with \$18.⁶⁵

⁶²Leonie Dennis, 'The Art of Storytelling', Over 40s Debutante Ball, Boomalli, Sydney, 1999, exhibition programme, Boomalli Publication, p. 2, Interviews JL, 2/3/1998

⁶³Chair, Ballina Aboriginal Community Debutante Committee, interview, 1/12/1999

⁶⁴Interview, LH, EP, CP, Dubbo, 24/8/1997

⁶⁵Interview LH, 21/8/1997

The Dubbo deb balls were extensively documented since the early 1970s in photographs taken by Carolyn Peachy. The hundreds of photographs, taken each year over nearly two decades, chart the movement of young Aboriginal women from the surrounding areas through Dubbo. In this way Peachy, and other women like her who took this role within financial restrictions, claimed some control over the image-making associated with young Aboriginal women that had been a pronounced feature of government representations. Peachy remembers: 'I took photos of every ball we had until it got too expensive'.⁶⁶

Mrs Howey, after whom the Aboriginal medical corporation in Dubbo is now named, argues that the balls acted as a focus of family get-togethers for the young girls who had left their home to further their education. She remembers the large turn-out of family members to the annual Dubbo ball: 'They'd book a table of sixteen, some of them would book two tables of sixteen they had that many coming.'⁶⁷ She remembers also how the balls provided a moment of luxury and dressing up outside of the day to day financial restrictions experienced by the majority of Aboriginal families in rural towns:

In all the years we've held the balls the tickets have been the same price. Since 1974 we've never raised our price. And they get a hot meal there... The boys all ordered their suits and paid for them.⁶⁸

For Mrs Howey, the most important thing about the balls was the fact that the kids - who would normally always hang out in their sneakers - would turn out looking fantastic. As she put it, 'they never let me down'. In this way the balls were a deliberate intervention in the politics of visibility in country towns throughout New South Wales. The young Aboriginal men and women, dressed in their best, would be presented to an important member of the Aboriginal community. At the Dubbo debutante balls over the years significant local and national Aboriginal identities such as Sir Douglas Nicholls, Neville Bonner, Bob Maza, Tony Mundine, Mum Shirl, Pat O'Shane and Roy Carroll all accepted the invitation to preside at the balls.⁶⁹ In Dubbo, in the late 1990s, when enough girls are of the right age Aboriginal

⁶⁶Interview, CP, 24/8/1997

⁶⁷Interview, LH, 24/8/1997

⁶⁸Interview, LH, 14/11/1999

⁶⁹Carolyn Peachy, Dubbo Deb Balls Photograph albums in her possession, Dubbo

debutante balls are still held: 'We usually have them at the civic centre now because they're so big. You find the girls and they found their own partners'. In 1997 Mrs Howey describes the crucial feature of the debutante balls, ' You got to find the girls first, you can't do it without the girls. Nearly every girl here in Dubbo has done their deb, so you got to wait for the school girls.'⁷⁰

The phenomenon of Aboriginal community-run debutante balls raises question about the ease with which Aboriginal women have been used to symbolise the 'answer' to the 'problem' of Aboriginality and national identity. These Aboriginal-run debutante balls, in paralleling dominant representations of assimilation raise important questions about the way Aboriginal women have historically been 'made available', in Catherine McGranahans term, as 'signs of the nation'.⁷¹ They raise questions about how both Aboriginal women, and men, navigate the available definitions of 'Aboriginal' and of 'nation', that intersect with their lives and often clash with their own definitions.⁷² Niral Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias' study of gender and nationalism and women's resistance argues that identities available to women from minority groups are constructed within specific power relations that provide the 'framework of choice'.⁷³ In this context 'identities which seem to be disempowering in some circumstances may be empowering in others'.⁷⁴ However if 'nation-as-woman' has been a dominant idea in state depictions of Aboriginal debutantes this raises questions about identity for Aboriginal debutante ball organisers. How do other discourses around the significance of the debutante ball appear in response? In different contested ideas concerning the phenomenon of the debutante ball some of these alternative discourses are made public, as the case below shows.

⁷⁰Interview, LH, 24/8/1997

⁷¹see McGranahan on Beauty Pageants in Tibet, 'Tibet Mis-represented?', p. 161

⁷²Mc Granahan, 'Tiber Mis-represented', p. 161

⁷³*Woman-Nation-State*, MacMillan, London, 1989

⁷⁴*Woman-Nation-State*, p. 37

Competing representations. The Nanango Aboriginal Debutante ball

Steppin' out in my deadly red shoes
Standin' up cause I'm wearing somethin' new

- Christine Anu, *Stylin' Up*, Track 10, 1995⁷⁵

The contradictory responses to a debutante ball organised in rural Australia are explored here to reveal the complexities of this gendered representation of successful assimilation. Early in 1973, in a small town in rural Queensland, 208 kilometres north-west of Brisbane, two 'white' girls were reported in the national media to have 'bowed out' of a local debutante ball because their parents did not want them to curtsy to Senator Neville Bonner.⁷⁶ When the ball's convenor informed parents that Senator Neville Bonner had accepted an invitation to receive the debutantes, two daughters of 'prominent grazing' families withdrew. The parents of the two girls, reported *The Australian*, 'did not want their daughters bowing to a black man'.⁷⁷

Despite Bonner's election as Senator, now in his second term of office, the organiser, Maureen Bain relayed to the newspapers that the families objected to him officiating at the ball since they have had 'dark people' working for them for years and they still compared Senator Bonner with them.⁷⁸ The 'mixed' debutante ball of 1973 had been organised by the local rural youth club and, prior to the controversy, had planned to see seven local girls make their debut at the evocatively named 'Tara's Hall'. At the invitation of the organiser, in place of the two white girls who 'refused to bow to a black man', two Aboriginal girls from Brisbane came up to make their debut. To support the Aboriginal debs, young Aboriginal members of the 'One People of Australia League' (OPAL), based in Brisbane organised a group party to drive up.⁷⁹ Aboriginal residents of the Cherbourg Aboriginal reserve, about thirty kilometres out of town, reported as being 'incensed at the snub to

⁷⁵From CD of same name, Mushroom Records International BV, 1995, Track 10

⁷⁶Hugh Lunn, 'Debs Bow Out of Ball over Senator's Colour', *The Australian*, 12 June, 1973, p. 17

⁷⁷Lunn, 'Debs Bow Out', p. 17

⁷⁸Lunn, 'Debs Bow Out', p 17

⁷⁹see *OPAL Newsletter*, no. 14, October, 1973, p. 2, ML 90406/1, Lunn, 'Debs Bow Out', p 17

Senator Bonner and their race caused by the debutantes' withdrawal' were organising to be in Nanango for the night of the ball.⁸⁰ Satirical articles appeared in the national media about the events in Nanango. Calling his article 'Blacks Day at Nanango' Hugh Lunn, from *The Australian*, reported that some of the Aboriginal 'youths' coming up from Brisbane would be taking their white girl friends with them 'which should create quite a stir' as it posed a threat to the unofficial colour bar operating in rural towns:⁸¹

Though Nanango bears an Aboriginal name meaning water-hole, no Aboriginals actually live there. But the way things are shaping, it will have more than its fair share late next week... (W)hile these Aboriginals are stepping out the Gypsy Tap and Pride of Erin with Nanango's rural youth inside the wooden church-like Tara's Hall - centre of Nanango's cultural and social activities - even more Aborigines are expected outside. 'You can expect them in town the night of the ball to cause a bit of trouble', said one civic leader who not unnaturally wished to remain anonymous. 'We never see a black here', said another local. 'But we will next Friday'... 'Take your partners for the last tango in Nanango?'⁸²

On the night of the scheduled debutante ball in Nanango, police reinforcements were dispatched from three surrounding towns - Maryborough, Kingaroy and Murgon. Senator Bonner with his wife Heather, were secreted into the town, arriving for dinner at Nanango's only motel, the 'Golden Dream' only thirty minutes before the ball began.⁸³ Despite these precautions the most violent outburst of the night was reported to come from a Nanango Shire Councillor who had a go at the number of 'Pressmen' who had descended on the small town to watch the events unfold:

Over six foot and 16 stone Councillor Green accused Pressmen of having painted a false picture of the scene... "why don't you blokes go over to Kingaroy where the real problem with the blacks are'... Locals who witnessed the scene said Councillor Green had 'overstepped the mark. They considered his outburst 'unreal'.⁸⁴

⁸⁰Hugh Lunn, 'Blacks' Day at Nanango', *The Australian*, 30th June, 1973, p. 3

⁸¹Lunn, 'Black's Day', p. 3

⁸² Lunn, 'Black's Day', p. 3

⁸³ J. Stern, 'Nanango: Non-Event of the Social Year', ANZ Press Clipping Service, AITSIS, 17/7/1973, p. 14

⁸⁴Stern, 'Nanango', p. 14

Councillor Green's 'unreal' outburst reflected his attempt to play down the segregation and racial conflict that formed a backdrop to the political economy of rural towns. By angrily suggesting the 'Pressmen' go over to Kingaroy 'where the real problems are', the local politician was distancing his small town from racial segregation. The occurrence of the 'mixed' debutante ball was proof enough, in his opinion, that his town had overcome its racial strife. As the papers reported the next day, in the event, the night went off without a hitch and the anticipated angry mobs of Cherbourg residents did not appear.⁸⁵

The controversy raised by the Nanango deb ball in 1973 contextualises some of the intersecting demands on Aboriginal women and men during the assimilationist decades. Racial segregation (see below) which underpinned the political economy of rural towns in Australia, for example was made public in the dispute around the Debutante ball. What was seen as a respectable performance of assimilation by some also represented a direct challenge to social and political order in rural areas. While the debutante ball drew on 'western' hegemonic models of femininity, beauty and respectability, this example illustrates how they also figured in disputes over national identities and the meaning and progress of assimilation. The public performance of race, class, sexuality and feminine maturity symbolised by the debutante ball could disturb every-day segregation amongst whites and blacks in rural Australia. The debutante balls made visible longstanding issues such as the right for Aboriginal men to act in positions of authority in 'white society', the right to socialise with and marry who you chose and the right to access central town buildings. The wider context in which these issues were central is explored below through the example of Sydney, in the mid-1950s and 1960s and the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowships Dance Committee.

The Broader Context: Community dances and the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (1956-1969)

Dulcie Flower, a well-known Aboriginal activist in Sydney for many years argued that the media in the 1960s:

⁸⁵Stern, 'Nanango', p. 14

Used to highlight special days like National Aboriginal's Day. Balls, they used to highlight. Anything bordering on being middle class- Australian that Aborigines did would be reported. There'd be a whole lot of Aboriginal girls dressed up in their finery and being presented to the Lord Mayor of Sydney... Those of us who wanted to see legislative changes take place would get rather impatient when we'd see the photographs of the debutantes, you know. We'd think, Oh no! We'd shudder a bit and think, that's not the way to do it! But it was helping. We'd rather have seen marches on parliament, flag waving. We'd rather have seen a big march down the street proclaiming the need for land. An end to the reserves. That style of thing.⁸⁶

While the Aboriginal debutante seemed to offer a theatrical, gendered depiction of assimilated Aboriginal femininity, many Aboriginal women had long been central political actors in campaigns specifically opposed to the goals and methods of the Aborigines Welfare Board. For example Pearl Gibbs, the only woman to sit on the Welfare Board during its twenty-nine years of administration, had become politicised while working as a cook in Sydney and coming in contact with indentured servants under the Protection Act.⁸⁷ She had not suffered the Board's removal and apprenticeship conditions herself but was struck initially by the injustice of an apprenticeship scheme that placed women's wages in a trust account and allowed the employee only a few pence pocket money. Jack Horner describes Pearl Gibbs' increasing involvement with the exploited domestic servants and her frequent representations to the Protection Board in the 1930s:

The Board's offices were in a building (since pulled down) behind Sydney Hospital and facing the Domain. Years later Pearl had vivid memories of walking across the wide park with these girls, appalled by their tales of how Inspector Donaldson and a police escort had forcibly removed them from their families, by their accounts of the severe regime at Cootamundra, and by their reports of many instances of mistreatment by employers. Pearl never forgot the autocratic and unsympathetic reaction of Board staff when she tried to speak up for the unfortunate apprentices.⁸⁸

During the 1930s depression Pearl Gibbs had experienced the repressive powers of the Aborigines Protection Board herself, under the 1936 Amendment (discussed in chapter

⁸⁶David Snell, 'An Interview with Dulcie Flower', in *Other Boundaries. Inner-City Aboriginal Stories*, Bagnall Publications, University of Technology, Ultimo, Sydney, 1993, p. 6

⁸⁷Horner, 'Pearl Gibbs: A Biographical Tribute', in *Aboriginal History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1983, pp. 12-13

⁸⁸Horner, 'Pearl Gibbs', p. 13

one), and learnt first hand of the conditions on the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal station. In 1937 she became a founding member of the Aborigines Progressive Association with the Aboriginal activist William Ferguson and was central to the campaign to launch the 1937 Inquiry into the Protection Board's extraordinary powers over all Aboriginal people in the state. She appeared as a witness at the unsuccessful Select Committee and became a regular speaker for the Committee for Aboriginal Citizen Rights formed in April 1938 by an alliance of representatives of churches, women's organisations and worker's organisations.⁸⁹ Working closely with William Ferguson, Gibbs campaigned for Aboriginal representation on the Aborigines Welfare Board and became Organising Secretary of the Council for Aboriginal Rights, a small organisation concerned with civil liberties and legislative reform established in Sydney in 1951. In this capacity she campaigned, along with some church representatives, for the establishment of 'citizens' committee in rural towns across New South Wales to make contact and support Aboriginal people living on Board stations and reserves.

As a member of the Board, Pearl was angry to find she was forbidden from visiting Aboriginal reserves except on official tours made with other Board members. She felt that her representation on the Board had little influence over policy or practice. Pearl Gibbs remained on the Board for two years. As a measure of her feelings towards the administration, she marched in the 1957 May Day parade with a banner that read 'Ban the Board'.⁹⁰ The year before, in 1956 Pearl Gibbs had approached Faith Bandler, a woman of Islander descent, to join her in forming an organisation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to fight the policies of the Aborigines Welfare Board. Bandler, whose politics were influenced by her Kanaka father who had been 'black-birded' and worked as forced labour in the Queensland sugar plantations, recalled Pearl Gibbs approach to her in mid-1950s during Gibbs' difficult term as a member of the Aborigines Welfare Board:

Every time Pearl attended any... get-togethers she always stressed the importance of abolishing the Board; she hated the Welfare Board intensely... She told us how the Board treated her, and I remember this very well - that they'd have a meeting, and they'd have a very tiny agenda, so

⁸⁹Kevin Gilbert, Heather Goodall & Jack Horner, 'Three Tributes to Pearl Gibbs (1901-1983), in *Aboriginal History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1983, pp. 5-20; Horner, 'Pearl Gibbs', p. 13; see also Haskins, 'My One Bright Spot', pp. 244-247

⁹⁰Faith Bandler, address to Sydney Writer's Festival, 'Thirty years of Australian Aboriginal Citizenship, 1967-1997', Mitchell Library, 20/6/97

they'd get it over very quickly. And it was at the same time that Section Nine was still operative, and she wasn't allowed to go into a hotel as an Aborigine... the members would close the meeting, and then go over to a hotel and really talk about the business of the Board. Which excluded her, because she was an Aborigine, and so she couldn't go into the hotel.⁹¹

Together, Bandler and Gibbs organised a series of meetings initially held in the front rooms of Aboriginal residents of metropolitan Sydney and interested non-Aboriginal people living in Redfern and Waterloo. After a few meetings these small gatherings convened a small formal organisation. The Australian-Aboriginal Fellowship began operating in 1956 on a shoe-string budget raised through individual and organisation affiliation, and small-scale fundraising events, the most important of which became the community dances discussed below. The Fellowship drew on an eclectic membership of left-wing trade-unions, Aboriginal residents of inner-Sydney, members of white feminist organisations such as Jessie Street, and Jewish refugees and political exiles from the Second World War.⁹²

Their first official public meeting was held in a room borrowed from the United Associations of Women organisation in Market Street, Sydney.⁹³ From there, the small group, planned a large-scale public meeting to raise awareness of the conditions experienced by Aboriginal people living 'under the Act' in New South Wales. The group decided to try and book the Sydney Town Hall for a large public gathering. Bandler remembers: 'I guess we were the gamest of all little groups that existed at that time... we were just a little band taking on the Town Hall!... Aborigines having the town hall, you know they'd never had it...'⁹⁴ The two key organisers for this meeting were Bandler and Gibbs, and Faith Bandler remembers vividly the exhausting hours of work the two of them put in to build attendance at the meeting, how the press would not use their statements and 'releases', and the enormous success of the event:

⁹¹Faith Bandler, Interview in Faith Bandler & Len Fox (ed), *The Time was Ripe. A History of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (1956-69)*, Alternative Publishing Co-operative Ltd., Chippendale, New South Wales, 1983, p. 5

⁹²see for example, Rosine Guiterman, 'I came from Hitler's Germany', in Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, pp. 61-67

⁹³Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, p. 4

⁹⁴Bandler, Interview in Bandler & Fox (ed), *The Time was Ripe*. p. 12

[T]wo wharfies who were not working that day, came out with their truck [to Bandler's gardner]and cut the wildflowers and decorated the whole of the platform. And it was just magnificent, absolutely beautiful! Jessie Street was there, there was also Don McLeod and all the other guest speakers... They then opened the doors, and the people just came in, and filled the place! And the excitement on the faces of the people as they came through the doors! Obviously this was an exceptional meeting - and there was a kind of happiness about it, hard to describe - and they surged forward, and the whole of the body of the hall was filled! And then, they let them come into the galleries. And I wasn't surprised, because we'd put that much work into it.⁹⁵

Significantly, Harriet Ellis, the young Aboriginal 'debutante' who represented Australia and 'came out' at the Queen's birthday ball in 1962, worked as the organisation's secretary from 1966 to 1969. As Harriet Ellis' political membership shows, the representations of debutantes sponsored by the Aborigines Welfare Board, when placed in their immediate historical context, illustrates how the idealised role ascribed young Aboriginal women as the conduit for assimilation was largely an imaginary construct, a desire on the part of the white administration.

Ellis' involvement with the organisation and her central role as secretary in the late 1960s left no doubt about her political allegiances. The Fellowship was an organisation with open support from members of the Communist Party and had been set up in direct opposition to the Aborigines Welfare Board, its legislation and a policies, and, most importantly, for its time, took an openly anti-assimilationist public platform.⁹⁶ Pearl Gibbs, for example, was outspoken about the pressures on Aboriginal people that lay behind the ostensibly 'progressive' policy of assimilation. Faith Bandler recalls that Gibbs argued that it was a 'deliberate plan by whites to get rid of the Aboriginal "problem" by absorbing the Aboriginal people into the white community'.⁹⁷ Other Fellowship members, such as Mrs Rosine Guiterman, a German Jewish refugee from the Nazi regime who played a prominent role in a series of public meetings and discussions organised by the Fellowship to discuss the question of assimilation or 'integration'.⁹⁸ Well aware of the dangers inherent in a state-sanctioned

⁹⁵Bandler, Interview in Bandler & Fox (ed), *The Time was Ripe*. p. 13

⁹⁶Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, pp. 16-20; see also Samantha Weir, 'The Red Scare: Aboriginal Organisations, the Communist Party and ASIO', Interviews with Pat Eatock about Lucy Eatock and Ray Blisset, in Susie Eisenhuth (ed), *Other Boundaries*, pp. 73-95

⁹⁷ Bandler & Fox, 'Assimilation or Integration', in *The Time was Ripe*, pp. 115-121

⁹⁸'I came from Hitler Germany', in Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, pp. 61-67

policy to remove a 'problem population', Rosine Guiterman argued in that assimilation policy should be dismantled as it would act to 'swallow up a minority group'.⁹⁹ Similarly, in a statement to the first Federal Conference of Aboriginal organisations held in 1958, Bert Groves, the Aboriginal delegate for the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, and an ex-member of the Aborigines Welfare Board himself, argued that assimilation was 'not a correct term to be used in the constitution of any Aboriginal organisation':

Assimilation is the official policy of all Australian governments... but what does it imply? Certainly citizenship and equal status - so far, so good; but also the disappearance of the Aborigines as a separate cultural group, and ultimately their physical absorption by the European part of the population. It is assumed that if the Aborigines are going to lead the same life as other Australians, then they must disappear as a culturally distinct group.¹⁰⁰

Groves was emphatic that physical absorption remained the implicit basis of contemporary assimilation policy and continued a campaign against the policy throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In 1965 he came before the Joint Committee into Aborigines Welfare and linked the assimilation policy of the late 1960s to earlier attempts at planned miscegenation (see following chapter).

From 1958 until its removal from the legislature in 1963, the Fellowship campaigned for the removal of section nine from the Aborigines Protection Act (1909-1969) which forbade the drinking of alcohol by Aborigines. The Fellowship also campaigned against the assimilation policy, for an end to the Aborigines Welfare Board, and for improved conditions on the many Aboriginal stations and reserves in New South Wales, undertaking local interventions at some stations.¹⁰¹ The Fellowship and its membership, many of whom went on to become founding members of the first Federal council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (FCAATSI), is best remembered for its seminal role in the referendum campaign to change the Australian constitution to give the federal government power to override the states and legislate on behalf of Aborigines, and to

⁹⁹Bandler & Fox, 'Assimilation or Integration', in Fox & Bandler, pp. 115-121

¹⁰⁰Bert Groves, 'Federal Conference', Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship Archives, ML MSS, 4057/6

¹⁰¹Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*; see also Faith Bandler, *Turning the Tide. A Personal History of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989

include Aborigines in the census. Nationally the Fellowship also participated in the federal government's inquiry into voting restrictions conducted prior to the referendum. Jack Horner, the organisation's first and longest serving secretary (1958-1966) remembers, the organisation was primarily concerned with 'civil rights' for Aboriginal people rather than 'civic welfare', the latter, a role taken by the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs.¹⁰² This difference in approach had consequences for membership and for activities organised by the two different organisations.

The desire of the Fellowship to provide political support, rather than welfare to Sydney's Aboriginal community led to their involvement in the day to day lives of many Aboriginal individuals and families residing in the Redfern and Waterloo area. For example Ken Brindle, initially suspicious of Fellowship, became a key Aboriginal member later introducing non-Aboriginal members of the Fellowship to local Aborigines who were also fairly sceptical of this new organisation. One of their most frequent concerns was the question of police interaction with the Aboriginal community. The early 1960s in Sydney have been shown to be a period of intense over-policing and often overt police intimidation for Aboriginal individuals and families.¹⁰³ Regularly the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship would undertake the day to day activities involved in paying the cost of court cases or speaking in defence of Redfern Aborigines who were arrested at a disproportionately high rate. Ken Brindle was arrested on numerous occasion for a variety of trivial reasons; once when police broke into his house in pursuit of Brindle's wife's younger brother, another time when police suspected that he had stolen the watch he was wearing (a present from his wife for which, luckily, she had kept the receipt) and another time, for making enquiries about the death of the teenage son of a family friend, who had been fatally shot in the back of the head that night by police while apparently breaking into a kiosk at St Peters station. Brindle recalls that when he went to the police station, and demanded to know what had happened (police had not informed the boy's family of his death) he was subsequently

¹⁰²The Australian-Aboriginal Fellowship was, however, registered under the Charitable Collections Act in 1957 so that it could supply clothing, blankets and school library books to Aboriginal communities locally and in rural NSW.

¹⁰³see Ken Buckley, *Offensive and Obscene: A Civil Liberties Case Book*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1970; Verity Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society*, Allen & Unwin, 1993, pp. 24-71; Chris Cunneen, *Aboriginal-Police Relations in Redfern: With Special Reference to the Police Raid of 8 February, 1990*; Report Commissioned by the National Inquiry into Racist Violence, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 1990

beaten and arrested himself, in the course of making these enquiries.¹⁰⁴ In the ensuing court case the Fellowship helped with his court costs, as they did in many cases, and stood, successfully in this case, as character witnesses.¹⁰⁵

Brindle's experience exemplified the extent of police harassment in both metropolitan and rural centres at that time. The Fellowship conducted their own survey in 1961 showing that police were randomly arresting groups of Aboriginal men on the streets of Redfern. Brindle recalled being part of one such action during the 1960s:

I was walking up the street one day with a group of footballers - we'd finished training, and they pulled up in the vans alongside of us, and they ordered us all into the vans - and straight into gaol. The cell that I was in, there were 20 of us, and these are not big cells... When we fronted the counter the old sergeant looked at us and just said: 'Put indecent language on these three'. That was the charge.¹⁰⁶

The Redfern Dances

Another central area of activism for the Fellowship was around the right of Aboriginal people men and women to socialise in suburban Sydney. Faith Bandler and Len Fox, executive members of the Fellowship members recall that Aboriginal residents of Redfern were being regularly denied permission to hold weekly dances in the Redfern Town Hall, and were experiencing police intimidation, including police assaults outside the infrequent dances which were permitted. In discussion with local Aboriginal residents the Fellowship began to run the Redfern dances to ensure that they would become a regular event. 'The first time I met the Fellowship' recalled Brindle 'was when you [the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship] tried to pinch our dances. From that I went down to a couple of Fellowship meetings to iron out how the bloody hell you had the hide to come into our district and start tapping our finances'.¹⁰⁷ The dances run by the Fellowship functioned as a weekly

¹⁰⁴see Brindle interview with Jack Horner, 'A Cheeky Black Bastard', in Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, pp. 81-89

¹⁰⁵Horner, 'A Cheeky Black Bastard', in Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, p. 88

¹⁰⁶Horner, 'A Cheeky Black Bastard', in Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, p. 90

¹⁰⁷Ken Brindle, Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, p. 18

community event as well as a fundraiser for the Fellowship's varied activities. When the Fellowship organised its first state-wide conference, revenue raised by the dances was used to cover the costs of Aboriginal people travelling from country areas to attend. Jack Horner, records that the dances came to function as the organisation's most reliable, regular fundraising event and helped to create a sense of community amongst an often dislocated population:

The dances helped us to find a continuing source of money... [and] the dances brought people together. In ignorance we imagined that the Kooris all knew one another. But their culture was very localised: you were a Casino girl or a Kempsey boy and so on.¹⁰⁸

In fact, during the late 1950s and 1960s the Fellowship came to be known to Sydney's Aboriginal community largely via these weekly dances. The April 1960 issue of 'Fellowship' the newsletter of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship ran an article titled, 'Besides Holding Weekly Dances what does the Fellowship Do?'¹⁰⁹ Ken Brindle, also involved with the dance committee describes these events and the Fellowship's initial involvement:

The Blacks came to the dances we organised at Redfern Town Hall because it was a meeting place and they could have fun. They came from as far as Liverpool and Parramatta. They became a bit curious when they saw Di Graham there with her glasses and Helen Hambley with hers swinging on a chain from her neck... and they said who the hell are those people? So the club put out a newsletter and explained about the Fellowship. They knew it was the only organisation doing anything and the fact that the Authorities didn't like it put you on our side. So we became a team really. The most unlikely team. Once the Fellowship was recognised they could go anywhere in Redfern.¹¹⁰

Diane Barwick, an anthropologist conducting field work amongst Aboriginal 'migrants' to Melbourne in the early 1960s noted the important role Aboriginal dances played for new arrivals in that city, and surrounding areas. Not only, argued Barwick, were the dances important places to meet and socialise amongst other Aboriginal people, they also

¹⁰⁸Jack Horner, pers comm, 18/11/ 1998

¹⁰⁹*Fellowship*, April, 1960, frontpage, ML AAF4057/6

¹¹⁰Ken Brindle in Bandler & Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, p. 18

functioned as a signifier of Aboriginal respectability to the white public. Barwick noted that 'dress and cleanliness' were especially important to the Aboriginal community of Melbourne attending the dances because, unlike 'houses, cars and furnishings', they were the visible symbols of status which 'even the poorest may achieve'.¹¹¹ In addition, Barwick suggested that the fine clothing worn to balls and dances was a 'symbol of independence' because 'until recently most Aborigines wore cast-offs which whites sent to charities'.¹¹²

Pearl Gibbs had been active in promoting the idea of Aboriginal community dances before her work with the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship. During the 1930s depression, while working with an Aboriginal women's pea-picking crew based in Nowra, she and Mrs Sarah Cruse had organised a Red Cross Dance, remembered as a focal point for South Coast Aborigines fighting segregation and discrimination during these years.¹¹³ Jack Horner argues that Gibbs viewed these dances, which attracted people from varying areas as one way in which connections could begin to be made between state-based Aboriginal rights organisations, prior to the establishment of the first national Aboriginal rights organisation in 1958.¹¹⁴ On 28th May 1946, for example, Gibbs ran a big dance to start a Dubbo Branch of the Melbourne-based Australian Aborigines' League. The parent League in Melbourne had been founded by the late William Cooper of Cumeragunga in 1932. After a successfully organised dance Pearl was elected vice-president of the newly formed Dubbo branch.

In Sydney, the Fellowship's Dance Committee was run by an Aboriginal woman, Peggy Leon, and a white woman, Helen Hambly. Peggy Leon had become a member of the Fellowship after travelling with her husband, Charlie Leon, to Moree after the Student Action for Aborigines in 1965 to gauge Aboriginal opinions of the events, and to assess the level of de-segregation that had taken place as a result.¹¹⁵ Moree was the scene of the dramatic attempts, in 1965, to desegregate the artesian baths and swimming pool reported widely in national media of the time.¹¹⁶ Peggy Leon recalled 'some of the Aborigines

¹¹¹Barwick, 'A Little more than Kin', p. 327

¹¹²Barwick, 'A Little more than Kin', p. 327

¹¹³Horner, 'Pearl Gibbs', p. 16

¹¹⁴Horner, 'Pearl Gibbs', p. 16

¹¹⁵P. Leon, 'It Made me Feel Equal', in Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, pp. 27-30

¹¹⁶Gerald Stone, *The Mirror*, 20/2/1965, p. 12, Rachel Perkins & Ned Lander, *Freedom Rides*, SBS documentary series, Peter Read, *Charles Perkins: A Biography*, Viking, Penguin Books, pp. 50-52

thought it was in some ways a little harder to live in that town after the students had been there, but they still praised them for their courage'.¹¹⁷ Organising the dances was one way to provide a regular forum for Aboriginal people in Sydney feeling similar isolation and social segregation and surviving under difficult working and living conditions. Helen Hambly, a member of the Communist Party, had a long history of political activism for the Aboriginal rights.¹¹⁸ Leon and Hambly led a successful campaign to secure Friday nights for the community dances.

Initially an issue with the dances was that they were not allowed to be held on a Friday night. It took three years of campaigning and 'good behaviour' before they could get permission to hold a dance on a Friday night at the town hall. Men such as Harry Penrith who went on to become the well-known Aboriginal activist Burnum Burnum, were involved in policing the dances to try to cut down on the arrests outside the dance hall. Members of the Fellowship remember the threats to ban the popular community dances that plagued the Fellowship throughout the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹⁹

In Sydney the Redfern Dances were a place to meet for the increasing numbers of Aboriginal people migrating into metropolitan Sydney in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. New arrivals from the country areas, writes Peter Read, were sometimes as many as a 'dozen a day', and often had nowhere to live, nor the means to find work.¹²⁰ The dances held in the local town hall, in Redfern and Alexandria functioned as a meeting place and place for pleasure and community contact in an often hostile urban environment. A comparison between the Fellowship's weekly dances in New South Wales, can be made with the Coolbaroo club in Perth, Western Australia. The Coolbaroo League, a Western Australian organisation of Nyungah activists set up a flourishing jazz club that ran for fifteen years in East Perth, on the border of the city area forbidden to Aborigines.¹²¹ Under section nine of the WA Aborigines Act the city centre was an officially prohibited area for Aboriginal

¹¹⁷Peggy Leon, pers comm, 1/10/1993, see also 'It Made me Feel Equal', in Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, pp. 27-30

¹¹⁸Bandler and Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, pp. 30-32

¹¹⁹"Dance Committee' folder, AAF Archive, ML MSS 4057/6

¹²⁰Read, *Charles Perkins* p. 81

¹²¹Affrica Taylor, 'The Sun always Shines in Perth': Memory, Place and Identity', in *Urban Life, Urban Culture*, pp. 267-274

people in the 1930s until the 1950s. (Maps from that time were published with a red line drawn around the city area showing the prohibited zone).

In New South Wales un-official boundaries and racial segregation within urban and rural centres were the subject of activism throughout this period. The Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA) Freedom Ride, for example, which departed from Sydney on February 13, 1965 from Sydney University with Charles Perkins and twenty-nine white students aboard, brought national media attention to the racial segregation in pubs, swimming pools, shops and cinemas across rural New South Wales.¹²² In country areas the roping-off of areas in the cinema where Aborigines could sit was one highly visible symbol of this racial segregation. Implicit in the act of roping off were ideas of moral and physical contamination that Aboriginal populations could bring to white townspeople. Even when these divisions were not physically symbolised by a rope, spaces in picture cinemas were divided. Irene McIlraith, a member of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship in the 1960s, remembers her trip to Walgett with Wyn Garland to investigate a series of newspaper reports about racial violence in that town.:

We asked if Aborigines were roped off at the local picture theatre. (The Shire Clerk) asked his fifteen year old son to answer that, "No", said the lad, "but they know their place - at the back of the front stall. They would not sit anywhere else"¹²³

Aboriginal women participated in the campaigns to de-segregate the local picture theatres throughout New South Wales in the 1960s. Barbara Flick recalls the segregated, roped-off section in the cinema she attended as a child in Collarenebri in the late 1960s: 'So there we were divided by ropes. The theatre owner and his assistant would walk around and if they found us (they sometimes did) sitting low in the whitefellas seats, they would belt us on the head with their torchlights.' Flick recalls that when the block-buster film *Ben Hur* starring Charlton Heston, came to town and the whole town 'turning out to see it', Flick's mother and Aunty, decided to stage a protest at the racial segregation at the local cinema:

¹²²Read, *Charles Perkins* p. 81

¹²³Irene McIlraith, *The Time was Ripe*, p. 36

They stood at the small ticket window and demanded the theatre be desegregated. Trouble-making blacks? Wasn't that what he called them? Well they told him that they would block his patrons and prevent them from purchasing their tickets until the ropes were taken down. There they stood. Defiant. Two black women in that crowd of whites. Talking calmly... Their heads held so high. This may seem like a small thing to you but in Collarenebri in the 60s it was a big event. This was the way that Murri women took responsibility to try and make a more equitable society for their children to live in. This story makes my heart big and full. Tell us again Mum, Aunty Is, tell us again. And the light in their eyes show the pleasure.¹²⁴

Back in metropolitan Sydney, at the local Redfern town hall dances held throughout the 1960s by the Fellowship, police patrolled the area around the hall at five minutes to midnight each week.¹²⁵ If a fight took place, or there was deemed to be too much noise from the departing crowd, the dance would be banned for the next week. Repeated accusations of damage to equipment in the hall were also fought by members of the Fellowship. Threats of a permanent banning were frequently issued through the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹²⁶ By the time Charles Perkins, representing the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs (see below), came before the *Joint Parliamentary Committee upon Aborigines Welfare* in 1965 (discussed further in the following chapter) the Aboriginal dances had first been confined to the use of a small hall in Darlington and then permanently banned in 1966. In a statement regarding racial discrimination Perkins drew the committee's attention to the Sydney Council Ban on the use of halls for Aboriginal dances. Of the banning Perkins argued, 'I would say it is based on racial discrimination... we are being isolated, confined to the Darlington town hall':

They have never said that to the Greek community or any cultural group in this society that has more or less been concerned in certain incidents near the hall. They have never isolated them to the use of one particular hall... There were complaints against us so far as behaviour in the street was concerned... we are not responsible for every aborigine on a Friday night in Redfern... A fair judgement has not been made here as far as damage to the hall is concerned. One boy playing in the band left his cigarette on the piano and it burned into the piano so we agree that we would

¹²⁴Barbara Flick, 'Colonization and Decolonization: An Aboriginal Experience', in Sophie Watson (ed), *Playing the State. Australian Feminist Interventions*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 63

¹²⁵Lester Bostock, Interview, Marrickville, 2/11/1997, see also Bandler & Fox, *The Time was Ripe*, p. 14

¹²⁶"Dance Committee' folder, AAF Archive, ML MSS 4057/6

have to pay for that and we paid it readily, without any hesitation at all. But there were half a dozen other burns on the piano and we had to pay for those as well.¹²⁷

Before the banning of the Redfern dances permanently in 1966, the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs took over the running of the dances and transformed them into the first Aboriginal deb ball in Sydney. The Foundation, a very different kind of organisation to the Fellowship was at this time superseding the Fellowship at a local level, which was disbanding as its membership became involved with the establishment of the first Federal Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Of the twenty executive members of the new national organisation, five were drawn from the executive of the small Fellowship of Aboriginal-Australians.

It is in contesting space in cinemas and town halls, in such 'everyday places', as Simon Schama argues, that cultural practices consistently and routinely take place, and cultural identity is confirmed.¹²⁸ Similarly, Affrica Taylor argues, in relation to the Coolbaroo club in Perth, that Aboriginal interventions over public space segregation is a reminder of how narratives of place in urban settings also resonate with the 'ancient cultural significance of place' for Aboriginal people.¹²⁹ Struggles for public space were not just about locations and the right to access community halls but were bound up with the forging of new cultural identities in metropolitan centres. The dances, and the debutante balls which followed them offered different public performances of Aboriginal representations of femininity, masculinity, sociality, and finally, identity.

¹²⁷Charles Perkins' Evidence, *Report from the Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines Welfare*, Part 1, Report and Minutes of Proceedings, 2 June, 1966, p. 283

¹²⁸Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, Fontana Press, Hammersmith, 1996, p. 2

¹²⁹Taylor, 'The sun always shines in Perth', p. 274

CHAPTER SEVEN

Gender, the 1965-67 Joint Parliamentary Committee Upon Aborigines Welfare and the end of the Aborigines Welfare Board

The 1960s and 1970s, decades which saw the rise of the Aboriginal debutante, also saw a number of shifts in public policy, as well as an increasing media and academic interest in Aboriginal issues. One of the most significant changes for the Aboriginal community as a whole during these decades, as the previous chapter illustrates, was the large-scale movement of people into metropolitan areas. The revocation of Aboriginal reserves to 'encourage' people to enter white society as part of the assimilation policy, contributed to this movement of people off rural lands. A rural economic depression combined with drought in the early 1960s, better job prospects in the city, as well as the chance to escape the expulsion orders and removal of children by the Board in rural areas, were contributing factors to the movement of Aboriginal people into the city during this decade.¹ This large-scale movement of people into metropolitan areas, which reached its zenith in the 1960s and 1970s², led as we have seen in Sydney, to the establishment of groups such as the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship, the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs and local initiatives such as community dances. An increasing Aboriginal presence in metropolitan areas also contributed to an emphasis on what was becoming known as 'Aboriginal affairs' in the media, and a new wave of scholarly interest in Aboriginal studies.³ In 1961, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal studies was established in Canberra, and in 1963 the Social Science Research Council of Australia, a co-ordinating group for the promotion of research and teaching in what was then the recent discipline of 'social sciences', approved its third and most ambitious major project: 'Aborigines in Australian Society'. Charles Rowley, formerly Principal of the Australian School of Pacific Administration in Sydney was appointed Director. The resulting three volume study, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (volume

¹ See Goodall, 'Moving Away', in *Invasion*, pp. 289-296; Read, *A Hundred Years War*; Read, *A Biography of Charles Perkins*; also Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, 1969

² The Scott Report, commissioned by the Minister for Child Welfare and Social Welfare in 1972 found that of the approximately 9,000 Aboriginal people living in the Sydney Metropolitan Area in 1972, 80% had migrated into the city in the last 15 years. W. S Scott & Co. Pty Ltd, 'Report of the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare for Year ended 30th June 1973', in *Papers presented to the Legislative Assembly & Legislative Council*, vol. 1, pp. 319-351; see also comment on this report in *New Dawn*, January, 1974, pp. 2-4

³ The Australian Public Affairs Information Service notes that the term 'Assimilation' appeared as a separate heading in 1961. 1963 had the largest entry yet on Aboriginal Australians, *APAIS: Australian Public Affairs Information Service: A Subject Index to Current Literature*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1960, p. 16

one) *Outcasts in White Australia* (volume two) and *The Remote Aborigines* (volume three) was the first sustained study of the historical and contemporary impact of white colonisation on the Aboriginal community.⁴

This chapter returns to the earlier theme, discussed in chapter one, concerning attitudes towards miscegenation which had explicitly informed the public policy of biological assimilation in the late 1930s. While assimilation throughout the 1960s was considered largely a social or cultural process it retained for some, as Charles Rowley's widely read three volume study (discussed below) suggests the earlier emphasis on biological 'breeding-out' of the Aboriginal population. Further, this chapter considers representations of women, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal primarily during the *1965 to 1967 Joint Parliamentary Committee* in New South Wales, which recommended that the Aborigines Welfare Board be abolished, but affirmed assimilation as policy for New South Wales. First, to contextualise the 1965 to 1967 New South Wales Committee and the end of the Aborigines Welfare Board, the following section considers the background to changes in assimilation policy and legislation during the 1960s and 1970s in New South Wales.

Charles Rowley's study, which drew on the work of the young anthropologist Diane Barwick (discussed in introduction and chapter three), and on the first large-scale survey of Aboriginal households, conducted by Aboriginal researcher Herb Simms,⁵ is noteworthy both for the scale of the project and for its contemporaneous criticisms of assimilation, at a time when this was still widely accepted as national, and state policy. Rowley's work is also significant for its discussion of the connection between earlier patterns of gendered and sexual interaction at the 'frontier' of Australia's colonisation and the later policies of assimilation. In *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, a work that considered the first hundred years of colonisation, Rowley argued that in frontier conflicts Aboriginal women had frequently been prostituted by white soldiers, and later civilians, and had been used as a means of exchange between white and black men.⁶ The specific gender imbalance of the 'frontier' had led to a particular pattern of interaction between Aboriginal women and European men Rowley argued. Using Bathurst in New South Wales as an example, he

⁴*Aboriginal Policy and Practice*, vol 1, 2 & 3, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1971.

⁵Interview with Herb Simms, La Perouse, 22/4/98

⁶Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, p. 33

noted that by 1841 the white men of the settler community there out-numbered white women by more than two to one:

Here then must have been developing the pattern of Aboriginal prostitution for alcohol which set the tone of social relationships in so many places; and the beginnings of the part-Aboriginal people - some of whom sprang up from permanent liaisons and marriages with whites, and some not; some accepted by their fathers, often no doubt eventually to disappear with their children among the 'whites' and forget about their Aboriginal forebears - a process which has been going on ever since. Those rejected by their white relations found their company either in the Aboriginal camps or as a true currency lads or lasses with the more improvident element of the frontier population, to find a way of life and attitudes which they shared with the other itinerant workers, perhaps contributing to the developing 'Australian legend' as much as they took from it.⁷

Rowley's reference to the 'beginnings of the part-Aboriginal population' and his idea that the early violence and demand for Aboriginal women as sexual partners 'set the tone' of social relationships in 'so many places', represented a significant acknowledgement of the sexualised dynamics of early settler colonialism in Australia. In the later volumes Rowley remained attentive to what, he argued, was a pattern of miscegenation from earlier decades, which had led to the 'part-Aboriginal problem in the first place'.⁸ In his discussion and criticisms of assimilation policy in the second volume, *Outcasts in White Australia*, which focussed on the situation of 'part-Aboriginal' people living in settled areas, Rowley argued that assimilation policy could still be 'equated with the process of genetic change in the right direction'.⁹ Assimilation policy, Rowley suggested in the late 1960s could thus be seen as an administrative attempt at 'benign genocide' predicated implicitly on a process of miscegenation.¹⁰ Beyond the 'frontier', he argued, assimilation policy was evidence of the poor reasoning on the part of administrators and government representatives who assumed 'prejudiced' whites would accept Aborigines of mixed-descent as partners, and that these Aborigines would not only accept whites, but 'their own cultural and racial extinction'.¹¹

⁷Rowley, *The Destruction*, p. 33

⁸Rowley, *Outcasts in White Society* p. 9

⁹Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 9

¹⁰Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 10

¹¹Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 10

During the late 1960s, the time that Rowley was researching and writing his far-reaching study, the Aborigines Welfare Board in New South Wales underwent a major staff re-structure which reflected the increasing movement of people off Aboriginal reserves and stations. During the *Joint Parliamentary Committee inquiry into Aborigines Welfare* (discussed below) the Board announced plans to significantly re-organise its staff. The men who had previously been employed as managers were to be appointed as 'welfare officers' with duties that extended beyond the Aboriginal station on which they had been employed. In the Board's opinion 'by releasing former station managers for duties other than only on a station, Aboriginal people not residing on stations will receive more frequent visits from them'.¹² Station matrons, who had previously been employed as a 'package deal' with their husbands (see chapter four) did not, concomitantly, have their position as matron transferred to the new position of female welfare officer. A new emphasis in administrative discourse in the mid to late 1960s on 'training in social welfare subjects' fell most heavily on female employees; the majority of the ex-matrons, unlike their husbands, were not re-employed in the capacity of welfare officer.¹³ Thus the increasing emphasis on professional 'social welfare' training amongst staff in the Aboriginal administration of the 1960s was applied more rigorously to female employees than to male.

The Board announced that a number of new Female Officers would be employed under the new structure.¹⁴ The women who were employed held varying professional qualifications. Mrs Trustum, for example, one of three women employed in the new capacity as 'Female Welfare Officers', had seventeen years experience as a welfare worker with the Far West Children's Scheme run by the Child Welfare Department. The Far West Children's Scheme was a programme to bring rural children, who needed hospital treatment, (a large proportion of whom were Aboriginal) into metropolitan hospitals.¹⁵ Other new female Board employee, Miss King had trained as a pharmacist and, Mrs McKinney was a trained nurse. Sister Griffith, stationed at Kempsey was a triple certified nurse. Under the re-

¹²'Better Welfare Service from Extra Staff and Reorganisation', *Dawn*, May 1966, pp. 1-3

¹³*AWB Annual Report*, 30th June, 1967, pp. 2-3; *Dawn*, May 1966, p. 1-3

¹⁴Three women were employed in March 1966, while the Board announced in *Dawn* and in its Annual report that six, and sometimes nine new female welfare officers were to be employed, see 'Better Welfare Services and Extra Staff and Reorganisation', see for example *Dawn*, vol. 15, no. 3, May 1966, pp. 1-3; and *AWB Annual Report*, 30th June, 1967, p. 4

¹⁵see interview, Minna Shaw-Smith, Doctor involved with Far West Scheme through her work for the Department of Health, Manly, 14/11/1997; see also 'Annual Report for the year ended 1968/69', Far West Children's Health Scheme, *The Scheme*, Manly

organisation of Board personnel, ex-managers, it seemed, had the experience and on-the-job training to make them automatically Welfare Officers. Ex-matrons did not. The Board's staff re-structure reflected their understanding of the progression of assimilation. Professional white women were seen to have a significant role to play in implementing these later stages of the policy.

At the national level, assimilation policy continued to be affirmed as official policy throughout the 1960s. Social or cultural, as opposed to biological, assimilation policy had been first stated as policy at the *Native Welfare Meeting of Commonwealth and State Ministers held at Canberra, 3-4 September 1951*, the year Paul Hasluck was appointed Minister for Territories.¹⁶ Hasluck was instrumental in calling together the states for the first comprehensive meeting of Aboriginal administrators since 1937.¹⁷ Significantly, at this 1951 meeting two states, Victoria and Tasmania, did not send delegates, stating that they no longer had an identifiable Aboriginal population.¹⁸ The 'Meaning of the Policy of Assimilation' was formally spelt out for the State representatives who did attend the meeting:

The policy of assimilation means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines will attain the same manner of living as other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs, and being influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as any other Australians. Any special measures taken for Aborigines and part-Aborigines are regarded as temporary measures, not based on race, but intended to meet their needs and to assist them to make the transition from one stage to another in such a way as will be favourable to their social, economic and political advancement.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, vol II, 1950-51, Government Printer, Canberra, 1951; see Paul Hasluck, 'I Become Minister for Territories', in *Shades of Darkness*, pp. 90-94

¹⁷ See Tim Rowse, 'The modesty of the State: Hasluck and the Anthropological Critics of Assimilationism', in Tom Stannage, Kay Saunders & Richard Nile (eds); *Paul Hasluck in Australian History: Civic Personality and Public Life*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Brisbane, pp. 119-32

¹⁸ *Native Welfare Meeting of Commonwealth and State Ministers held at Canberra, 3-4 September 1951*, delegates and proceedings, p. 1; Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness*, p. 90; Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 398

¹⁹ *Native Welfare Meeting*, p. 5

The Northern Territory, under Federal control, was the first to change its legislation after 1951.²⁰ The 'special measures', referred to in the above statement, in New South Wales amounted to the same restrictive legislation, experienced by Aboriginal people under the Aborigines Protection Act introduced in 1909 and last amended in 1943 (discussed in chapter two and three). No further amendments were made to the Aborigines Protection Act until 1963. Pressures to repeal these restrictive clauses under the Act, and to get rid of the exemption certificates brought in under the 1943 amendments (see chapter three) had been longstanding. Campaigns run by the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship and the Aborigines Progressive Association in particular had focused on the discriminatory legislation enacted in the name of assimilation.²¹ Under intense lobbying from such groups and with the increasing national focus on progressive Aboriginal policy influenced by Hasluck, the Aborigines Welfare Board in New South Wales, and the politicians who worked closely with it, began to consider legislative changes to the restrictive Aborigines Protection Act. A *national Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers held in Darwin* in 1963 accelerated this process, when it placed pressure on state governments to liberalise restrictive legislation to make way for full equality under the law for assimilated Aborigines.²²

The impact of these national developments was felt in the 1963 amendments to the Aborigines Protection Act in New South Wales which withdrew special provisions relating to Aborigines, in acts dealing with the supply of liquor, 'vagrancy' and police offences.²³ The special controls still held by the Aborigines Welfare Board related to Aboriginal child 'welfare', to the management of the stations and the development of the area-welfare system. Provision for separate custody and maintenance of Aboriginal children and for control of Aboriginal wards of the State along with special provisions for apprenticeship,

²⁰For a review of Northern Territory Aboriginal policy in this period see for example, Tim Rowse, *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, Australia, Spain, UK; Rowse, 'The modesty of the State', pp. 119-32; William McMahon, *Australian Aborigines: Commonwealth Policy and Achievements*, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1972; Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness*; Rowse, 'The modesty of the State', pp. 119-32

²¹See chapters three and four

²²*Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers, Darwin, July 1963, Statement of Policy, Resolution of Conference, Ministerial Statement*, Parliamentary Papers, 1962-63, vol. 3, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1963, pp. 651-660

²³*Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act*, Act No. 7, 1963, 2 (1), Statutes of New South Wales, pp. 80-82

remained with the Aborigines Welfare Board until its demise in 1969 when these powers were handed on to the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare.²⁴

The main thrust of the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act, was that it removed the prohibition against giving, selling or supplying alcohol to all Aborigines, rather than just those with an exemption certificate. The issue of restrictions on Aboriginal access to alcohol had received widespread publicity in the mid 1960s with the cases of Albert Namatjira the painter, and then Robert Tudawali the male lead in the film *Jedda*. Both men, although themselves exempted from the 'Act', had been arrested and charged with supplying alcohol to their relatives. Both served a prison sentence for this crime. In both cases the arrests were widely reported to have a profound impact on the otherwise successfully assimilated men and seen as a contributing factor in each man's eventual breakdown and death.²⁵

When the Bill repealing the restrictions on alcohol became law on March 30th, 1963 it was hailed by the Aborigines Welfare Board as the final legal barrier to the complete 'assimibility' of black Australians. *Dawn* magazine described it as a 'breakthrough', heralding new freedoms from what was termed the 'paternalistic' hand of previous administrations.²⁶ Specifically, in terms of gendered representations, this was seen as a significant victory for civil rights for Aboriginal *men*. The cover of the *Sun* newspaper, for example, carried an evocative image of 'a lone black man' taking his place with other white men stood at the bar.²⁷ (Fig. xix). The Welfare Board, in summing up its greatest achievements in its own eulogy in the last edition of *Dawn* in 1969 and in its final annual report, drew attention to this act of legislation, proudly claiming it as a victory over the earlier 'old paternalistic' policies.²⁸ The repeal of Section nine of the Act prohibiting drinking was represented in *Dawn* and in the Board's annual reports as a privilege dependent on the 'proper behaviour' of Aboriginal men in particular, as drinking equals with white men.²⁹ Prior to the

²⁴ *Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act*, 1 (1)

²⁵ For analysis of Namatjira and Tudawali see Julie Wells & Michael Christie, 'Namatjira and the Burden of Citizenship', *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 114, April, 2000, pp.110-120

²⁶ *Dawn*, May 1963, p. 1

²⁷ March, 1963, cover page

²⁸ *AWB AR*, 1968, p. 2, *Dawn*, November, 1969, p. 1

²⁹ *AWB AR*, 1962, p. 5, *AWB AR*, 1963, p. 3, see also *Dawn* magazine, March, 1962, p. 7

amendments becoming law, the Board's welfare officers had been instructed by the Board to undertake intensive counselling of Aborigines about their 'new responsibilities'.³⁰ A two-page article which accompanied the announcement of the 1963 amendments featured in the *Dawn* magazine, showed Aboriginal men learning how to enjoy 'civilised drinking', alongside their white male counterparts.³¹ The article included advice such as 'don't drink before going out in the cold', followed by a check list of how a man ought to drink appropriately. The Board's approach was typical of the administration's increasing stress on individual psychology, behaviour modification and socialisation (see following section).

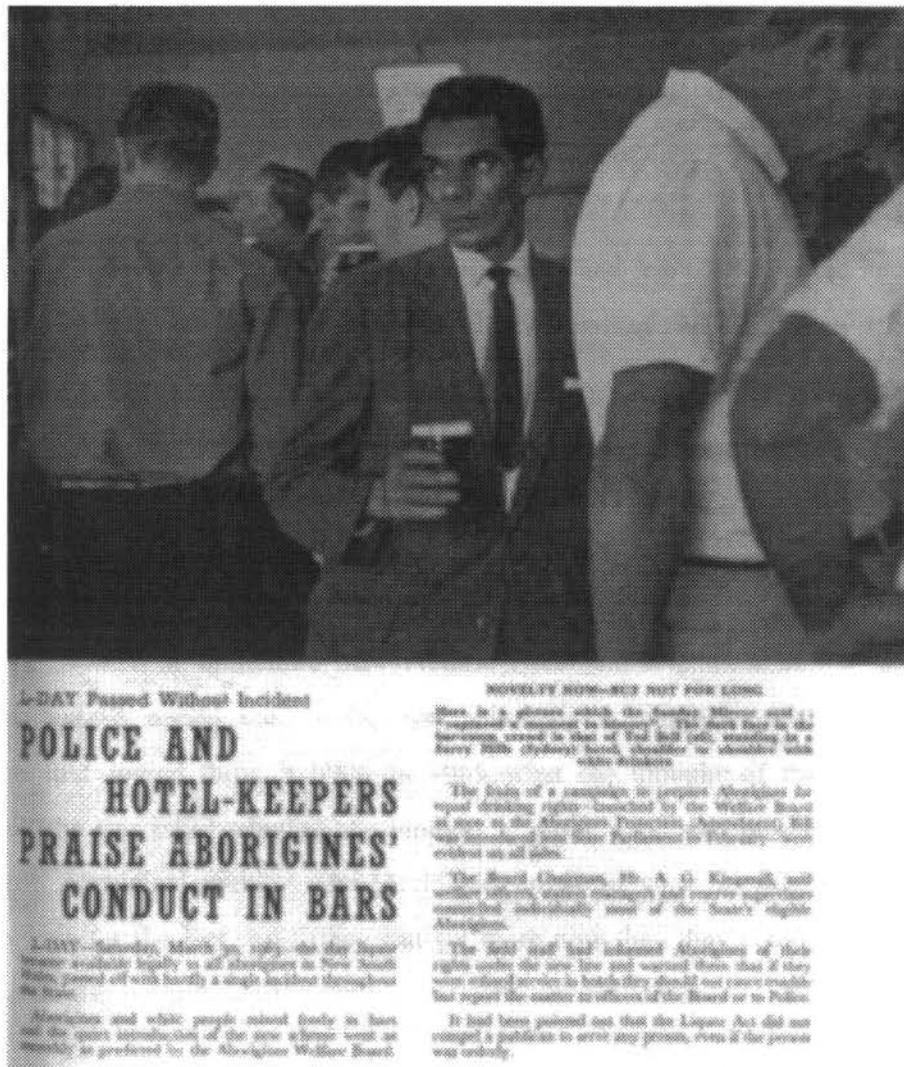


Fig. xix

³⁰AWB AR, 1963, p. 3

³¹*Dawn*, April, 1963, pp. 8-9

The 1963 amendment to allow Aboriginal adults access to liquor conformed to a gendered conception of full citizenship and equality for Aboriginal people. Jeremy Beckett's studies during the 1960s, which had described and analysed all- male drinking groups and their social purpose amongst the 'part-Aboriginal' communities he worked amongst, established a link between male solidarity and alcohol.³² More recently Gillian Cowlshaw has noted the articulation between notions of male citizenship and alcohol which existed in the Northern Territory and formed the background to the debates over legalising Aboriginal drinking. In the Northern Territory, Cowlshaw argues that assertions of mateship and manhood are made in the pub, quoting Rex Campion, a young stockman in the 1970s: 'When I stand up and drink a can of beer I'm not like old times. I'm a man'.³³ In this context, asks Cowlshaw, when Aborigines had been forbidden alcohol, how could they be 'men among men'?³⁴ Similarly, in New South Wales, the 1963 repeal of liquor restrictions and the link between Aboriginal masculinity and alcohol is indicative of the contradictory, but central way that ideas about gender and Aboriginal masculinity and femininity figured in the debates and campaigns around assimilation and citizenship in the mid 1960s and early 1970s.

That the amendments did not change the Aborigines Welfare Board's powers of committal over Aboriginal children to the Cootamundra and Kinchela Homes, nor reduced the Board's hold over Aboriginal apprentices and their salaries was a contradiction which highlighted the way the 'new' era of assimilation obscured the on-going disadvantage of Aboriginal children and women at this time. Mrs Victoria Archibald a resident of the Burnt Bridge Aboriginal reserve during the 1960s, was asked by a member of the parliamentary Committee that toured through NSW in 1965 what she thought of the new legislation. Specifically she was asked whether she thought it was a 'good step or a bad to make drink available to Aboriginal men'.³⁵ Mrs Archibald answered that it would not make any difference save for the fact that '[t]hey can get more now than they could before'.³⁶

³²Beckett described 'all male drinking' groups and their social purpose amongst the 'part-Aboriginal' communities he studied in the late 1950s and 1960s in NSW, see 'Aborigines, Alcohol and Assimilation' in Marie Reay (ed), *Aborigines Now*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1964; and Beckett 'A Study of Mixed-Blood Aboriginal Minority in the Pastoral West of NSW', Master of Arts Thesis, Australian National University, 1958

³³Cowlshaw, *Rednecks*, p. 22

³⁴Cowlshaw, *Rednecks*, p. 22

³⁵*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry 1965-1967*, p. 400

³⁶*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 400

The Special 'Problem of Women' and the 1965-67 Parliamentary Committee

The question was posed to Mrs Archibald during the state-wide inquiry into the future of Aboriginal administration in New South Wales. On the 8th December 1965, a Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly of the New South Wales Parliament was appointed to enquire into, and report on, 'the welfare of Aborigines with particular reference to the education and housing of Aborigines and the legislative or other proposals necessary to assist Aborigines to attain an improved standard of living'. Introducing the final report the Chairman of the joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Assembly emphasised that the Committee had not been appointed to inquire into policy and actions of the Aborigines Welfare Board. Nevertheless the Chairman noted:

[A]s the Aborigines Welfare Board has, since 1940, been charged with the formulation and implementation of policy concerning Aborigines in New South Wales, it was only natural that the policies adopted and the manner of implementation were closely scrutinised.³⁷

In fact, the Committee, instigated after decades of campaigning by anti-Board groups and individuals, recommended the abolition of the Aborigines Welfare Board and the 'mainstreaming' of bureaucratic control over Aboriginal people. The Parliamentary Committee's report and recommendations came at a time when a 'special' Aboriginal welfare agency was seen to counteract the successful progress of assimilation. The government's two year investigation was concluded on 12th September, 1967 and subsequently a Cabinet sub-Committee was appointed to examine the report and investigate the possibility of drafting a Bill containing the recommendations proposed by the Committee. On 6th November 1968, the Chief Secretary introduced into the Legislative Assembly the Aborigines Bill that embodied nearly all of the recommendations of the Committee (see below).

The Committee heard evidence from witnesses in the Sydney metropolitan area as well as travelling around rural New South Wales, visiting many of the remaining Aboriginal reserves. Two of the eleven Committee members were female parliamentarians: Mrs Evelyn Barron from the Labor party and Mrs Mable Furley of the Liberal-Democratic

³⁷*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry, 'Report', p. 1*

party.³⁸ Mrs Barron had been a member of the New South Wales National Council of Women and active in the movement for the Australian Women's Charter, before joining the Labour party in 1938 and becoming president of the Women's Central Organising Committee in 1964.³⁹ It was at this time that she became a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1964 to 1967. Barron was sixty-five years old when she began the tour of New South Wales with the Committee 'inquiring into Aboriginal welfare'. Mabel Furley, a founding member of the Liberal Democratic party and a member of the provisional state executive in 1944. She had been the honorary secretary of the Women in War Work Council, a member of the National Council of Women, superintendent of National Emergency Services, Mosman branch (1939-42), a member of Mosman-Cremorne-Neutral Bay Repatriation Committee, a member of the New South Wales League of Women Voters, a member of the federal board of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, and eventually a member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee set up to inquire into Aborigines welfare, which she joined in its second year in 1965.⁴⁰ As their line of questioning reveals, these women were seen to have a special expertise in understanding the Aboriginal women's realm and the 'domestic' sphere generally. In the parliamentary debate following the Committee's hearings, and in press reports issued by the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare after the demise of the Board it was claimed that the Committee had spoken to '2000 Aborigines'.⁴¹ But in fact the inquiry only interviewed a total of 107 witnesses, of which twenty-five were Aboriginal, twenty-three were women, and only eight of whom were Aboriginal women.⁴² Seven of the eight women who came before the inquiry are listed simply as 'reserve residents'.

Ascertaining Aboriginal women's attitudes towards their families and wider community, both Aboriginal and white, was seen as key to understanding the reasons for 'delays' in Aboriginal assimilation into white towns, and society generally. The Aboriginal women who came before the Committee were repeatedly questioned about their attitudes towards leaving the

³⁸*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 86

³⁹Heather Radi, Peter Spearitt and Carolyn Hinton, *Biographical Register of NSW Parliament*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1979, p. 13. Interestingly this register lists her occupation as simply 'Housewife'

⁴⁰Radi, Spearitt & Hinton, *Biographical Register*, p. 105

⁴¹see Mr Willis, Minister for Labour and Industry, Chief Secretary and Minister for Tourism introducing the Aborigines Bill, 6 November 1968, *NSW Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 76, 1968-69, pp. 2338-2341

⁴²*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry Upon Aborigines Welfare, 1967-1967*, List of Witnesses, p. 86

reserves; their children's education; their diet, ('You look pretty well. Do you have a mixed diet?')⁴³ their attitude towards employment, and their attitudes towards their daughter's marriages; most specifically did they discourage, or encourage them from marrying Whites? The questions directed at Aboriginal women by the Committee indicated that their mothering practices were to be singled out as a particular 'problem' for the progression of people off reserves and into the white community. Describing the problem of the reluctance of Aboriginal families to be removed from their homes on reserves, the Chairman of the Committee put the matter succinctly: '[i]f you could make the wife or the mother dissatisfied with her conditions, the husband will be prodded into moving to a more acceptable situation.'⁴⁴ Similarly Mrs Barron remarked that on the problem of getting people voluntarily to move off reserves the answer was: '[D]evelop the women... They are the people who are the drawback... [T]hey are a great drawback to the advancement of the movement [of people off reserves]'.⁴⁵ The Aborigines Welfare Board's female officer for Kempsey lamented the attitudes of the Aboriginal mothers she encountered remarking: 'I sometimes feel, when I get up in the morning, that it would be a wonderful thing if I could load a syringe with "get up and go" and that if I could do that I would get somewhere.'⁴⁶ Mrs Thelma Henderson, a white witness who came before the Committee in Bowraville, voiced a common sentiment amongst white witnesses and Committee members when she remarked: 'if you educate the woman you therefore educate the whole family. It is worth any price'.⁴⁷

Evidence before the Committee that contradicted this emphasis on the behaviour and attitudes of the Aboriginal mother, was dismissed in the reports findings. Mrs Rebecca Buchanan, for example, from the Bowraville Aboriginal reserve tried to indicate to the Committee something of the level of everyday racism and repression experienced by the Aboriginal community in her local area. She described how simply by appearing before the Committee, Aboriginal people were subjected to criticism and suspicion of some white townspeople:

⁴³*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 373

⁴⁴*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 352

⁴⁵*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 114

⁴⁶*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 419

⁴⁷*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 351

Q. Do I take it from your remarks that you feel there is great discrimination here against aborigines?

A. Yes that was always here.

Q. Is it very bad at this point of time?

A. If we got out of this office now they would ask us what we were doing here.

Q. Who is they?

A. White people in town here.

Q. They approach you in the streets and ask you what you are doing in town?

A. Yes, but we would not tell them what we came here for.⁴⁸

This exchange shows something of the courage it took for Aboriginal women to speak before the Committee and conditions in rural towns at this time. In other evidence Mrs Doreen Flanders recounted that 'some of the crowd' at her local cinema 'had pelted oranges down and nearly hit my baby on the head as she entered the stalls, after her cousin, who had given evidence at the Committee, had asked the manager to allow Aborigines access to the segregated seating reserved for 'whites only'.⁴⁹

In the report's conclusion Aboriginal women were criticised in a number of ways, and the general experience of poverty and local racism was blamed on the women themselves. Aboriginal women, for example, were criticised for the poor diet of their children: '[M]ain diet... seems to be biscuits for breakfast, bread for dinner and biscuits for tea - nothing that means work and effort to prepare.'⁵⁰ On the subject of education and the problem of irregular school attendance the Committee dismissed the long-standing disputes over Aboriginal access to 'white' schools, and claimed that the problem lay with Aboriginal mothers who were generally too lenient with their children. In this matter the Committee found that: the 'Aboriginal mother is inclined to permit the child to stay home from school if the child so desires'.⁵¹ It was also minuted that Aboriginal mothers were rarely effective at administering even the most simple medications prescribed to their children. Chronic worm infestations on Aboriginal stations, for example, were ascribed to poor mothering.

⁴⁸*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 372

⁴⁹*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 374

⁵⁰*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 353

⁵¹*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 10

The female Welfare Officer based at Kempsey noted that of the four hundred and eighty eight Aboriginal mothers she dealt with she could 'only trust twenty to administer tablets' to their children on their own:

After the tablets are given the mothers are supposed to administer an aperient. In several cases where I have had to go back to check up, where the children have been vomiting worms, I have found that the aperient had not been given. That points to the fact that these people are still not up to the standards of giving it themselves.⁵²

Aboriginal mothers were also reported to be inadequate when it came to caring for a very sick child due to their 'natural' timidity and fear.⁵³ Sister Cecily Griffith, a Board Welfare Officer told the committee that 'many of my aboriginal mothers are terrified if the child is very ill. They stay away rather than go down to see the child; they are terrified of seeing the bottles, the intravenous stands, the oxygen tents and so on'.⁵⁴

The other, apparently self-evident area, for questioning Aboriginal women, according to Committee members, was their sexuality and high rates of pregnancy. As Dr de Bryon-Faes recommended to his fellow Committee members: 'Let us consider this question of morals'.⁵⁵ Mr Cahill, seeking answers to this questions, asked Mrs Henderson, a white woman, about the 'question of morals' of Aboriginal women: 'Do you think it is something that is inherent, or something that had been absorbed, shall we say, from the white man?'⁵⁶ Both the question and answer resonated with the earlier debates, described in chapter one, from the late 1930s. Henderson replied that she thought a lack of 'morals' came from the 'poor class of white man' to which Cahill responded, 'do you not think it is a hangover from the past with the particular tribal marriage laws?'⁵⁷

Mr Wright, directing his questions to Mrs Ella Hiscocks, Matron of Cootamundra Girl's Home, noted that the Committee had 'found a pattern that the coloured people are not

⁵²*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 420

⁵³*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 421

⁵⁴*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 420

⁵⁵*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 356

⁵⁶*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 356

⁵⁷*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 356

immoral but amoral - that they have different standards.⁵⁸ This was, in Wright's opinion, 'tied up with their limited intellectual capacity and the fact that they are an easy-going type of child that can be talked into doing lots of things.'⁵⁹ Mr Earl concluded that a 'large number of Aboriginal girls' had 'poor intellectual ability and low reasoning ability' and thus 'seem to be unable to comprehend the dangers of sexual relationships with men'. Since all the girls were 'to be fitted into the industrial areas', the Committee was at pains to get to the bottom of this 'common pattern'.⁶⁰

The answer to the 'problem of Aboriginal women' according to Committee members, and the anthropologist James Bell who appeared as an expert witness to the Committee, was to employ more professional female welfare workers. In Bell's opinion the appointment of the 'necessary number' of female welfare workers had been overlooked by the Board.⁶¹ Without them, 'this problem of the home environment' as he described it, could not be solved.⁶² According to Bell, if Aboriginal women were not stopped from offering sanctuaries on reserves for other family members, the job of breaking up the reserves was made all the harder for Board personnel.⁶³ The white women interviewed by the Committee included the Welfare Board's matrons and new female Welfare Officers, as well as women from a range of non-government and government organisations. Some interviewees were members of charities such as Save the Children, others were involved in the Aboriginal advancement and welfare groups of the 1960s, groups such as the Aborigines Advancement League of Victoria and the Armidale Assimilation Association (AAA).⁶⁴ Gwendoline Phelan, who came before the Committee, worked as the research officer for the Teacher's Federation; Dr Ellen Hughes Kent was the doctor at Armidale Hospital, and Annie Howarth was the Principal of the Department of Education's, Far West Hospital School at Manly.

Joan Kersey, a member of the Save the Children fund in Armidale was quizzed by the Committee, along with the other 'ladies' in her group, as to why they had not visited the

⁵⁸*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 512

⁵⁹*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 512

⁶⁰*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 512

⁶¹*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 76

⁶²*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 77

⁶³*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry* p. 77

⁶⁴The work and complexities of this assimilation organisation are analysed by Jo Woolmington in her article, 'The 'Assimilation' Years in a Country Town', *Aboriginal History*, 1991, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 25-37

Aboriginal mothers and children in her local area in their homes more often. Mrs Kersey replied that she had tried to get into people's homes but felt 'an awful barrier'.⁶⁵ The task of training Aboriginal mothers to behave correctly, leave their homes on the reserves and reduce the size of their families was 'difficult' anyway and required 'time and training'. She argued that: 'The idea of a few well-intentioned ladies running around and trying to teach people about birth-control is a thing no self-respecting woman would want. This is a job for welfare workers'.⁶⁶ In answering the criticisms of the Committee in regard to her inability to interfere more directly with Aboriginal women and children, Joan Kersey relied on a historic call for more professional women in the administration of Aboriginal welfare. Camillas Jane Robison, Welfare Officer for the Aborigines Welfare Board in Lismore, was one of the professional women seen as the answer, by many, to the 'special problem' of Aboriginal women. However the anthropological advice of Bell, for example, ignored the level of Aboriginal hostility to the intrusion of the Board's officers. Camillas Robison reported to the Committee in March 1965:

I ask them whether I may come in and inspect their houses and many of them do become suspect [sic] and say, "No, why should you come in? It is my house"... The reserve at Coraki is anti-Board and they class me as Board. I get very little co-operation from them.⁶⁷

Mrs Brenda Flanders, a resident at the Racecourse, Bowraville, when asked if she saw much of the Board's Welfare Officer replied, 'I see too much of him... as for helping me, the Board has never helped. Me and my husband battled on all the time. We get no help from the Board'.⁶⁸ Mrs Buchanan, an elderly resident on the Bowraville Aboriginal reserve, when asked if she thought the Board had her best interests at heart replied flatly, 'No'. When asked if she had any further views on the Board she answered that 'things had been a long way better', before the 'Welfare' had interfered with her family. She concluded firmly: 'I do not like them myself'.⁶⁹ Linda Longbottom from La Perouse speaking to the Committee as a representative of women from the Aboriginal reserve described how the Aborigines Welfare Board had refused to make basic repairs on the houses they owned and rented to

⁶⁵*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence, p. 118

⁶⁶*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 350

⁶⁷*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 145

⁶⁸*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 375

⁶⁹*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 372

Aboriginal residents. The process of deterioration of the houses in the face of repeated requests for basic repairs was a common experience:

From the women's point of view I think the houses have been terrible, especially in wet weather. I would like to see some of you people look at La Perouse in winter, especially in the rainy time when the rain pours in on people. You would see then the bad conditions. The conditions are very bad... it is really the deterioration of the houses that the people think is worst... They feel the Aborigines Welfare Board has let them down. It has really let their homes deteriorate so much that they have not much faith in it.⁷⁰

Confronted with the obvious poverty on Aboriginal reserves and stations the Committee's solution to the run-down houses was 'more home training, education, training in home management of the wives and mothers in particular'.⁷¹ The Committee concluded that any Aboriginal women who stated that they wanted to remain on the reserves were 'misguided'.⁷² The Board commended Mrs Rebecca Buchanan from the Bowraville Aboriginal reserve for the fact that all her children had moved to Sydney to get work: 'You are a very wise woman, Mrs Buchanan. Practically all your children who have grown up have moved down to Sydney... and have got married down there'.⁷³ The Chairman of the Committee asked Linda Longbottom if she would move from the area if offered a house off the reserve: 'Suppose somebody came out there tomorrow and said: "I have a nice home for you in the general area of the reserve at a rent you can afford", would you take it?'⁷⁴ Longbottom replied:

Five or six generations of my people have been living at La Perouse. I have grown up with the place. I have lived in that area for fifty-three years... My eight sisters have all grown up and lived in the area.⁷⁵

⁷⁰*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 161

⁷¹*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 162

⁷²*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry* p. 163

⁷³*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 373

⁷⁴*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 161

⁷⁵*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 161

Her reply indicated the connection many Aboriginal women felt with the reserve lands that the Welfare Board, under the policy of assimilation, was seeking to remove Aboriginal people from. In this respect then, the Committee was right, Aboriginal women's attitudes were central and the administration's refusal to maintain properties on reserves in order to 'prod' people to move on, would not be successful in the face of such women's commitment to their land, their families and their homes.

'An indigestible lump of colour'.⁷⁶ Herbert Groves, miscegenation and anti-assimilation.

Aboriginal men who appeared as witnesses before the Committee also sought to articulate their criticisms of the Aborigines Welfare Board and the policy of assimilation.⁷⁷ Herbert Groves, President of the Aborigines Progressive Association and an executive member of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs gave evidence to the Committee in April 1966. The Progressive Association, which Groves estimated to have approximately one hundred members in 1965, was an activist organisation based in Sydney, with a branch at Walgett. The majority of the members of the organisation were Aboriginal. (Mr Doyle, a Committee member asked Groves a number of times if 'any members of the Progressive Association were Communists').⁷⁸ Groves had also been the Aboriginal representative on the Aborigines Welfare Board for two terms (six years). When asked about his impressions of his time with the Board, Groves replied that he had felt he had been 'hamstrung':

It was not my privilege to visit the people I represented. When I wanted to visit them I went on an itinerary... Apart from that I could do little more than attend board meetings. If I did put anything constructive forward I could be outvoted by a majority of nine to two or nine to one.⁷⁹

In his evidence, Groves compared the experience of migrant assimilation with Aboriginal assimilation, arguing that there was an unwillingness to recognise or endorse Aboriginal difference by the Committee:

⁷⁶*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 88

⁷⁷*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, see for example evidence of Charles Perkins, pp. 273-424, John Ballangarry, p. 357, John Ferguson, p. 254 and Henry Penrith, p. 582

⁷⁸*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, pp. 88-89

⁷⁹*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 87

If Aborigines want to remain in groups and build up co-operatives and remain in their respective groups they should be able to do so. We have such groups in Australia today in Italian colonies in Queensland and also Maltese colonies. These people have no intention or idea of assimilating but they mix very freely and they do preserve their national dances and culture and their own way of life. There does not seem to be any objections to what they are doing, so why should the aborigines be regarded in a different light if they want to do it?⁸⁰

The Hon. E. G. Wright, MLC could see no sense in Groves' argument. He could not see why Aboriginal people in New South Wales believed they had any culture: '[W]e know about Albert Namatjira and the Widgee brothers', he told Groves, 'but where are there any in New South Wales?'⁸¹ Under pressure to prove the existence of a separate Aboriginal culture in New South Wales, Groves answered that there were 'workers' still to be found in New South Wales who were 'carving emus eggs and that sort of thing', adding, 'I might have said that there are many aborigines in this state quite capable of doing just as good bark paintings as full bloods in the Territory.'⁸² Groves' justification of New South Wales culture by reference to the Northern Territory was indicative of the common perception in the late 1960s, that the only true Aboriginal culture still alive in Australia was from the Australian desert.

While the Committee members unanimously dismissed the cultural heritage of New South Wales Aboriginal people, in its arguments against Groves and other Aboriginal spokespeople who appeared before the Committee, they simultaneously returned to notions of biological heredity to explain away Aboriginal occupancy on reserve land. Edward James Morgan, the Area Welfare Officer of Aborigines Welfare Board, Lismore, was asked by Committee member Mr Earl:

Do you think these people who were never agriculturalists in their tribal state and never had a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle or horses or anything of that nature whatever, just have not any hereditary [sic] more or less any innate love for agricultural pursuits?⁸³

⁸⁰*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 87

⁸¹*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 88

⁸²*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 92

⁸³*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 113

The Board's Welfare office replied authoritatively: '[T]hey have not any innate urge to carry on, on the land'⁸⁴ While cultural legacy was denied by the Committee and Board staff, an earlier language of biological inheritance, 'absorption', and 'innate' behaviours was used interchangeably by both Committee members and white witnesses in describing the 'solution' to Aboriginal 'disadvantage'. John Wallace Green, President of the North Coast District Council for Aborigines Welfare, one of many white advancement groups at this time said: 'I feel that on the score of absorbing these brighter young people who are coming on, they must be got into the bigger towns and even into the cities'.⁸⁵ Views such as these, that reflected ideas about racial and/or cultural extinction as the solution to the Aboriginal problem and the answer to assimilation, were ambiguous throughout the Committee's hearings. When told by the sympathetic Alan Duncan, staff tutor at the Department of Aboriginal Adult Education that Aboriginal people in New South Wales had 'lost their pride in race', Mr Earl, responding for the Committee replied: 'that would be natural would it not? There is no race? Most of them are quarter castes or octoroons. How can they have pride in race when the race does not exist?'⁸⁶ Duncan went on to compare indigenous people in New South Wales with other 'very good Australians' who may also be aware of their Jewish, Italian, Irish or Scottish ancestry. Duncan was criticised for giving instances of people with a 'high culture'. Mr Earl argued:

I have been talking of a western culture and standard of civilisation. Then we have these people at Brewarrina in these humpies and so on. You are putting them on the same footing as having some pride in a distant background of which they are completely ignorant.⁸⁷

Committee members and white witnesses alike relied on an individualistic analysis of the 'problem' of Aboriginal people in New South Wales. Mr Earl argued that he knew what the issues were affecting Aboriginal people in New South Wales because he used to teach in a State school in Redfern:

⁸⁴*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 114

⁸⁵*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 142

⁸⁶*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 264

⁸⁷*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 265

I never once saw any discrimination against those children. As a matter of fact one boy was captain of the first football team... an aboriginal boy of 12 today has more opportunity than the white boy of 12 in the same level and the same social group...⁸⁸

If this was the case, responded Herbert Groves, why was there still special legislation designating restrictive clauses on Aboriginal lives? Against the view that assimilation was the appropriate policy for the progressive 1960s Groves argued that the seemingly benign contemporary rhetoric of assimilation amounted to the genocide of an 'entire race' of people. 'In my mind' he said, 'I feel that assimilation is a modern term for extermination'. He described the policy in 1967 as being 'a policy of encouraging them to intermarry' with the hope that the 'race would disappear' for good.⁸⁹

I would not favour that... I do not favour disappearance of a race. I do not think it is right that aborigines should be encouraged to intermarry but if they wish to do so it is their democratic privilege to do what they want to do.⁹⁰

Groves drew attention to the biological assumptions on which successful assimilation had originally been based. He criticised popular scientific 'experts' responsible for disseminating pro-miscegenation arguments and raised the issue, ignored by administrators and scientists alike, that many non-Aboriginal people, as well as Aboriginal, were deeply opposed to the idea of assimilation:

Assimilation by those and for those who want to assimilate but you will find that a lot of people do not favour assimilation. Surveys that I have made in three of four states, indicate that the views on assimilation are, that Europeans feel that it will create an indigestible lump of colour in society and it is not generally acceptable. A lot of them have no desire to assimilate through inter-marriage.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 89

⁸⁹ *New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 76

⁹⁰ *New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 84

⁹¹ *New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 87

Groves argued that the New South Wales administration still unofficially endorsed a biological approach to the 'problem' of assimilation and reminded the Committee of the scientific and administrative approach to the 'problem' presented by part-Aborigines over the past thirty years (discussed in chapter one):

[Q]uite a number of welfare officers are inclined to favour the other interpretation [of assimilation] that maybe arose from a survey that was conducted by Professor Watson in Adelaide. He stated conclusively that aborigines could be absorbed into the white race in three generations without fear of throwback. Welfare officers are inclined to favour this definition of assimilation but it seems to me that it would mean the disappearance of a race of people. We should accept aborigines on the basis of equality and also help retain their culture.⁹²

Groves told the Committee that he represented the 'general opinion of the aborigine' in his interpretation of assimilation. He argued that the Aboriginal people he represented in the Progressive Association shared a sense that assimilation was the same as 'absorption', and that they had never been consulted as to whether they agreed with this policy.⁹³

It is the general opinion of any aborigine that they could be absorbed. To be logical about it, it seems that 100, 000 or thereabouts of aboriginal descent are in the community, and out of that 100, 000 you could say that two-thirds are already half-castes. This would come about by evolution, but if it is going to come about, let it come by evolution, and not by an encouraged policy of assimilation.⁹⁴

Aboriginal Culture, the Aborigines Act, 1969 and a new Administration

In the same year that the Joint Parliamentary Committee had begun its enquiries in New South Wales, the official definition of the 'Meaning of the Policy of Assimilation', which had been affirmed at the 1951 and 1963 meetings of Commonwealth and State administrators, was amended. Don Dunstan, Attorney-General in South Australia,

⁹²*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 84

⁹³*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 87

⁹⁴*New South Wales Joint Parliamentary Inquiry*, p. 87

introduced the word 'choose' to the formal definition of assimilation at a Conference on Aboriginal welfare held by Commonwealth and State ministers Welfare Conference in 1965.⁹⁵ The official statement of assimilation was amended to read: 'The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner of living to that of other Australians'.⁹⁶ In its final report and recommendations the New South Wales Committee made reference to the new element of choice in assimilation policy but found that 'while ever the choice remains with the Aborigines the above policy of assimilation is the best for Aborigines and the community generally'.⁹⁷ On the question of what might happen to those Aboriginal people who chose *not* to assimilate the Committee had nothing to say, and no recommendations. Item five in the final report, under the heading 'Pride of Race', recommended that 'Governments should unobtrusively but definitely aim at eradicating any reflection on the philosophy, culture and way of life of the tribal Aboriginal' and commended the Department of Education on its 'proper presentation of the Aboriginal as an individual'.⁹⁸ According to this conclusion, breaking any remaining links with traditional Aboriginal culture would result in the desired assimilation of people identifying as Aboriginal in New South Wales, whether they chose it or not.

The findings of the Committee fitted with a widely accepted narrative of 'part-Aboriginal' experience in the south east of the continent that represented it, in Dennis Byrne's phrase, as an 'unmitigated slide into dependency'.⁹⁹ This was a narrative characterised by James Clifford, in his writing on notions of the 'primitive' in post-colonial encounters:

Entering the modern world their distinct histories quickly vanish. Swept up in a destiny dominated by the capitalist West and by various technologically advanced societies these suddenly 'backward' peoples no longer invent local futures. What is different about them remains tied to traditional pasts, inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new but cannot produce it.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ *Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers on Aboriginal Welfare, July 1965*, in *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, 1965-66

⁹⁶ *Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers*, p. 2

⁹⁷ *Report of the Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly upon Aborigines Welfare*, (ordered to be printed 13 September, 1967) in, *Joint Volumes of Parliamentary Papers*, New South Wales, vol. 5, 1967-68, p. 24

⁹⁸ *Report of the Joint Committee*, p. 25

⁹⁹ 'Deep Nation: Australia's Acquisition of an Indigenous Past', *Aboriginal History*, no. 20, 1996, pp. 83-102

¹⁰⁰ *The Predicament of Culture*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988 p. 5

The Committee argued that it was this inability to cope with 'the new' that had seemed to devastate the Aboriginal communities it visited. The result of decades of child removal, expulsion orders, restrictive legislation including prohibitions on Aboriginal people's access to social security payments, the meagre ration system and un-equal pay went un-remarked in the Committee's final report and recommendation. Needless to say it went unrecorded that in the fringe camps around towns, and on the missions and reserves, and increasingly in urban centres where large numbers of Aboriginal people were moving, cultural change and innovation, as well as continuity with elements of a traditional Aboriginal past were an everyday part of Aboriginal life (see final chapter).

In its concluding report the 1965 to 1967 Committee was unanimous that there was no cultural continuity between what were often referred to in Committee proceedings as 'the coloured people' (a term reminiscent of the West Australian Commissioner for Native Affairs, A. O. Neville's book title, *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its place in the Community*)¹⁰¹ and the 'old tribal culture'.¹⁰² Any connection Aboriginal people expressed with Aboriginal culture was dismissed at the conclusion of the Committee as the result of 'a social condition' imposed upon them 'by our laws and society'.¹⁰³ Any reflection on a separate indigenous identity by 'part-Aborigines' of New South Wales, the Committee concluded, could be blamed on the special legislation that the Welfare Board had been allowed to implement and oversee. Thus the abolition of the Welfare Board recommended by the Committee and the huge 'Yes' vote at the 1967 referendum was, according to such logic a 'yes' to white Australian acceptance of Aboriginal sameness, and the final successful moment in the progression of the mержence of Aboriginal identity within white society.

Introducing what was simply entitled, the 'Aborigines Bill', to the Legislative Assembly in November 1968, (based on the Committee's report and final recommendations) the Chief Secretary Mr Willis reminded parliament that it had been the accepted view 'even thirty years ago', that Aborigines would 'completely die out'.¹⁰⁴ He reminded the members that:

¹⁰¹Currawong Publishing Company, Sydney, 1947

¹⁰²*Report of the Joint Committee*, p. 24

¹⁰³*Report of the Joint Committee*, p. 24

¹⁰⁴Mr Willis introducing the 'Aborigines Bill', *NSW Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 76, 6 November, 1968, p. 2339

'for eighty-six years a board in some form has been responsible for the care of aborigines in this State. The bill now before the House will end this era.'¹⁰⁵ The 'remarkable progress' of the last years said Willis 'can be summed up in one word - assimilation':

Assimilation is a word which is often misunderstood. It does not mean miscegenation, that is, inter-breeding, with the avowed objective of eventually breeding out and losing the aboriginal physical features. Assimilation means that the Aborigine will become similar to other citizens, not necessarily in looks, but with regard to all the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.¹⁰⁶

Mr Willis explained to the other parliamentary members that the report and recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee were accepted wholly in principle and substantially in detail by the Government.¹⁰⁷

The Aborigines Act, 1969, which resulted from the proceedings and recommendations of the 1965-67 Committee repealed the Aborigines Protection Act (1909-1969), dissolved the Aborigines Welfare Board, and vested responsibility for Aboriginal Affairs in the Minister for Social Welfare.¹⁰⁸ All assets and liabilities of the Aborigines Welfare Board were transferred to the Minister for Child and Social Welfare, who was to work with the Minister for Housing and the Housing Commission in the future administration. A Director of Aboriginal affairs and an Aboriginal advisory council, consisting of nine Aborigines, including at least one woman was to be set up. In the event, the Aborigines Advisory Committee was not established until 1971 and had a limited impact (see chapter eight).

The new Director of Aboriginal Welfare, and chief adviser to the Minister, was psychologist Ian Mitchell, trained at the University of New South Wales' School of Psychiatry and occupying a senior position within the Department of Child Welfare and Social Welfare.¹⁰⁹ Mitchell's first report reflected the emphasis on attitudinal change and

¹⁰⁵ Willis, 'Aborigines Bill', 18 February 1969, vol. 78, p. 3723

¹⁰⁶ Willis, 'Aborigines Bill', 18 February, 1969, p. 3725

¹⁰⁷ Willis 'Aborigines Bill', 6 November, 1968, vol. 76, p. 2339

¹⁰⁸ *Report of the Minister for Social Welfare on the working of the Aborigines Act, 1969, for year ended June 1970*, in *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 1, 1969-71, pp. 1-6

¹⁰⁹ *Report of the Minister for Social Welfare*, p. 2

individualism in the 'new era'. He argued that: 'The vast majority of Aborigines in this state do not wish to live in conflict with their non-Aboriginal colleagues: on the contrary they wish to share the same mode of living'. The report did concede that '[n]onetheless they also desire ethnic entity [sic] and recognition by the wider society that they are different and wish to pursue that difference'.¹¹⁰

However the Directorate and its field staff remained largely uninformed as to anything but the negative aspects of Aboriginal difference, and retained the emphasis on Aboriginal women as a particular 'problem' for successful assimilation (discussed below). Aboriginal attempts to remain on reserve lands, and to remain close to extended family networks, which provided some economic support, were seen by the administration as a problem to be overcome. The 1971 report of the directorate noted:

Communal living has its peculiar difficulties; ablution blocks which serve multiple families will always be subject to a greater degree of vandalism; providing essential facilities is more costly on reserves.¹¹¹

Aboriginal families who chose to remain on reserve lands were characterised as choosing to 'avoid conventional housing'.¹¹² The option that conventional housing could be built and maintained on Aboriginal-identified land was not considered. Mitchell's Directorate conformed to the findings of the 1965 -1967 Committee which recommended no new houses be built on reserves to ensure complete assimilation. Mitchell reported:

A considerable number of Aboriginal people still prefer to avoid conventional housing. Some are adamant that they would prefer their present circumstances. While their wishes should be respected in terms of location and open-air living, it is equally essential that minimal standards of hygiene such as water services and ablution facilities should be provided. It must also be realistically faced that there are many families who are not suitable for standard housing.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ *Report of the Minister for Social Welfare*, p 5

¹¹¹ *Report of the Minister for Social Welfare for the year ended June 1971*, in *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 2, 1969-71, p. 1

¹¹² *Report of the Minister for Social Welfare*, p. 2

¹¹³ *Report of the Minister for Social Welfare*, p. 10

Communalism and 'open air living' were the only ways that difference was recognised simplistically in Mitchell's reports. This limited recognition of a separate Aboriginal cultural existence was a belated response to decades of local Aboriginal organising, formal political lobbying and an informal political movement which had maintained, throughout the most heady of the assimilationist days, the validity and importance of separate indigenous rights and a distinct New South Wales Aboriginal culture.¹¹⁴

Any observable differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture began to be conflated at this time with the idea of social life. Culture/social life was seen to be something with which whites could manipulate and experiment. Various strategies were employed to this end; these included innocuously encouraging social groups amongst Aboriginal and white residents of country towns, applying the methods of social work and social psychology to the domain of Aboriginal administration, new childcare schemes and 'experiments' with re-socialising adults through the re-settlement scheme.

Gender and the 'Re-settlement' scheme

In conclusion, this final section analyses the first major project of the new administration and considers what the 'new era' brought in terms of representations of Aboriginal women, their relationships to their families, and the process of assimilation, in the first years of the 1970s. In 1971, with the assistance of the University of New England and the University of New South Wales, the Directorate undertook what it described as a major 'experiment' called the 're-settlement' scheme. The programme aimed at removing Aboriginal families from rural areas into urban centres.¹¹⁵ From 1971 to 1980 targets for relocation were the towns with the largest Aboriginal populations. First Aboriginal people at Bourke and Brewarrina were directed to Newcastle, to be followed by Murrumbidgee from Moree and Boggabilla who were sent to Tamworth; Wilcannia residents were directed to Albury or Cobargo, Lake Cargelligo and Murrumbidgee Kooris were sent to Wagga.¹¹⁶ Offers of decent housing and

¹¹⁴ See Barry Morris, 'The Emergence of a Culture of Resistance', part 6.3, *Domesticating Resistance*, pp. 140-150; Peter Read discusses features of South Eastern Aboriginal culture in, 'A Double Headed Coin', p. 17-19; For a discussion of Aboriginal political organisations at this time see Goodall, 'Border Wars, 1948-1965', in *Invasion*, pp. 261-297

¹¹⁵ *Report of Child Welfare and Social Welfare Department Year ending 30th June, 1972*, p. 22

¹¹⁶ *Report of Child Welfare*, p. 21

regular employment were extended to over two hundred families who were encouraged to move in the nine years of scheme's operation.

In what was described as 'an extensive action research project',¹¹⁷ the Department's senior welfare officer from Bourke, the ex-manager under the Aborigines Welfare Board, Eddie Cockburn, was seconded to 'help with counselling and day to day operations'.¹¹⁸ During the pilot re-settlement project, between July 1972 and June 1975, one hundred and three people from seventeen households were sponsored to move from Bourke to Newcastle. A further four households were sponsored to move from Wilcannia to Albury. Couched in the language of a sociological survey, the scheme was apparently simple. Aboriginal families from the 'donor town' of Bourke would be approached and encouraged to move to a house in Newcastle where regular employment would be set up for them by the 'counsellor', Eddie Cockburn. If the family agreed and the male head was considered to be able to pay bills and maintain regular employment, and the woman deemed able to 'keep house',¹¹⁹ they would be driven in the counsellor's car down to Newcastle and taken to a rental home. Once in town the man would be introduced to his employer, the woman shown local bus routes to the children's school.¹²⁰ The counsellor would then visit the family at weekends, introduce them to the local doctor, and, if the family wanted to the local church group. This process, repeated with a number of different Aboriginal households was called 'transmigration' in official reports.

The aim of the scheme was to get Aboriginal families to move away from an 'Aboriginal' lifestyle and identification by placing them in the middle of an unknown urban centre, geographically removed from their extended family and social contacts in the Aboriginal community. The cities chosen for the relocation 'experiment' were ones that had no obviously identifiable Aboriginal community. The department reported in 1973 that it planned to expand the scheme by 'utilising other urban centres with growth potential

¹¹⁷ *Report of Child Welfare*, p. 21

¹¹⁸ *Report of Child Welfare*, p. 23, interview with Eddie & Amy Cockburn, Newcastle, 20/11/1997

¹¹⁹ see Ian Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move: Personal Adjustment in the Resettlement of Aboriginal Families: A Psychosocial Study', unpublished PhD, University of New South Wales, School of Psychiatry, 1979, pp. 15-17

¹²⁰ Interview with Eddie Cockburn, Newcastle, 20/11/97, see also Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', pp. 32-25

(Albury, Wagga, Orange) where, at present, there are no significant Aboriginal communities¹²¹

Again Aboriginal women, and their attitudes towards housekeeping, their children and their extended families were considered a key to the success or failure of the Department's scheme. Even with the Department's sponsorship and encouragement, the annual report for 1972 showed that many of the families who had been relocated had returned to their homes on the North Coast: 'Although several families remained for a time in Newcastle, results were not encouraging.'¹²² Director Ian Mitchell's research into the scheme, which he carried out as his doctoral research, argued that it was women who had instigated the return home 'in all but one case'.¹²³ Describing the reasons given by one family for moving back to Bourke, Mitchell detailed the woman's comments: 'I have no one to talk to, the neighbours are away working in the daytime, we don't have floor coverings like the others'.¹²⁴ He described how another family who had been considered highly likely to remain in Newcastle had suddenly decided to return home: 'Much of the pressure to return to Bourke came from Cathy who found it difficult to adjust to the constraints of suburbia... She could not cope with its size or pace'.¹²⁵ One of the key reasons women decided to return to Bourke, argued Mitchell, was their inability to 'keep house' and maintain their domestic duties. One woman whom Mitchell used to illustrate the 'typical problems facing migrants', was described as initially overwhelmed and later, unenthusiastic, about her increased domestic chores in a nuclear family set-up:

As she had lived on the Bourke Aboriginal Reserve before moving, she found the domestic chores of a European type of house overwhelming at first, and needed to be coaxed into buying such items as household goods, blankets for winter, and kitchen hardware.¹²⁶

¹²¹*Report of Child Welfare*, p. 20

¹²²*Report of Child Welfare Year ending 30 June 1972*, in *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 1, 1972-1973, p. 21. The report added ominously - for Aboriginal people seeking better conditions in their towns of origin - 'nevertheless the project provided much valuable information which will assist future work'

¹²³Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', p. 283

¹²⁴Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', p. 275

¹²⁵Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', p. 276

¹²⁶Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', p. 213

When the woman and her partner decided to return to Bourke, Mitchell made it clear that the woman was at fault for their decision to leave town. He wrote that despite Ron's good record as an employee in Newcastle and his desire to stay in town he found that he could not 'bear to be alone' and reluctantly followed Eadie home.¹²⁷

Women who made an effort with their homes were considered crucial to the success of the scheme. Mitchell made a link between the 'best type of family', their success at adapting to the city and the woman's housekeeping skills in his research:

The family settled into Newcastle quickly. Despite her inexperience, Irene adapted readily to the house, adding personal touches such as bright tablecloths and decorative items in the house. This was a credit to one who had not lived in a standard home before. One illustration of her inexperience is that she was so frightened of the electric range that she did not switch it on for a week.¹²⁸

In Mitchell's findings women's emotional connections to their families and extended families were also considered a problem for the success of the scheme and was listed as another of the key reasons why families decided to return home. One woman, for example, who had previously made a 'successful transition to city life', keeping her house 'as though she always expected guests',¹²⁹ became, in Mitchell's opinion, 'unduly anxious' when her daughter returned to Bourke shortly after giving birth, to be with the father of her young baby. The family left shortly after and Mitchell was critical of what he saw as her over-emotional reaction. Another woman was criticised for over-spending the family's budget when she was found to be catching taxis to visit friends and other Aboriginal families in Newcastle during her husband's drinking binges. Mitchell noted sourly that '[t]he taxi fare, of course, further eroded the amount of money available for food and clothes'.¹³⁰

The re-settlement scheme was the latest in a series of attempts to successfully assimilate identifiably Aboriginal women, men and their children, into white society. In the first major

¹²⁷Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', p. 213 (not their real names)

¹²⁸Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', p. 214

¹²⁹Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', p. 208

¹³⁰Mitchell, 'Aborigines on the Move', p. 278

project of the 'new' administration women were closely watched and their attitudes were seen to play a central role in the success or otherwise of the scheme. Since the late 1930s representations of Aboriginal women had been central to government attempts at assimilation. Women had been considered potential breeding partners to white men during the public acceptance of biological notions of assimilation. Later women were depicted as the solution to the cultural version of assimilation in the 1950s and 1960s, depicted in *Dawn*, for example, as the demure debutante, partnering the white man. In what the Chief Secretary Willis described as a 'new era' of Aboriginal administration, representations of Aboriginal women, as they had in the first days of the assimilation policy, held a central place. The final chapter of this thesis concludes with a consideration of some alternate representations of Aboriginal masculinity and femininity performed in metropolitan Sydney.

CHAPTER EIGHT

'A City's Place of Dreaming'¹: Representations of Aboriginal Culture and Gender Relations in the early 1970s

Despite the continuities in government discourse, and similar representations of Aboriginal women from the past administration, the end of the Welfare Board in 1969 and the establishment of the Directorate, based within the Child and Social Welfare Department, marked a new phase in the Aboriginal administration of New South Wales. In place of the Aborigines Welfare Board, mainstream bureaucracies such as the Education Department and the Department of Housing were called on to act in tandem with the Child and Social Welfare Department. This mainstreaming of the administration created both a new set of demands and a new set of possibilities for Aboriginal people in New South Wales.² Lester Bostock, who moved to Sydney in the early 1960s remarked: 'at least during the Welfare Board days you knew who your enemy was'.³ The mainstreaming of the Board, said Bostock, meant that: 'instead of having one head, it had many heads. It was a many headed monster'.⁴ Paul Coe argued that:

Even though the Welfare Board has changed its form and its policy, the people who governed blacks under the Welfare Board are the same people who are governing blacks today. Even if they haven't the legislative power to 'govern', they still have the attitudes to do so, and the economic power to do so.⁵

This 'many headed monster', as Bostock called it in New South Wales in the early 1970s, arose in a changed Federal context; a result partly of the recognition of the national issue of Aboriginal welfare at the 1967 referendum, and later the election of the Whitlam government in 1972. The referendum campaign, fought in New South Wales by groups such as the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship and FCAATSI, placed a new emphasis on

¹From George Whaley, 'Black Theatre in Sydney', in *Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 7, Summer, 1977, p. 100

²For lively discussion of some of the contemporary demands and possibilities on an Aboriginal community in New South Wales, see Gillian Cowlshaw, Interview with Frank Doolan, Mellie Mar and Father Paul, Mt Druitt in four parts, 6/00

³Interview with Lester Bostock, Marrickville, 11/2/1997

⁴Interview with Lester Bostock, Marrickville, 11/2/1997

⁵cited in Colin Tatz (ed), *Black Viewpoints. The Aboriginal Experience*, ANZ Book Company, Sydney, 1975, p. 16

Commonwealth powers regarding the Aboriginal 'problem'. As discussed in the previous chapter, the 1967 referendum had not challenged assimilation, but rather expressed and reinforced the values of 'inclusiveness' and 'sameness' of Aboriginal Australians within 'white' Australian society (see chapter seven).⁶ Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus argue that the referendum was of symbolic significance, a collective statement of the desire to include indigenous Australians in a 'non-discriminatory regime'.⁷ The ninety-one percent vote to count indigenous Australians in the national Census and to make Commonwealth powers concurrent with the States contributed, they argue, to a 'climate of opinion which provided an activist federal government with a mandate'.⁸ However when it came to dismantling statutory or administrative discrimination against indigenous Australians, as Attwood and Markus argue, the changes sought by advocates of the 1967 referendum were largely irrelevant. In sum while the referendum mandated the national application of Commonwealth policies, it did not mandate any variation on the prescription of 'equal treatment', except to pay, in Tim Rowse's words 'lip service to indigenous choice'.⁹

New Federal directions. Legislating culture in the 1970s.

The body established by the Coalition government in 1967 to 'translate the mandate of 1967' into Commonwealth policies was the Council for Aboriginal Affairs made up of influential intellectuals and Federal politicians, such as William Stanner, Nugget Coombs and Barry Dexter. Dr H. C Coombs was the Chairman of the Council and Governor of the Reserve Bank, Barry Dexter, a member of the council and director of the office attached to the Council had previously been Australia's chief diplomat to Laos, and W.E.H. Stanner was Professor of Anthropology and Sociology at the Australian National University. Stanner, as an anthropologist and administrator, had been active in the foundation of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal studies and was one of the longest-standing, and influential critics of

⁶For a full discussion on the referendum campaign and the impact of the Whitlam Government on Aboriginal affairs see, Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *The 1967 Referendum*, Tim Rowse, *Obligated to be Difficult. Nugget Coomb's Legacy in Indigenous Affairs*, Cambridge University Press, 2000

⁷Attwood & Markus, *The 1967 Referendum*, p. 63

⁸Attwood & Markus, *The 1967 Referendum*, p. 64

⁹Rowse, *Obligated to be Difficult*, p. 11

assimilation.¹⁰ Administrative practices designed to 'lift' Aboriginal people 'out of their heritage and into a new social order', argued Stanner, assumed that Aboriginal ways of thinking about themselves were inconsequential.¹¹ Referring to his experience in the Northern Territory he argued:

No policy or law can transform the Aboriginal from what he is in this region - a social person, tied to others by a dozen ties which are his life - into an abstract 'individual' in order to make the facts fit a policy.¹²

Nugget Coombs was also well known to regard assimilation as an inappropriate policy and to recognise 'a separate and distinct social and racial identity' for Aborigines.¹³ Coombs, the Chairman of the post-referendum three-man controlling council, established as the new Office of Aboriginal Affairs attached to the Prime Minister's Department, played a significant role in the increasing recognition of a separate indigenous culture that was developing in the early 1970s.¹⁴ Stanner and Coombs in particular were highly influential in promoting the validity and worth of a distinct Aboriginal culture against the official policies of assimilation.¹⁵ In the early 1970s these influences in the federal government led to an increasing recognition, in government administrative discourse, of Aboriginal cultural continuity. This marked a substantial shift in common public perceptions about Aboriginality. Stanner's anthropological background and Coomb's interest in Northern Territory Aboriginal issues reflected, however, the fact that this 'new' approach to

¹⁰ W.E.H. Stanner, *White Man got no Dreaming: Essays, 1938-1973*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1979, Stanner, *After the Dreaming with a foreword by H.C Coombes*, ABC Enterprises for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Crows Nest, New South Wales, 1991, Diane Barwick, Jeremy Beckett & Marie Reay, *Metaphors of Interpretation: Essays in Honour of W.E.H Stanner*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1985, for discussion of the founding of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies see Gaynor McDonald, Contextualising Cultural Continuities in New South Wales, in *Urban Life, Urban Culture - Aboriginal-Indigenous Experiences*, Proceedings of the Conference hosted by the Goolangullia Centre, University of Western Sydney, Macarthur, November 27-29, 1997, a Goolangullia Publication, University of Western Sydney, Macarthur, 1998, pp. 1-26

¹¹ Stanner, *White Man*, p. 43

¹² Stanner, *White Man*, p. 44

¹³ H. C. Coombs, *Kulinma*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978, p. 8, see also Coombs, *Aborigines Made Visible: From 'Humbug' to Politics*, Kenneth Myer Lecture, no. 2, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1991, Coombs (ed) by Diane Smith, *Aboriginal Autonomy: Issues and Strategies*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, New York, 1994, see also Rowse, *Obliged to be Difficult*

¹⁴ Coombs, *Kulinma*, Rowse, *Obliged to be Difficult*,

¹⁵ see for eg, *Report on Visit to Yuendumu and Hooker Creek by Dr H.C Coombs and Professor W. E. H. Stanner*, issued by the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1974

indigenous culture still relied heavily on notions of the 'traditional' and the 'remote' nature of Aboriginal culture. At the Federal level in Australia these ideas were fermenting, within a wider international context in which the ideas associated with Black Power were making a marked impact in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Britain.¹⁶

Arts and 'Culture'

Significantly, this new Federal voice, in what became increasingly known as Aboriginal Affairs, coincided in Australia with an emphasis on the 'Arts' in national government policy and funding. Establishing a broad 'cultural profile' for Australia was high on the political agenda in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁷ The first Australian Council for the Arts (ACA) was established in 1968, a year after the referendum which had granted federal control of Aboriginal affairs. This was the same year as the tabling of the report of the New South Wales Joint Committee into Aborigines Welfare, that spelt the end of the Aborigines Welfare Board (discussed in previous chapter). The first chairman of the new arts Council was Dr Nugget Coombs.

Coombs, representing Australia, attended the first of the United Nations Economic Social Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Paris meetings of July 1969 - a round table meeting on 'Cultural Policies'.¹⁸ In 1970 Coombs also represented Australia at an international inter-governmental conference on Cultural Policies, the main purpose of which was to draw up a ten year programme of cultural policy for the 'developed world'. A combination of the increasing interest within federal government in the 'Arts' and with Aboriginal culture, meant that a new emphasis on the art of Aboriginal Australians came to replace formerly dominant ideas of Aboriginal culture as a lack of culture, or a lost culture. Coomb's influence

¹⁶Robert Allen, *A Guide to Black Power in America: An Historical Analysis*, Gollancz Publications, London, 1970, Charles E Jones (ed) *The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered)*, Black Classic Press, Baltimore, 1998, Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America*, Addison-Wesley Publishing, Reading, Massachusetts, 1994, Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993,

¹⁷Lindsay Barrett, 'The Prime-Minister's Christmas Card', Annette Blonski (ed), *Arts for a Multi-Cultural Australia, 1973-1991: An Account of Australia Council Policies*, Australia Council, Redfern, New South Wales, 1992, Justin MacDonnell, *Arts Minister? Government Policy and the Arts*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1992, Hugh Emy, Owen Hughes & Race Mathews, *Whitlam Re-Visited: Policy Developments, Policies and Outcomes*, Pluto Press in association with the Public Sector Management Institute, Monash University, Leichardt, NSW, 1993

¹⁸see *Report of Information required for 1970 Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies*, Australia Council Records held by their library, Redfern, Sydney, 1968-73

on the post-referendum Council for Aboriginal Affairs, his Chairmanship of the Australian Council, and his interest in traditional Aboriginal culture contributed to a recognition of 'traditional' Aboriginal arts more readily than urban forms of Aboriginal expression. This was reflected in funding decisions such as the first 'Aboriginal' grant being sent to the Northern Territory division of the Australia Council, for the establishment of a traditional Aboriginal theatre foundation.¹⁹

As Nugget Coombs explained in one of his first addresses as Chairman of the Australia Council, a main aim of the new funding was to 'develop the traditional theatre' of the Aboriginal people.²⁰ This approach to Aboriginal arts was also reflected in the composition of the new Aboriginal Arts Advisory Committee (AAAC) to the Australia Council chaired by R. M. Berndt, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia, which included three Aboriginal representatives out of eleven committee members. Dick Roughsey from Mornington Island, George Winunguj from Goulbourn Island and Oodgeruoo Noonucal (Kath Walker, see chapter five) from Stradbroke Island were the Aboriginal representatives.²¹ The merits of traditionalism were stressed in the first annual report produced by the Aboriginal Arts Advisory Committee.²² The first tour of the Mornington Island Traditional Dancers, for example, was enthusiastically reported, although it stressed that since adult interest in Aboriginal dance was limited, 'future efforts would be better directed to the very receptive audiences of school children'.²³ Whatever the truth in their analysis of audience response, the overall tone and composition of the committee was one which supported the notion of traditional Aboriginal arts and appeared to infantilise the perceived audience for Aboriginal cultural output. This view had yet to incorporate, or even understand the concept of culture as a fluid, transforming and contemporary process. Established western forms of cultural expression were highly valued in this framework. The 'most heartening' experience of that year, according to the report, was the visit of the Adelaide Wind Quintet to Yirrkala at Gove on the Gulf of Carpentaria.²⁴

¹⁹ *Australia Council for the Arts, (ACA) 2nd Annual Report, 1968*, ACR, Redfern, Sydney, p. 2

²⁰ Address given by Dr H. C Coombs, to the Arts Council of New Zealand, 'Arts Conference', Wellington, New Zealand, 11 April, ACR, Redfern, Sydney, 1970

²¹ *ACA, Annual Report, 1968*, p. 2

²² *ACA, Annual Report, 1968*, p. 1

²³ *AAAC, Annual Report, 1968*, p. 3

²⁴ *AAAC Annual Report, 1970*, p. 3

Under Whitlam, in 1973 the Australia Council set up an Aboriginal Arts Board, chaired, this time by Dick Roughsey. This new Aboriginal Arts Board included both artists and activists such as Ken Colbung, Chicka Dixon, Terry Widders and Harold Blair. Their first report stated that they sought to develop policies and make recommendations on grants for 'all forms' of Aboriginal arts. The report linked artistic production with broader notions of cultural identity arguing explicitly that 'the success of their work was important in the eyes of Aboriginals wishing to preserve their distinct cultural identity within the community'.²⁵ The establishment of the Aboriginal Arts Board thus represents a new acceptance of the possibility of a 'modern' Aboriginal identity and 'modern' art forms. However there appears to be a certain ambivalence about just what a distinct cultural identity amounted to. By introducing the first ever funding from the government, for Aboriginal film and video in 1973, for example, the report concluded: 'the Board sees great potential for the use of film and video as the visual communication for a culture which is predominantly without written literature'.²⁶ The conflation of the Aboriginal tradition of oral and visual culture with a lack of literacy illustrates the complex, contradictory ways in which the new focus on Aboriginal arts both supported and, also *undermined* Aboriginal peoples struggle for basic civil rights at this time. This approach towards Aboriginal literacy was ambiguous for on the one hand it represented an important recognition of the oral tradition in Aboriginal society. However it could also be interpreted as a tacit acceptance of the low levels of adult literacy amongst the Aboriginal community that were due to discriminatory experiences in local schools.²⁷ Lester Bostock, an Aboriginal media producer and activist, whose story is described below, learnt to read and write only in his late thirties at the Aboriginal college in Glebe, Sydney. His story of discrimination at school was common throughout the Aboriginal community.

New South Wales

In the context of these federal influences in the area of 'Arts' and 'Aboriginal Affairs', in New South Wales a new theme in government discourse can be identified. This was the

²⁵ *Aboriginal Arts Board, (AAB) Annual Report*, of Australia Council Library, Redfern, 1973, p. 3, Interview with Lester Bostock 5/2/97

²⁶ *AAB Report*, p. 36

²⁷ On discrimination in schools see for example Goodall, *Invasion*, p. 145

theme of the 'cultural revival' of Aboriginal Australia that began to circulate in the early 1970s. The first edition of *New Dawn*, successor to the *Dawn* magazine, published in April 1970 by the Child and Social Welfare Department, stated this baldly when it explained to its readership that the 'underlying theme' of the new Aborigines Act of 1969 was the 'regeneration of the Aboriginal people'.²⁸ The idea of 'regeneration' implied that Aborigines had lost something important in the preceding years under the previous administration, and the new administration promised to facilitate 'cultural revival' amongst the Aboriginal community of New South Wales.²⁹ While Aboriginal communities had lost children, land, the right to education and the means to earn a living under the previous policies of the Aborigines Welfare Board, it was not these things that the new discourse and policies sought to address. Rather it was a general notion of Aboriginal 'arts', and by the mid 1970s 'identity', that largely became the subject of government sponsored 'regeneration' in the early 1970s. The 'regeneration' of Aboriginal culture took two repeated forms in government discourse in New South Wales - an increasing emphasis on the counselling of individuals to meet the demands of modern life (as in the Directorate's Re-settlement scheme discussed in the previous chapter) and, increasingly at the federal and then the state level, a new emphasis on Aboriginal 'arts' as Aboriginal 'culture'.

In New South Wales, as at the Federal level, the stress on Aboriginal traditional arts was central to official representations of Aboriginal culture during this time of 'regeneration'. Aboriginal communities from remote areas in the Northern Territory, for example, were promoted as more authentically Aboriginal than New South Wales Aboriginal people. A 1972 tour of dancers to Sydney from Cape York, Arnhem Land and Bathurst Island, organised by the recently established Aboriginal Theatre Foundation with assistance from the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council, was touted as helping to 'promote cultural revival' amongst Sydney's urban Aboriginal community.³⁰ On the other hand, the long-standing experiences of Aboriginal people under the restrictions and control of the Aborigines Protection, and later Welfare Board, which had shaped a definite sense of community and identity in New South Wales, were not seen as a legitimate locus for

²⁸*New Dawn*, April, 1970, p. 1

²⁹See *Report of the Minister for Social Welfare on the Working of the Aborigines Act, 1969*, in *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 1, 1969-71, pp. 19-20, also *New Dawn*, editorial June, 1970, p. 1

³⁰*New Dawn*, September 1972, p. 6

Aboriginal identity. This dismissal was reminiscent of the approach taken by anthropologists working under Elkin's supervision in the 1940s (see chapter three).

However, against the dominant perception in government discourse of Aboriginality as something only evident in 'tradition' (a discourse still evident today in the language of Native Title)³¹ Aboriginal people who had moved to the city from rural areas in the 1950s and 1960s were re-formulating contemporary definitions of Aboriginality. By the 1970s in Sydney, the establishment in Redfern of the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service, the Aboriginal Hostels Corporation, and local initiatives such as the Murawina Aboriginal Breakfast programme, and later the child care centre, as well as the state-wide development of Aboriginal Family Education Centres, signalled the growth of a contemporary, urban Aboriginal identification.³² These new organisations of the early 1970s built on, and widely extended the programmes of earlier organisations such as the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs discussed in the previous chapters.

Metropolitan centres such as Sydney, provided indigenous people - the majority of whom had escaped the restrictions of the Aborigines Welfare Board in the early 1950s and 1960s by moving into the city - with new forums for expressing their sense of a contemporary Aboriginality. Alistair Walton put the arguments simply: 'Aboriginality is dynamic - jeans, t-shirts and country and western music, do not deny Aboriginality'.³³ Robert Merritt, playwright (see following section), argued: 'Aboriginality is like a relation, it is only dead if you stop believing in it'.³⁴ Paul Gilroy argues that the Black transatlantic, post-colonial migration into Britain in the 1950s and 1960s opened up the possibility of thinking about identity in new ways.³⁵ There was a new invention of white and black 'ethnicity' in the

³¹ see Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Native Title Research Unit, *Land, Right and Laws: Issue of Native Title*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2000

³² See Kevin Cook et al, 'The Growth of Aboriginal Organisations', in Plater (ed), *Other Boundaries*, pp. 185-243, Peter Read, 'Cheeky, Insolent and Anti-White: The Split in the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders - Easter, 1970', in *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1990, pp. 73-83, Kay Anderson, 'Place Narratives and the Origins of Inner-Sydney's Aboriginal Settlement, 1972-1973', *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 314-35, also interviews with Lester Bostock, 16/2/1995, 11/2/1997, Interview with Kevin Cook, Tranby, 16/2/1995

³³ Alistair Watson, 'This'll get'm for sure! An Interview with Bob Merritt', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, December, 1985, pp. 11-13

³⁴ Watson, 'This'll get'm', p. 12

³⁵ see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. xi

1950s and 1960s in Britain, paralleling the 'explosion' of black power in the 1960s in the United States, and framed by the experience of migration. Ultimately the Black Atlantic, argues Gilroy, 'yields a course of lessons as to the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade'.³⁶ Stuart Hall, like Franz Fanon before him also describes how in moving to the metropolis of Paris and Britain, a new generation of Caribbean's, including themselves 'discovered they were 'black' by going to England'.³⁷ Concomitantly, in confronting black imperial citizens a new figure emerged, the figure of the 'white man'. The ideas of these post-colonial writers are important here for assessing the impact of the movement of Aboriginal people into cities in Australia from reserves (or 'missions') and stations during the late 1960s and 1970s. In the migrations into the city in New South Wales there were a new generation of Aboriginal Australians who found avenues for the exploration and performance of identity which became increasingly understood as a pan-Australian indigenous, or 'black' identity.

Lester Bostock, Aboriginal political activist and media producer recalled his own movement into Sydney in the 1960s and its impact on both his politics and his sense of identity. Bostock was born in the early 1930s, with his brothers and sisters, on the Box Ridge Aboriginal mission in Northern New South Wales, two miles from the town of Coraki.³⁸ His father was a member of the Brisbane branch of the Communist Party, until a split in the party in the mid 1950s occurred, when he became a member of the Labor party. Initially the Communists were the only party that would have any political involvement with Aboriginal people, however Labour's involvement grew as a result of their affiliations with Communist trade union.

Bostock's father worked with the Main Roads Department that gave the family a mobility which enabled them to move off the reserve, and escape the worst of the restriction under the Aborigines Protection Act, and subsequent amendments.

As Lester recalled:

³⁶Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. p. xi

³⁷Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Black Film, British Cinema*, ICA Documents 7, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1989, p. 12, see also Frantz Fanon, 'The Fact of Blackness', in *Black Skin, White Masks (Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, Seuil, Paris) trans. Chahs Lam Markmann, MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1968

³⁸Interview with Lester Bostock, Marrickville, 5/2/97

[N]ot everyone... were under the Board, but ninety nine per cent of them were.

There was always that one per cent who didn't want anything to do with them, would very much clear off and run away and not let the Board know where they are or who they are... there was a group of people that deny their Aboriginality because of the Board. They said they weren't Aboriginal because if you said you were Aboriginal you were taken, or brought under the... Board. So a lot of people then said , well, they weren't Aboriginal. That's not unusual.³⁹

Bostock and his family lived in road camps in tents supplied by the Main Roads Department throughout the 1930s, thus avoiding the intervention of managers and matrons and other welfare staff associated with the Box Ridge Reserve. As a result, recalls Lester, 'none of us was taken', but his cousins, who remained on an Aboriginal reserve were.⁴⁰ During the Second World War, when their father went to work on the construction of a road between Darwin and Alice Springs for use by the army, the family moved to Tweeds Head to stay with relatives.⁴¹ At the end of the War they then moved to the outskirts of Brisbane, living in a shanty town near the suburb of Marouka in huts made out of flattened kerosene tins and saplings.⁴² Bostock recalls that Aboriginal children who were sent to school in Brisbane were frequently sent outside to collect rubbish, only sitting inside to learn to read and write when the school inspector came by:⁴³

By law the Aboriginal kids were to go to school but that didn't mean to say that the teachers would teach them. When I went to school in Brisbane there was four Aboriginal families there. We were sent to do gardening and clean up the yard... That was my experience at school. I was always sent out to pick up all the papers in the yard.⁴⁴

Leaving school early, Bostock worked in and around Brisbane as a labourer on farms, railways and roads, and as a factory worker. At the age of twenty-two his life changed when his leg became gangrenous and was amputated - the result of a football injury and a beating

³⁹Interview with Lester Bostock 11/2/1997

⁴⁰Interview with Lester Bostock, 5/2/1997

⁴¹Interview with Lester Bostock, 5/2/1997

⁴²Interview with Lester Bostock, 11/2/1997

⁴³Interview with Lester Bostock, 10/1/1999

⁴⁴Interview with Lester Bostock, 11/2/1997

he had received, with wet blankets and rubber hoses, by the Queensland police, when he was 'picked up' for being on the streets in a crowd bigger than three.⁴⁵

The police were very vicious because they had a law there they used to impose especially on Aboriginals - any more than three people seen together on the street constituted a riot. So when you were arrested, don't matter what you were arrested for, when they take you into the lock up... you automatically expect a beating and you automatically get one.⁴⁶

No longer able to work as a labourer, and in order to escape further police persecution, Bostock moved to Sydney in 1962 and became one of the first students at Tranby Aboriginal college based in Glebe. Tranby College had been established in 1958, an alliance between Aboriginal activists who were interested in the model offered by the co-operative movement, the Anglican church and the Australian-Aboriginal Fellowship which had become a shareholder in the Christian Community Co-operative Society in the late 1950s.⁴⁷ Alf Clint, an Anglican minister with networks amongst the Trade Union movement (the first Chairperson of Tranby College was Dick Scott from the Metalworkers union) had been working in Papua New Guinea, sponsored by the Australian Board of Missions, to set up co-operatives. In Sydney he came in contact with groups and individuals involved in Aboriginal issues and they came together to establish Tranby. The College began by running summer courses from a building in Mansfield Street, Glebe, where it is still located. At night student priests would tutor Aboriginal students many of whom were working during the day. The college became a meeting place for indigenous people from across the state, and nationally, including some students from the Torres Strait.⁴⁸ Students learnt literacy and numeracy skills and business management principles necessary to run co-operative organisations in their local communities and in Sydney. Lester Bostock recalls that after his discriminatory experiences at school he learnt to read and write at Tranby and lived at what was then the residential college. After completing courses in literacy and

⁴⁵Under the Queensland Act of the 1950s more than three people gathering on the street constituted a riot. This law was used especially against Aboriginal people who were regularly picked up and beaten in police cells. It was under this Act that Lester Bostock was held by the police on the occasion of the severest beating. Interview with Lester Bostock, 11/2/1997, see also Rosalind Kidd, *The Way we Civilize: Aboriginal Affairs- The Untold Story*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1997, p. 76

⁴⁶Interview with Lester Bostock, 11/2/1997

⁴⁷see Michelle Edwards, David Snell, Lydia Miller & Diana Plater, 'The growth of Aboriginal organisations', in Diana Plater (ed) *Other Boundaries*. pp. 185-243

⁴⁸Plater (ed) *Other Boundaries*

book-keeping he stayed on to become the house-manager and a member of the Board of Tranby.⁴⁹ Through Tranby he became involved in a number of organisations, such as the Fellowship and the Aborigines Progressive Association which held their meetings at the Glebe college. He also had contact with the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, the Labor party and the Trade union movement. From his work with the Fellowship he became involved with the Federal Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (FCAATSI).

With skills learnt at Tranby, in the early 1970s Bostock became the founding treasurer, and later the administrator of the first 'Black' theatre in Redfern. Lester, and his younger brother Gerald Bostock went on to become leading proponents of indigenous media in Australia. Lester Bostock was involved in setting up Radio Redfern and the first Aboriginal program on 2EA. He went on to work as the coordinator of Aboriginal issues at SBS television for ten years and to be executive producer of *First in Line*, an Aboriginal magazine program in 1989. He was on the managing committee of Metro Screen until his retirement in 2000 where he was involved in teaching a new generation of Aboriginal writers, film and video makers the skills for this medium.⁵⁰

The following section focuses on the development of the first 'Black' theatre in Sydney to explore some Aboriginal self-representations relevant to the questions of gender and assimilation analysed in the previous chapters. Amongst the many Aboriginal initiatives in Sydney in the early 1970s, the establishment of an Aboriginal theatre in Redfern is significant as it provided a venue for public performances of Aboriginal identity, and was a forum for Aboriginal representations of the gendered impact of the assimilation policy, and the legacy of the Aborigines Welfare Board. In the details of both the lives (and deaths) of some key members of the Black Theatre in the early 1970s, as well as in a study of two of the plays produced at the theatre, the contradictory, ambivalent impulses that fed the gendered policy and practice of assimilation and their personal impact on the lives of Aboriginal women and men is explored.

⁴⁹Interview with L Bostock, Marrickville, Interview with Kevin Cook 16/2/95, for more information on Tranby see Kevin Cook and John Higgins, in Plater (ed) *Other Boundaries*, pp.185-200

⁵⁰For further details of Lester Bostock's extensive career including his 1984 travelling scholarship visiting the UK, USA, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Central America (Panama City) investigating the effects that satellite broadcasting and the electronic media have on indigenous people, his publications on protocol for working with indigenous community, and his UNESCO portfolio see L. Bostock 'Biography', 11/ 2/1997, Lester Bostock, author's copy.

The Black Theatre

Gerry Bostock, a founding member of the Black Theatre along with his brother Lester, argues that the political and social context of growing up Aboriginal under the assimilation policy was productive of the conditions which made performance an essential facet of Aboriginal identity. Gerry described the background to the development of the Black Theatre in these terms:

It is the experience of living as a black because kids when they grow up on missions and then move into the city, they have to 'wear' two faces. They have to present one face to European society and one face to their black brothers and sisters.⁵¹

The sense of performing varied faces on an everyday basis, described by Bostock, took on an immediacy and added complexity in the early 1970s as a politicised Aboriginal presence in the city grew. Challenging the government discourse that focused mainly on Aboriginal culture as traditional and static, Aboriginal activists and actors began to reflect the reality of everyday life for Aboriginal people living in the city.

The group responsible for the establishment of the National Black Theatre, which included Lester and Gerald Bostock, was initially involved in what they called 'guerrilla street theatre'.⁵² These were theatrical reactions to the political and social circumstances which most directly impinged on Aboriginal people in the city. Aboriginal performers and activists, Gerald Bostock and Kevin Williams, arranged one day for an Aboriginal activist to be in the centre of Sydney in handcuffs, accompanied by two non-Aboriginal people:

These people were pretending that they were coppers, they wanted to see what sort of reaction they could get by handcuffing and bashing an Aborigine in the heart of Sydney. It was a great piece of street theatre because, you know, virtually everybody who saw it completely ignored this outrageous scene before them, except for one person who happened to be passing on a bus. A non-

⁵¹Gerald Bostock interviewed for *Hindsight*, Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 11/30/1997

⁵²Gerry Bostock, 'Black Theatre', in Jack Davis & Bob Hodge, (eds) *Aboriginal Writing Today, Papers from the first National Conference of Aboriginal Writers, Perth, Western Australia, 1983*, published by Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1985, pp. 25-31

Aboriginal lawyer, who'd been helping us set up the Aboriginal legal service, and he freaked out, he thought it was real and it resulted in the head of the Aboriginal legal service, then Professor Hal Wooten, ringing up police stations all over Sydney demanding that this Aboriginal person be produced, and the police madly denying that they had him... as guerrilla street theatre it had even more an effect than we intended!⁵³

From this context, Gerald Bostock argues that the roots of formal Aboriginal theatre came, not from ancient tradition, as many contemporary theatre critics, and bureaucrats assumed, but from the political context of contemporary Australia.⁵⁴

Betty Fisher Establishes the Theatre

In 1973 Betty Fisher, an Aboriginal woman who had moved to Sydney in the 1960s, leased an old Printing House from the Methodist church for a period of twelve months on a 'peppercorn' lease with money received from the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, which had been established that same year.⁵⁵ Money had been made available to the group by the Australia Council on the proviso that the Aboriginal administrator of the theatre and the Aboriginal Director be advised by two white bureaucrats working for the ACA. The first newsletter of the Black Theatre commented:

Thank you Australia Council for the Arts. We'd particularly like to thank you for keeping the strings down to two. If you feel that a black administrator and a black director better have your two "professionals" advising them... then I guess it must be alright... Boss⁵⁶

Work on converting the old print house into a theatre was done by an alliance of volunteers. Architects and Sydney University students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the Builder's Labourer's Federation, an African-American dancer, a dance

⁵³Gerry Bostock, 'Black Theatre', p. 30

⁵⁴see for eg. John McCallum, 'Black Theatre: Robert Merritt's 'The Cake Man', *Meanjin*, 36/4, December 1977, Gillian Oxford, 'The Purple Everlasting: the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in Australia', *Theatre Quarterly*, v. 7, Summer, 1977, pp.88-98, George Whaley, 'A Cities Place of Dreaming: Black Theatre in Sydney', *Theatre Quarterly*, v.7, Summer, 1977, pp. 98-100

⁵⁵'Use of Black Theatre Site before Bettie Fisher's Planning Application', Sydney Municipal Council Archives. CRS 87, File 42/31, July 1974, see also *Aboriginal Arts Board Report (AAB)*, The Australian Council for the Arts, 1973/4, p. 33; Minute Paper, Municipality of South Sydney, Planning and Building Department, CRS 93, SSDDA, 270/1974, 13/11/74, Interview with Lester Bostock, Marrickville, 5/2/97

⁵⁶*Mereki. Journal of the Black Theatre*, no. 1, vol. 1, 15 Nov. 1974, p. 32

teacher from Manilla, members of the gay and lesbian lobby and Women's Liberation groups, budding white actors, many of whom went on to become well-known names, and Aboriginal urban activists contributed to the energy of the new theatre.⁵⁷ With six weeks to prepare the derelict building before its official opening this coalition of Aboriginal performers and activists, Builder's Labourers, progressive architects and students from the newly formed 'Architecture for the anonymous client' group, Archanon, began work.⁵⁸ Nick Hollo, an architect with the Archanon group remembers: 'We started by cleaning the place out... it was full of stale rubbish, then we were hosing, scrubbing and throwing disinfectant about'.⁵⁹

The theatre was constructed downstairs in the basement of the old print building, with a low ceiling, obstructive steel columns and hard, reverberating surfaces of concrete and masonry. An exhibition space was cleared out upstairs. Tom Hogan, a Builder's Labourer who later became Betty Fisher's husband, marrying her in the theatre he helped set up, recalls jumping on the seating to test it after it had been erected by the architecture students, and the whole lot collapsing.⁶⁰ Nick Hollo remembered: 'our pride collapsed with the scaffolding as it dropped... We had used the wrong clamps. So all together we put up the next seating block correctly, then re-did the first'.⁶¹ It was this combination of expertise and idealism that fashioned the new black theatre and exhibition space.

The naming of the theatre, and the way these names have been remembered and revived, reflect the ambiguity of identity in the context of Aboriginal politics at this time. In 1974 a photograph of the front of the theatre, taken soon after the official opening shows in clear lettering the name 'Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre'.⁶² By the time of the

⁵⁷ Interview with Col James, University of Sydney, 12/3/97, with Grahame Gray, dancer and gay activist, Sydney, 15/2/95, Kevin Cook, Tranby, 16/2/95; Lester Bostock, 11/2/1997, Marrickville, 11/2/97; Wendy Lewis, Lyn Symes, Robyn Syme, Tahmoor, 13/10/94

⁵⁸ Archanon, had developed in Sydney by progressive architects such as Col James and Nick Hollo from the University of NSW and Sydney University. Archanon was a co-operative formed by students and staff at the University of NSW. The ideas came from similar progressive architecture movement internationally, such as the Team Ten featuring the architects Ralph Erskin, Bachamar, Van Ike and Smithsons from England. The Archanon group came in contact with the Black Theatre group through their involvement with South Sydney Community Aid, Interview with Col James, University of Sydney, 12/3/97; Pers comm Nick Hollo, 2/99; see also 'Archanon II and the Sydney University Students at the Black Theatre Arts and Cultural (sic) Centre', *Architecture in Australia*, April, 1975, p. 2

⁵⁹ Pers. comm. Nick Hollo, 2/99

⁶⁰ Interview with Tom Hogan, Newcastle, 23/1/95

⁶¹ Pers. comm. Nick Hollo, 2/99

⁶² Photograph taken by Sandy Gray, in 'Archanon II', p. 3

demise of the theatre the main players were quick to assert an Aboriginal, rather than just a 'black' identity. Although paying a visit to the National Black Theatre in Harlem in the early 1970s, Gerry Bostock argued in 1977: 'our political motivation comes from our attachment to the land and our loss of it. If we identify with anyone it is the American Indian'.⁶³

The difficulties in establishing an urban Aboriginal and 'Black' identity were reflected in the 1975 decision of state politicians to refuse funds to send representatives of the Black Theatre to an international 'Black' arts festival. In June 1975 the *Sun-Herald* reported that several Labour Ministers had privately criticised the decision to send the group to the Second World Black and African Festival in Lagos on the grounds that they were not a 'Black' group. Betty Fisher, calling for a 'face to face confrontation' on television to 'thrash out these arguments' and suggested that the ministers were suffering from 'culture shock': 'I think the idea of urban Australian Aborigines attending an African culture festival has induced panic in the ministerial ranks'.⁶⁴ In the end, Carole Johnson, an African-American dancer and choreographer, who had worked at the Black Theatre in Redfern, and a traditional Aboriginal dance group from the Northern Territory, went to represent Australia in Lagos at the 1975 'Black' world festival. It is significant that the government chose not to send Betty Fisher, the driving force behind Sydney's first 'Black' theatre. This is an illustration of the complexities of racial classification in the years following the assimilation era. Betty Fisher found herself not black 'enough' to be considered part of the African culture festival tour, and yet she was proudly Aboriginal. What were the options for Aboriginal women in post-assimilation years in terms of self-identity and public recognition?

⁶³Quoted in Whaley, 'Black Theatre in Sydney', p. 99

⁶⁴*The Sun-Herald*, June 22, 1975, p. 5

Two Betty Fishers. Gender, representation and the city

She had nothing to fall back on; not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality she may well have invented herself

- Toni Morrison, 1984.⁶⁵

Different themes in the identity of the Black Theatre's first administrator indicate the complexity of the woman herself and highlight the social and political context from which the theatre emerged. Embodying femininity and blackness, and emphasising questions of Aboriginal identity and performance, Betty Fisher's life and death indicate some of the contradictions of assimilation, and the representations of masculinity and femininity in that era. Her story reveals something of how the formative categories of colonial modernity - race, gender and class - are interlocking categories emerging often, in Anne McClintock's words, in 'dynamic, shifting and intimate interdependence'.⁶⁶ Fisher's role in the theatre, and her strong personality, highlight issues about the role of women in the newly-formed Aboriginal urban organisations of the early 1970s. Lyne Symes argued that in the history of Black Theatre, in her words: 'what will happen, is it will be recorded as being the men'. Symes went on to describe the opening of the theatre and the central role of women in that process:

I remember the first exhibition that was held there... there was one exhibition which was a whole collection of different Aboriginal artists from different sort of art mediums displaying their works. It kicked off on the Saturday and I remember we were running around like mad hens, picking up stuff from the artists to get it over there, to get it all up and everything... and I remember Betty doing that almost, like single-handed... And I s'pose it's still that same old story of the people who do the actual physical work again are the women. With little recognition.⁶⁷

⁶⁵quoted in Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, Quill William Morrow, New York, 1984, p. 81

⁶⁶McClintock, 'Colonial Mimicry and Ambivalence', in *Imperial Leather*, pp. 61-65

⁶⁷Interview with Lyn Symes, Tahmoor, 13/10/94

Betty's organisational strengths and achievements are alone emphasised by Mum Shirl's in her autobiography.⁶⁸

Fisher was born on Orient Point Mission on the South Coast of New South Wales and moved with her family to Newcastle, aged seven. Expelled from school when she was twelve for being 'undisciplinable'⁶⁹ she joined up with well-known Aboriginal performers Jimmy and Freddy Little, and sang with the first all-Black show to do the club rounds in Sydney and rural towns of New South Wales: 'The audience used to come along to look at the bunch of freaks and then they discovered the freaks could actually sing'.⁷⁰ Travelling throughout New South Wales with the singers, Fisher moved to Sydney in the 1960s and became involved in the Aboriginal movement in Redfern during the early 1970s.

Betty Fisher embodied some of the many alliances within Aboriginal political activism at this time. Despite her avowed 'animosity for whites', two years before her death she married Tom Hogan, a white Australian of Irish background who worked as a Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF) organiser, in a ceremony at the Black Theatre. Her marriage to Hogan in the exhibition space in the Black theatre acted as a potent symbol of the alliances between working class trade unions and Aboriginal struggles in the inner city in the early 1970s. The BLF had an active profile in Redfern and the wider inner city at the time of Fisher and Hogan's marriage. They had met through the green bans at Eveleigh Street, and Hogan's involvement with the theatre was practical and grass-roots.⁷¹ His expertise and willingness to support the theatre was indicative of the more widespread alliances between the Aboriginal movement and workers unions. Kevin Cook, for example, who became the President of the Black Theatre in 1974 was a builder's labourer working in the Redfern area at the time.⁷² The marriage service carried additional significance as it was conducted by the Aboriginal Pastor Don Brady. Brady, who had built a large congregation loyal to the Methodists in an inner city church in Brisbane during the late 1960s and early 1970s, had

⁶⁸ *MumShirl. An Autobiography with the assistance of Bobbie Sykes*, written with the assistance of Bobbi Sykes, Heinemann Publishers, Australia, 1981, p. 73

⁶⁹ One informant, Wendy Lewis suggested the term 'undisciplinable' was often a euphemism for a girl who had boyfriends or got pregnant, interview with Lewis, Tahmoor, 13/10/99

⁷⁰ Mary Haugh, 'How Bettie Fisher forced Black Theatre on the Map', *The National Times*, Jan 12-17, 1976, p. 26, interview with Frances Peters, Ultimo, 5/11/94

⁷¹ Interview with Tom Hogan, 10/4/1994, Interview with Wendy Lewis, 13/10/94

⁷² Interview with Kevin Cooke, Tranby, Glebe, 16/2/95

been sacked by the Church in 1972 for his public commitment to Black Power. Pastor Brady had been reprimanded by the church for publicly burning copies of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Act, and when he stood in protest with Kath Walker dressed in black, during the Queen's visit to Brisbane in 1970, he returned to his church that evening to find himself literally locked out.⁷³ Friends who attended the wedding remember references to Native American tradition during the ceremony⁷⁴ suggesting, as Gerald Bostock argued, an identification within the inner-city 'black' movement in Australia with a wider international indigenous agenda.

Fisher's work with the theatre was short-lived as she died in 1976 in her mid-thirties.⁷⁵ Speculations after her death (still discussed today) indicate the important imaginative space that was created by the figure of Betty Fisher, a space in which interactions of race, gender and class are illuminated. One speculation after her untimely death was that Fisher had been 'sung', because she broke Aboriginal tribal laws and exhibited sacred material in a public place.⁷⁶ This speculation is interesting for a number of reasons. It raises questions about the power attributed to wrongful 'representations' within the political conscience of an emerging urban Aboriginal political movement and it also raises important questions about the roles and authority accorded men and women in the urban politics of the early 1970s. Negotiations about the place of Aboriginal sacred images under the conditions of modernity were central to Aboriginal debates at this time. Vivien Johnson, for example, describes an incident in Alice Springs in the early 1970s, when an art gallery showing Aboriginal designs was stoned by a group of desert Aboriginal men and women.⁷⁷ Fisher's death, and the controversy surrounding it, focused questions on how traditional Aboriginal representations were to be seen, and which among the men and women could authorise it, in the urban space.

⁷³ *Identity Magazine* published by Aboriginal Publications Foundation, October, 1975, p. 28, Pastor Don Brady's act of defiance was recorded in a poem, 'Requiem' from Roberta Sykes, *Love Poems and Other Revolutionary Actions*, University of Queensland Press, 1979, p. 15

⁷⁴ Lyn Symes & Wendy Lewis interview, Tahmoor, 13/10/94

⁷⁵ Beryl Symes, "Great Loss to Black Theatre: Obituary of Bettie Fisher", *Aboriginal News*, vol. 3 (2), 1976, p. 2, see also Arnold Murphy, "Bettie Galvanizes the Black Theatre", *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 4th, 1975, p. 6

⁷⁶ Interview, Col James, 12/3/97, interview, Tom Hogan 10/4/96, interview Grahame Grey 15/2/95

⁷⁷ Vivien & Tim Johnson, (eds) *The Painted Dream: Contemporary Aboriginal Paintings from the Tim and Vivien Johnson Collection*, Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1990, p. 2

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants in the black theatre repeat these speculations regarding Betty Fisher's inappropriate use of material to this day. Col James, now a senior lecturer in architecture at the University of Sydney, who was involved with the theatre in the early 1970s, remembered of the Black theatre in Redfern that:

Black Theatre failed... because one of the directors exhibited some work that wasn't s'posed to be shown and she died and that left sort of a vacuum there and I think there had to be some settlement about that particular issue.⁷⁸

James links Fisher's death and her showing of work 'that wasn't s'posed to be shown' causally, suggesting that 'settlement' in a ceremonial or ritual sense was not effected and this has had an ongoing impact on the site.

There were other speculations about Fisher's death that did not imply super-natural causes. Roberta Sykes and Colleen 'Mum' Shirl had their doubts about the official explanation of Fisher's death, suggesting the official reports that she died from a heart attack were disputable.⁷⁹ Mum Shirl recalled:

Betty Fisher was struck down very suddenly, and everyone was so upset about her death. She was not an old woman, just a young girl really, when she died and they said it was a heart attack. Whatever the cause, the Black Theatre didn't recover, and while things still go on there from time to time, it is not the same organised program that Betty always tried to run.⁸⁰

Fisher's anger, her disrespect for white authority, her close connection to, what were then, powerful workers' unions such as the Builder's Labourers Federation, and her commitment to the burgeoning international black power movement, possibly made her a target for those opposed to these movements, suggested Sykes.⁸¹ The late Bob Maza, director and actor with the theatre, suggested that many people wanted to attack her 'because she's a loudmouthed woman, rough, arrogant, independent of men and has this animosity for

⁷⁸Col James interview, Sydney University, 12/3/97

⁷⁹Pers. Comm, Dr Roberta Sykes, Redfern, 2/2/97

⁸⁰MumShirl, in *MumShirl: An Autobiography*, pp. 91-92

⁸¹see also Pers Comm. Dr Meredith Burgmann, Sydney, 11/2/97, Interview with Tom Hogan, 10/4/97, Dr. Roberta Sykes, pers. comm 11/2/1995

whites.⁸² Ideas of foul play were encouraged by reports of a number of death threats received by Fisher during her time as the theatre administrator.⁸³

Another speculation which operates mainly as a fascinating rumour amongst those shocked by her early death, is the claim that Betty Fisher is still alive, heard to be living far away 'up the North coast' of Australia.⁸⁴ Of all the talk after her death, this resurrectionist speculation is perhaps the easiest to unravel. The singer, theatre administrator and Redfern activist, Betty Fisher, who died in 1976, had taken her stage name, which became inseparably her 'real' name, from a young Aboriginal singer who received wide-spread publicity in New South Wales in 1945. The 'other' Betty Fisher came to public attention as a young teenager for being the first Aboriginal person to win the popular radio award 'Amateur Hour'.

Born in 1932, at Maranboy, the original Betty Fisher was taken from her mother as a baby to the Kahlin Compound in Darwin, then to a home in Pine Creek and from there, aged five or six, to an Aboriginal mission at Croker Island.⁸⁵ During World War Two and the bombing of Darwin, the mission on Croker was evacuated to the mainland at Oenpelli, and the hundred children from Croker Island mission were marched overland, over a number of days, to Pine Creek. From there the mission children were sent in army trucks to Alice Springs and then down to a makeshift mission based at the 'Crusaders Home' on the south coast of New South Wales at Otford.⁸⁶

Based at the home for four years (1942 -1946), Betty Fisher, along with the other mission children, went to primary school in Scarborough and later to Wollongong High School. At Wollongong High, Fisher sang in the choir, 'the only coloured girl' she recalled, and was chosen by a teacher to audition for the 'Amateur Hour' on radio.⁸⁷ At the Sydney Town Hall in front of a large crowd, she sang 'My Curly Headed Baby' and won the Amateur Hour

⁸² Bob Maza, quoted in Haugh, 'How Bettie Fisher', p. 26

⁸³ see Haugh, 'How Bettie Fisher', p. 26

⁸⁴ Interview with Symes sisters, 13/10/94, Pers comm Martha Campbell, Australian National University, 1994

⁸⁵ Betty Fisher, 'Talking History', *Land Rights News*, vol. 2, no. 13, March 1989, p. 30-31

⁸⁶ Fisher, 'Talking History', p. 31

⁸⁷ Fisher, 'Talking History', p. 30

competition.⁸⁸ After her star performance at the Town Hall she was the subject of numerous articles and feature stories eulogising the efforts of the missions to civilise even the darkest child from the North.⁸⁹

Betty Fisher, remembering her life story for *Land Rights News* in 1989 recalled the publicity:

They had to stop me going to school. Too many kids wanting to take me home. I didn't know what it was going to be like. All these newspapers and magazines, *Truth*, *Pix* and *Post* did the story.⁹⁰

The media attention accorded this 'other' Betty Fisher did not stop with her success on *Amateur Hour*. The excitement over her sweet singing voice and appearance, was whipped to something of a fervour in the popular media when it was reported that she was to be sent back to the mission on Croker Island. Despite efforts on the part of the singing fraternity in Sydney to have her adopted out to a well-known 'opera couple', she was sent back North, on a boat, with seventy five other Aboriginal children. At the time the story caused such attention that the federal Minister for the Interior, responsible for the Native Affairs department, was moved to issue a stern statement that Betty Fisher would not be permitted to return to Sydney within the next two years.⁹¹ On the morning of the departure of the children on board the 'Reynella' from a Circular Quay wharf, Betty Fisher sang from the boat her song 'Curly Headed Baby' for a large number of wharf labourers who were reported to have taken up a collection for the young singer.⁹²

The extent of the publicity surrounding the young Aboriginal girl signals the central symbolic place held by young, feminised Aboriginality in the post-war Australian

⁸⁸Newsreel Footage, Australian Sound and Film Archives, Canberra, 2/3/1946 (FR 1940 545)

⁸⁹'A Girl Stood at Life's Cross Roads', *Telegraph*, March 24th, 1946, p.13; 'Audition Planned for Aboriginal Girl Singer', *The Daily Telegraph*, March 19th, 1946, p. 14, 'Fund for Aboriginal Singer Suggested', *The Sunday Sun*, p. 15

⁹⁰ Fisher 'Talking History', *Land Rights News*, p. 30

⁹¹Statement by Bob Johnson, Minister for Interior, reported in *Women's Weekly*, 22 September, 1945, p. 12, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 April, 1946, p. 4, *Herald* (Melbourne), 10 April, 1946, p. 6

⁹²'Girl Aboriginal Sings Farewell', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April, 1946, p. 12. The young singer never returned to Sydney. After her release from Croker Island Aboriginal Mission at the age of 18, she moved to Darwin where she worked as a hospital orderly and lived in a fringe settlement. Her own children, a boy and a girl were removed to the Retta Dixon Home, see Fisher, 'Talking History', p. 31

imagination. In this example images and brief contacts with a 'domesticated' Aboriginal girl and her 'banishment' to a remote mission in the Northern Territory became a *cause celebre* of the late 1940s and 1950s. In 1949 the argument over sending some other Aboriginal children, who had come down to New South Wales during the war, back to the Northern Territory, was still continuing, with local people organising to prevent the removal of some remaining children.⁹³ Betty Fisher of the Black Theatre, born in about 1941, would have been a child of about five years old at the time of the publicity around the young singer.⁹⁴ The connection she felt with the publicised 'half-caste' singer from Croker Island may have been based partly on the fact that both spent time in their childhood on an Aboriginal 'mission' on the south coast of New South Wales.⁹⁵ Betty Fisher's identification with the young singer, sent back to Croker island, is revealed by her decision to adopt her name as a stage name. As the previous chapter, and the story of the 'other' Betty Fisher show, contrary to always being seen as modernism's 'other', Aboriginal women in Australia were invited to join the project of white modern assimilation. The ambivalence of the ideological project to welcome 'developed' Aboriginal women into white modernity and the ways in which this was experienced by women themselves are illustrated in the story of the two Betty Fishers. Betty Fisher, administrator of the Black Theatre, responsible for the mundane and sustaining activities such as negotiating and signing the lease, paying the electricity bills, organising payment for the performers is not readily remembered in official accounts of the theatre.⁹⁶ Her absence is illuminated by feminist theory that has drawn attention to the various historical and cross-cultural manifestations of the effect of gendered public and private spheres.⁹⁷ In the context of this thesis her absence is also evocative of the contradictory and unsatisfactory ways in which the figure of the

⁹³ *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) 31 January, p. 7, 7 & 14 February 1949, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January, 4, 13 & 14 February 1949, see also Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 37

⁹⁴ No birth certificate has been located, interviews with her ex-husband and friends suggest this age, see interview Tom Hogan, Newcastle, 23/1/1995, interview with Symes sisters, 13/10/1994

⁹⁵ The place the children were taken to from Darwin was not an established Aboriginal mission as indicated earlier

⁹⁶ see for example David Horton (Gen. ed) entry on 'Aboriginal Black Theatre' in *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, History, Culture and Society*, vol. 1, Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1994, p. 8 also Michaela Perski for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 'Hindsight' programme, 30/10/97, Radio National, and Bostock, 'Black Theatre', pp. 25-31

⁹⁷ see for example, Sherry Ortner & Harriet Whitehead, (eds), *Sexual Meanings. The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, London, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney, 1981, Michell Rosaldo & Lena Lamphere, *Women, Culture and Society*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1974, McCormack & Strathern. (eds), *Nature, Culture, Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980

Aboriginal woman was simultaneously seen as the solution to the 'problem' of assimilation but accorded no real or substantial place within Australian culture and history.

Representations of Gender in *The Cakeman* and *Here Comes the Nigger*

Look, actually I'm here to make an enquiry, to discover if possible what it is I have that you now want - Sweet William, *The Cakeman*⁹⁸

The following section considers the two plays written and produced at the Black Theatre both of which provide a reflection on the personal dynamics of gender amongst Aboriginal people during the time of assimilation policy. The first of the two plays produced for the theatre explored the experiences of an Aboriginal family living under the policies of the Welfare Board in New South Wales and focused on the disintegrated identity and self-esteem of a central Aboriginal male character and the ramifications for his family. The play gives an Aboriginal perspective on the human cost of the policies of the Protection and Welfare Boards discussed in the previous chapters.⁹⁹ *The Cakeman* was written in just ten days by Robert Merritt and achieved a number of firsts for Aboriginal theatre. It was the first play written by a Koori, depicting Koori experiences on a mission; it was the first Aboriginal play to be published and the first Aboriginal play to be set on the Higher School Certificate syllabus.

The publication of the play represented a significant amplification of the playwright's voice, widening the potential audience for an Aboriginal perspective on the impact of history in the contemporary environment. The first production of the play, directed by Bob Maza, opened at the Black Theatre site in Redfern, in January 1975 and ran initially for three weeks to full houses. Despite continual funding difficulties, *The Cakeman* had a further season at Bondi Pavilion under the direction of George Ogilvie in 1977.¹⁰⁰ In 1978 the play was published by Currency Press, and four years later, in July 1982, *The Cake Man*

⁹⁸Currency Press, Sydney, 1978, p. 13

⁹⁹McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 364

¹⁰⁰Adam Shoemaker, 'The Cake Man' in Phillip Parsons' (Gen ed), *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.119

represented Australia at the World Theatre Festival in Denver, Colorado.¹⁰¹ The same production had seasons in Melbourne and at the Warana-Commonwealth Arts Festival in Brisbane later in the year.

Robert Merritt, playwright, born at Cowra, in 1945, was one of nine children, and grew up on Erambie Aboriginal mission. He was educated at the mission primary school and then the Cowra primary and high schools. Merritt, although an exceptional student, left school at fifteen, aspiring to a clerical job, but finding, as his father had before him, only seasonal labouring work available.¹⁰² He left Cowra looking for better work in the early 1970s and was arrested shortly after, and wrote the play from Bathurst gaol.¹⁰³ Merritt reflected in 1983 that until the production of *The Cakeman*, '[p]rojects in which Aboriginal people have been involved, in any capacity other than as actors, have been confined to the experimental'.¹⁰⁴

The play centres on the relationship between 'Sweet William', his wife 'Ruby' and their son 'Pumpkinhead' within the larger context of Aboriginal internment on a 'stinking mission', rural unemployment and large-scale migration to the city. The play tells the story of an Aboriginal family living on a mission in north-west New South Wales. Amidst poverty and unemployment the Aboriginal father decides to leave and go down to Sydney to find work. Within a few hours of his arrival in the city the Aboriginal man is arrested in a police round up outside a pub in Redfern. The opening act of the play, set in the days of first contact presents a stark portrayal of the initial colonial encounter, and its impact on Aboriginal families. The scene opens as a priest, a soldier and a civilian approach an Aboriginal family, father, mother and child playing after a successful hunting trip. Within a few minutes of the start of the play the soldier has shot the Aboriginal father dead (with a gun blessed by the priest) and the civilian has succeeded in luring the boy and mother with some cake. The soldier, the priest, and civilian shepherd the grief-stricken boy and mother off the stage, the

¹⁰¹The other Australian presentation was the Melbourne Theatre Companies production of Ron Elisha's *Einstein*, Shoemaker, 'The Cake Man', p. 119

¹⁰²Watson, 'This'll get' m for sure!', p. 11, and author's note in, *The Cakeman*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1978, 1995 (reprinted), p. 3

¹⁰³Authors preface to second edition, *The Cakeman*, p. 2

¹⁰⁴Authors preface to second edition, *The Cakeman*, p. 2

priest pushing a bible into the woman's hands, 'Come... don't be frightened... put your trust in us... we're going to make you our own'.¹⁰⁵

The death of the Aboriginal father and the leading away of the mother and child at the start of the play is echoed in the following acts of the play, set during the late 1960s and early 1970s in New South Wales. The later acts of the play illustrate the impact of colonisation on the relationship between Aboriginal father, mother and son. As the scene shifts to an Aboriginal reserve in the late 1960s the father, Sweet William appears unable to relate to his wife or child stressing his own redundancy in the white system:

I don't talk much real words to my missus... have to pretend a thing, have to live it and hide it all the time, anyway I got no strength to put behind what words I have to say to anyone... just a fuckin' blackfeller, me.¹⁰⁶

Pumpkinhead, the young son, has lost all respect for his father, who he sees only as a useless drunk defeated by the rural recession, dreaming only of a better life in the city. He listens to his father imagining a new life for himself in the city:

But there's work still down the city... Sydney's the place! Got their own bloody pub, the Kuri's have... (*Amazed*) fancy that. Man can stand up at the bar and have a go. (*Living it*) Hey, your shout, mate! Sweet William, its your bloody shout!! (*Grimming*) And with your own damn money, too, that y'earned all by yourself.¹⁰⁷

Pumpkinhead refuses to acknowledge his father by using the name, 'Sweet William', rather than 'Dad' to address him. This is a point of conflict between Ruby and her son. Ruby remains intent on maintaining her belief in her husband, and insists that her young son shows his father respect. In one scene Ruby chastises Pumpkinhead about this, reducing him to confused tears:

¹⁰⁵*The Cakeman*, Act One, p. 11

¹⁰⁶*The Cakeman*, Act One, p. 13

¹⁰⁷*The Cakeman*, Act Two- Scene One, p. 26

RUBY: (*angrily*) You call your father your father (*More angrily as he ignores her*) You hear me, you cheeky little bugger. Now see you made me swear, and all because you damn hatin' your good man father who loves you. Your good man father, you hear me say that, Pumpkinhead?¹⁰⁸

In place of a satisfying relationship with his wife and child Sweet William fantasises on the spectre of an Aboriginal woman. Sweet William concludes the play with a soliloquy that tells the audience that while out working on the fences around a property, one day, he is chased by the spectre of the 'eurie woman':

Her hair shinin' and swirling like it was made out of water, an' her skin like black lightnin', if y' can imagine that... so beautiful she couldn' ever be bad... but she was scary anyway, an' always there in front of me... but somewhere else. Well, all I remember then is a gubba [white person] I was workin' for, was sayin' to me what was wrong? What happened... an' I said 'didn't he see that eurie-woman'... a gubba... Ain't no eurie womans for gubbas, she came to tell me so I'd know.¹⁰⁹

When Sweet William's move to Sydney ends up in jail and he remarks in despair: 'Just hopeless, and no price I can pay because there ain't no price I've got to give that anyone want. *I got nothin' they want*'.¹¹⁰ Reviews of *The Cake Man*, at the time, saw the story as a tale of the inability of Aboriginal men to fit into the modern, urban world. This approach was reminiscent with the 'The play shows the confusion and misconceptions of that half-way world... the torment of the man, Sweet William... more than anything he wants his son to respect him. Finally in his search, he is lured to the big city, which engulfs him'.¹¹¹ This approach denied the systematic and gendered practices associated with the assimilation policy.

The second play written and produced for the Black Theatre by Gerald Bostock, *Here Comes the Nigger*, depicts the growing relationship between a blind Aboriginal man and the white woman who comes to tutor him. The short play reverses what Fanon and other

¹⁰⁸*The Cakeman*, Act Two- Scene One, p. 20

¹⁰⁹*The Cakeman*, Epilogue, p. 59

¹¹⁰Author's italics, *The Cakeman*, Act Two-Scene three, p. 30

¹¹¹John McCallum, 'Black Theatre: Robert Merritt's 'The Cake Man', *Meanjin*, 36/4, December 1977, p. 478

writers have analysed as the foundational colonial fear of black male sexual violence towards white women.¹¹² In this portrayal, the role of the white male as the benevolent protectors of women is reversed as the white brother strangles his own sister for an assumed sexual attraction towards the Aboriginal man she tutors.

The narrative unfolds around the story of the brother of a white woman, Odette, who is threatened by her friendship with a blind Aboriginal man, which he can only interpret as a sexual relationship. In the dramatic concluding scene the brother and his friend assault Odette and Sam, the Aboriginal man, in the underground station at Redfern. While Bob, the white brother's friend gropes Odette, her brother Neil attacks Sam who manages to knock Neil down with his blindman's cane. The white brother's friend, lets go of Odette to go to Neil's aid. Released from the hold of the white man, Odette, rushes over to help Sam. Neil recovers from Sam's blow to see his sister running to the side of the Aboriginal man and shouts: 'That bitch! It's all her fault! I'll kill that slut!' He then grabs his sister by the throat and throttles her until she is limp in his arms. Neil runs off as police sirens are heard offstage. Sam, the blind Aboriginal tutor is left cradling the dead body of the white woman as police arrive. Both plays offer a dramatic reversal of the dominant depictions of Aboriginal women and men available in the government media and policy documents of the assimilation years.

Reflections

History teaches us that the way to genocide is to take a culture, mould it into a defunct company - bankrupt, at the mercy of liquidators - and destroy its credibility so it can no longer reflect itself.

- Robert Merritt, 1983¹¹³

It was a seemingly mundane detail that defeated the physical space of the Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre. A few months after Fisher's death, a local council building inspector was sent out to the Black Theatre building to interview Lester Bostock, who had taken over as

¹¹²Fanon, 'The Man of Colour and the White Woman', in *White Skin, Black Masks*, pp. 112-123

¹¹³Author's preface, *The Cakeman*, p. vii

administrator, as to his intentions regarding the use of the building.¹¹⁴ Despite the new discourse of 'self determination', the problems familiar to Aboriginal people across the state regarding ownership of property had haunted the black theatre site from its beginning. The efforts to transform street performance to theatre site to establish a physical space in Redfern were protracted. This reflected the longstanding, and ongoing opposition posed to Aboriginal activists seeking to lay claim to land and property both in the city and throughout the state.¹¹⁵

The South Sydney Council seemed keen to evict the Black Theatre from the building and used the previous administrator's failure to supply twenty car-parking spaces, deemed necessary by the council, as their legal reason to evict the group.¹¹⁶ Betty Fisher had been in communication with the council about these car spaces since her initial application to develop the building as a theatre and exhibition space in 1974.¹¹⁷ She had written to council suggesting that 'as this is an Aboriginal cultural centre and most of the participants don't have cars anyway', the council should drop the matter.¹¹⁸ It was this matter of the parking spaces that council used in the months after her death to institute legal proceedings, under sections 632 and 633 of the local government act of 1919, against the Black Theatre. Lester Bostock was served a notice to 'cease use today' in April, 1977.¹¹⁹ Under financial pressures with the withdrawal of government funding, and in the face of this council pressure the short period of an active Black Theatre at the site ended.

At the end of November 1977 a meeting of seventeen representative local Aboriginal groups including Murrawina, the Aboriginal Housing Co-op, The Aboriginal Medical Service and the Redfern All Blacks, chaired by Lester Bostock who had been involved in the

¹¹⁴'Development Officer note to Council', South Sydney Municipal archives, CRS 87 File 42/27, 28/2/77, Interview with Lester Bostock, Marrickville, 11/2/97

¹¹⁵see Heather Goodall, *From Invasion to Embassy. Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, for contemporary process specifically related to Redfern, see Kay Anderson, "Reflections on Redfern", in E. Stratford (ed) *Australian Cultural Geographies*, OUP, Melbourne, 1999

¹¹⁶*Minute Paper*, South Sydney Council Archives,(DA 270/74), 13/11/74

¹¹⁷Letter from B. Fisher, 21 Nov 1974, in South Sydney Municipal Council Archives. The development proposal submitted by Fisher was approved on 5th September, 1974 on three conditions; that a sign application be submitted to council, that all loading and unloading take place within existing loading bay, and that twenty off-street parking spaces be provided. CRS 93, SSSA 270/1974, p. 1/1

¹¹⁸Letter from B. Fisher, 21 Nov 1974, p. 1/1

¹¹⁹Correspondence files, Works, Planning and Development Committee of the Planning and Building Department, 1 June 1977, South Sydney Municipal Council Archives, CRS 93, SSSA 270/1977

original theatre formed the Black Unity Centre Committee aimed at drawing together local groups and securing their interest in the site.¹²⁰ The Methodist Church receiving a formal request for ownership of the site from the Black Unity Committee and in the context of a highly vocal land rights movement agreed to hand the property to the local Aboriginal community with certain restrictions.¹²¹ Thus began a twenty year wrangle between the ADC and then ATSIC and local organisations over ownership of the site. In the middle of the bureaucratic battle and its capacity to lapse into months of administrative inertia, a longstanding group of homeless Aboriginal people came to squat in what had been the Black Theatre.

In response to over twenty years of activity by local groups and federal administration in 1994 a report entitled 'The Cope Street Precinct, Redfern. History and Proposals', was commissioned jointly by the South Sydney City Council, the New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Board and the Uniting Church on the 'Cope Street Site'. The report details the long history of Aboriginal community involvement in the site since the 1970s and the conflicting stakes in the site held by local Redfern Aboriginal groups, as well as state and federal government. The physical site of the theatre, at what was then 31 Botany Street (later renamed Cope Street) Redfern, had been lost in 1977 due to local council pressure leading to withdrawal of federal funding, through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Australia Council. In 1991, against local protests the site was finally demolished for re-development.¹²²

Throughout the long struggle over the 'Black Theatre' site the short period of the functioning Black Theatre and Cultural Centre remained as an important ideal for many local Aboriginal people. Framing all these debates is an increasingly intense pressure to remove the Aboriginal presence from the inner city suburb.¹²³ Indeed a Black Theatre Performing Arts and Cultural Centre Committee was formed with the idea of re-establishing

¹²⁰Correspondence from Rev Dick Udy to Paul Memmott, 21/05/94 in Memmott Report, 1994, p. 15

¹²¹Paul Memmott, *Report on the Cope Street Precinct, Redfern, prepared for Cope Street Community Project*, copy in my possession

¹²²Memmott, *Report on the Cope Street Precinct*, p. 20

¹²³see Anderson, 'Place Narratives' pp. 314-335

the original centre in 1986 that still met in Redfern in 1995.¹²⁴ In 1986 Naomi Myers wrote to the Regional Manager of the ADC as a representative of the ADC stating:

We as a body composed of responsible persons representing all community controlled organisations in the inner city have never at any stage deemed responsibility to the ASC for the holding of the title deeds, be they in trust or straight out ownership. It always has and always will be the desired wish of our community to utilise the building as a National Black Theatre for visual, performing and communicative arts.¹²⁵

The idea of the theatre and cultural centre as 'the city's place of dreaming', a phrase first coined by an Aboriginal man visiting the theatre from the Northern Territory in early 1977, remained long after the place had stopped functioning in its original form. As a place to re-dream the impact of decades of assimilationist policy enacted under both Protection and Welfare Board controls in New South Wales the Black Theatre was a significant place, but the questions around gender and identity remained un-resolved.

¹²⁴Harry Mumbulla personal communication, 1995, Memmott *Report on the Cope Street Precinct*, p. 20

¹²⁵Memmott, *Report on the Cope Street Precinct*, Correspondence from the BTPACCL to Ministry for Aboriginal Affairs, p. 21

CONCLUSION

In the years between the first national meeting of *State and Commonwealth Authorities on Aborigines* in 1937, and the demise of the Black theatre in 1977, the official policy of assimilation had undergone some major revisions. From Cecil Cook, administrator of the Northern Territory, with his scheme to absorb the Aboriginal population by 'making the coloured girls the same as the whites', to Nugget Coombs and his interest in understanding and promoting the validity of a distinct Aboriginal culture, Commonwealth policy had significantly changed.

In New South Wales, in the forty years since the first national meeting of Aboriginal administrators, the Aborigines Protection Board had been replaced with a diffused system of Child and Social Welfare administrations. By the mid 1960s in New South Wales the need for a separate Aboriginal administration was seen as an anachronism, as the recommendations of the 1965 to 1967 state parliamentary inquiry clearly indicated. In 1969 with the repeal of the Aborigines Protection Act (1909-1969) which dissolved the Aborigines Welfare Board, the popularity of the ideology of assimilation had reached its peak, and changes in arts policy at the Federal level were impacting considerably on state government discourse and practice concerning Aboriginal 'culture'.

While urban policy makers in NSW in the 1880s had assumed that Aboriginal people were conveniently dying out, policy makers and scientists of the mid-twentieth century had believed that Aboriginal culture was, just as conveniently for the goal of assimilation, also dying out. However in the early 1970s rather than disappearing into an assimilated society, the widespread re-settlement of Aboriginal people in metropolitan areas saw the establishment of a number of highly politicised Aboriginal organisations and the first fledgling publications of Aboriginal perspectives on the past policy and practice of assimilation.

The central questions of this thesis have focused around the interaction between gendered representations and racial policy. What were the perceptions of Aboriginal women that lay at the heart of plans for breeding out in the late 1930s? How did these assumptions about the compliant sexuality of Aboriginal women translate into a set of administrative policies

and practices in the so-called 'settled' state of New South Wales during the administration of the Aborigines Protection Board? In that light the thesis considered the impact of changes in the broader socio-economic climate brought about by the Second World War, and the way in which these changes impacted on the gendered nature of assimilation policy. In the period of the Aborigines Welfare Board, how did staff and policy reflect the emphasis in government discourse on the malleability of Aboriginal women's sexuality, and their potential as reproducers of the next generation of assimilated children? A significant part of the response lies in the relationship between non-Aboriginal perceptions of the particular place of white women in presenting the benign and tutelary aspects of the Welfare Board and the Aborigines Protection, and later Welfare Board's policy of assimilation. When both Boards were replaced after seventy years of central administration and replaced with a mainstreamed bureaucratic approach, how were images of Aboriginal women discussed in this 'new era' of administration?

By focusing on gendered power relations, this thesis underlines the ways that state interest in Aboriginal women remained central across the decades when biological absorption was replaced with a cultural model of assimilation. While the short lived official period of breeding out focused on Aboriginal women as the physical reproducers of the next generation of assimilated Aborigines, the policy of cultural assimilation, as this thesis seeks to show maintained its interest in Aboriginal women as the centre of social reproduction. Further, this thesis has sought to show that biological and cultural explanations about, what was considered, the Aboriginal 'problem' and policy for dealing with it, were used interchangeably throughout this period and that ideas about gender, specifically attitudes towards Aboriginal women formed a major theme across these decades. As late as 1969 the Chief Secretary asserted to the Legislative Assembly, gathered to discuss the end of the Aborigines Welfare Board that

Assimilation is a word which is often misunderstood. It does not mean miscegenation, that is, inter-breeding, with the avowed objective of eventually breeding out and losing the aboriginal physical features. Assimilation means that the Aborigine will become similar to other citizens, not necessarily in looks, but with regard to all the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.¹

¹Aborigines Bill, p. 3725

This thesis has argued that across the decades and the debates about absorption and assimilation, an interest in the figure of the Aboriginal woman remained constant. Aboriginal women, whether as the target for breeding-out, or for re-socialisation as mothers and domestic servants, remained at the forefront of government discourse around how to 'solve' the Aboriginal 'problem'.

As the work of merging or absorbing the Aboriginal population was directed at Aboriginal girls and women, the work of persuading and explaining and overseeing this process at an administrative level was considered work for non-Aboriginal women. This thesis argues that white women were employed in particular capacities to administer assimilation and they participated, in Ann Laura Stoler's terms, as both subordinates of colonial hierarchies and as active agents of colonial culture in their own right.² Policy and administration directed at Aboriginal women in New South Wales during the assimilation era interacted with assumptions about 'white' women and with the wider demands of a policy designed to remove a self-identifying Aboriginal community from New South Wales. This thesis has sought to show that as in other colonial contexts the figure of the white woman in New South Wales was mobilised in both a literal and symbolic way during the administration of the assimilation policy, to facilitate so-called racial distinctions, and the modernisation of bureaucratic control. This thesis has argued that the place of Aboriginal and white women in the public imagination in New South Wales, and the undercurrent of sexuality which informed assimilation policy and administration, constituted an integral part of the overall complex of policy and cultural iconography from the period of assimilation.

Throughout the period of absorption and assimilation, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal activist organisations and individuals had lobbied for the abolition of the Boards for both the so-called 'Protection' and 'Welfare' of Aborigines, and for an Aboriginal majority on any continuing agency. This thesis highlights the contradiction between the public presentation of successful assimilation and the impact on Aboriginal families at this time. While the Aboriginal debutante presented a theatrical depiction of successful assimilation in its gendered terms, Aboriginal women had been active in creating their own lives and identities within the operations of the Protection and Welfare administration and in later period of cultural relativism. However in the period of the 1970s, a time seen as a

²'Making Empire Respectable', pp. 634-660

progressive improvement on the old policies of assimilation, limiting definitions of Aboriginality were still impacting on the lives and careers of Aboriginal women such as Betty Fisher of the Black Theatre. The personal impact on Aboriginal lives, in the aftermath of assimilationist policies, were depicted vividly in productions at the first Black Theatre in Redfern.

In conclusion, Gillian Cowlshaw has argued recently that assimilation policy, is often referred to today 'contemptuously', as though it was only an 'outdated policy', rather than the 'cultural process of making similar', which 'characterises much intercultural experience'.³ This thesis has examined the cultural and political, as well as some of the economic factors involved in the process of 'making similar' from a gendered perspective. Finally, assimilationist thinking, with its roots in a gendered approach to the 'Aboriginal problem' cannot be safely thought of as belonging only to the pre-war decades. Today, demands to conform to certain gendered notions of 'civilised' or 'rational', or 'Australian' behaviours are pressures currently operating on individuals working within both Aboriginal organisations and the larger institutional and private cultures of all our lives. When current debates about, for example, the level of domestic violence between Aboriginal men and women are carried out today, they often pay scant attention to the official policy of 'breeding out' or the ongoing attempts by state government during the assimilation policy to interfere at the most intimate level with relationships between Aboriginal women and men and their families. This thesis urges us to consider the fundamental and often invisible ways in which the discourses of gender and race have overlapped throughout the period of colonisation in Australia, and continue to do so up to the present day.

³Gillian Cowlshaw, *Rednecks, Eggheads & Blackfellas. A Study of Racial Power and Intimacy in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1999

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