White Without Soap

Philanthropy
Caste and Exclusion
in
Colonial Victoria 1835-1888

A Political Economy of Race

Marguerita Stephens
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Abstract

The thesis explores the connections between nineteenth century imperial anthropology, racial ‘science’, and the imposition of colonising governance on the Aborigines of Port Phillip/Victoria between 1835 and 1888. It explores the way that particular, albeit contested, images of Aborigines ‘became legislative’. It surveys the declining influence of liberal and Evangelical ‘philanthropy’ at the end of the 1830s, the pragmatic moral slippages that transformed humanitarian gestures into colonial terror, and the part played by the Australians in the emergence of the concept of race as the chief vector of colonial power. The thesis contrasts the rhetoric of the British Evangelicals with governmental rationalisations in connection with Major Lettsom’s murderous raid on the Kulin on the outskirts of Melbourne. It then probes two mid century ‘scientific’ discourses - one concerning the purported infertility of Aboriginal women in connection with white men (a thesis that captivated Social Darwinists but was belied by the ubiquitous presence of children of mixed descent); the other concerning the purported propensity of the Australians to wantonly destroy their own offspring - to illustrate how self-serving misinterpretations of the effects of colonisation, and of Aboriginal cultural practices, presented the Kulin as less than human and underwrote the removal of their children into ‘protective’ incarceration. It explores how a policy originally intended to ‘domesticate’ and transform the children of the Kulin into model citizens turned into a project designed to eradicate the Aborigines of Victoria by ‘breeding them out’. It considers the contestations between humanitarians and racialists at the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines and how, in the 1870s, an arcane theory that the Aborigines were of Caucasian origins came to underwrite an intentionally genocidal ‘absorption’ policy that deployed the arithmetics of caste. Throughout the thesis, the determination of the Kulin survivors to adapt to the new circumstances, their efforts to farm the Coranderrk station lands as independent, free farmer-citizens, their resistance to the Board’s efforts to ‘board out’ their children and dispossess them of every acre of land in the colony, is juxtaposed against representations of the Aborigines as primitives, savages, as less than human and inherently bound for extinction on the one hand, and as a people passively awaiting the remedy of being made ‘white without soap’ on the other.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Ph.D,
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
(iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.
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Naturally, this work is

for Tillie, who else?
‘View from Mr Ryrie’s, Upper Yarra’ drawn by William Thomas around 1845. All but the three mountains closest to the headwaters of the Yarra are marked ‘all gone dead’. Thomas’s notations read: ‘Here are the mountains as seen in my district … as you stand at Mr Ryrie’s.’ ‘There can be no doubt from these names and ranges taken from an old wandering Black named Kurburra (alias Ruffy) how particular the Blacks are of giving names to every portion of country – even to the ranges as correct for their purpose as civilized surveyors … Every spot has its name … .’

Robert Brough Smyth Papers, State Library of Victoria MS 8781, Box 1176/7 (b) and (c), items 25-34.

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Note On Language

The Kulin Federation of Central Victoria consists of five intermarrying clans, each of which spoke a distinct but related and mutually intelligible language or dialect at the beginning of the colonial period. The clans are generally named by reference to these languages or ‘wurrungs’. In nineteenth century texts the clans were commonly referred to as the Woiworung (occasionally the ‘Yarra’ or Melbourne people), Bunurong (occasionally the Western Port people), Taungurong (occasionally the Goulburn River or Delatite River people), Wauthaurung, and Jajawrong, though, the spellings were not standardised and there were a number of variations. In 1996, Ian D.Clark, in conjunction with the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, reexamined the earliest transcriptions of these languages in an attempt to make modern spelling reflect traditional, pre-colonisation pronunciation. Clark settled on the following spelling for the Kulin clans: Woi wurrung, Boon wurrung, Daung wurrung, Watha wurrung and Djadja wurrung.\(^1\) The Museum of Victoria has adopted Clark’s scheme. In this thesis, Clark’s spelling is used except when quoting, in which case the spelling in the original text is retained.

The use of the racist terms ‘full-blood’, ‘half-caste’, ‘quadroon’, ‘octoroon’ and similar designations is unavoidable in this thesis. Their use, however, is restricted to direct quotations, or where avoidance of such terminology would make the meaning of a passage unclear.

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\(^1\) Ian D. Clark, "Aboriginal Language Areas in Victoria: A Report for the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages," (Melbourne: Victorian Aboriginal Corporation For Languages, 1996)
INTRODUCTION

Imperial Economies of Race

In the expansionary movements of the European nation states in the nineteenth century, race and empire were mutually constituted. 'It was', wrote Catherine Hall, 'colonial encounters which produced a new category, race'.¹ The idea of race raised colonialism to a biological imperative. The idea of race, and the ability of individuals to perceive the marks and differentials of race, have a history of their own. What follows is a history of how Europeans in one colonial encounter came to think that race mattered and how they produced specific categories of race that gave scientific and moral warrant to their rapacious colonising. It is a political economy of race.

This study is concerned with the multilateral connections between developments in the science of race across the European imperial domain and the operations of colonial policy in one location, that of Port Phillip, later Victoria, in south-eastern Australia in the middle and late nineteenth century. Specifically, it is concerned with the interactions between anthropology and the practical management of the Victorian government’s Aboriginal station Coranderrk, onto which the Kulin people, on whose land the colonial settlement of Melbourne was established in 1835, were gathered in 1863. It is concerned with the prominence of the Australians, particularly those from the south-eastern corner of the continent, in the formulation of European concepts of race, and with the daily lives of those on whom the ethnological gaze fell so heavily. It is concerned with the circularities of colonial theory and colonizing practice which produced the extinguishing Aboriginal body and the imperial fantasy of terra nullius. Colonialism and anthropology formed an hermetic ideological coupling of power and knowledge in which European desire, be it sexual or territorial, was projected onto the colonised with such force and effect that it delivered them up as objects who entreated their own colonization. It is with the twists and turns in this multidirectional relationship between theories of race and the practical expressions of colonial power through the categories of race that this study is concerned.

¹Catherine Hall, Cultures of Empire: Colonisers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: a Reader (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.19.
In the following chapters I explore how anthropology projected imminent Aboriginal extinction as an effect of biology and culture, rather than as an effect, and an animating ambition, of colonial practice. I also explore the complicity of humanitarian philanthropists in the production of the ‘ideological dissimulations’ encapsulated in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s provocative formula: ‘white men are saving brown women from brown men’ with its slippery and readily mutable verb. In south-eastern Australia, white men produced and reinforced colonizing power through the purported rescue of brown women, whose ethnologically-predicated ill-treatment by brown men provided the singular event that permitted the suspension of the letter of the law in order to impose ‘not only a civil but a good society’.  

From the generalised rape, abuse and exploitation of the sexual labour of Aboriginal women and girls by colonists on the frontier in the late 1830s, to the emphasis laid by the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) on the seizure of Aboriginal girls from their kin in the 1860s and 1870s, to the Board’s determination in the 1880s to bring ‘finality’ to the Aboriginal ‘problem’ by steering young Aboriginal women into marriages with white men, the exercise of power over Aboriginal women was the most crucial vector of colonial power. In Victoria, as in so many other colonial sites, the control of female sexuality and reproduction was, as Anne McClintock argues, crucial to the ‘transmission of white, male power’.  

A Genealogy of Race.

Perceptions of race, as Robert Young and Paul Gilroy insist, are a product of deliberate cultural training that is determined by the particularities of specific social and techno-scientific constraints. There is, Gilroy argues, against those who continue to privilege race as a natural category of human division, ‘no raw perception dwelling in the body. The human sensorium has had to be educated to see race. When it

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3 'The Board' was designated the 'Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of the Aborigines of Victoria' from 1860-1869. From 1869 to 1957 it was known as the 'Board for the Protection of Aborigines'. For convenience, I will refer to it throughout by the latter title, as the BPA, or simple as 'the Board'.
comes to the visualization of 'race' a great deal of fine tuning has been required. Racial categories exist in a constant state of imminence and disintegration, their demarcations subject to constant challenge, breach, renovation and strategic manipulation. 'The otherness of colonized persons', Stoler and Cooper remind us, 'was neither inherent nor stable; his or her difference had to be defined and maintained'.

Racial categories exist not as natural entities, but come into being only when apprehended by relations of power. It was through the everyday choreography of distinctions of race that colonial power was exercised.

In defining race, imperial powers sought to construct mutually exclusive categories of 'self' and 'other' that set the imperial elect over those whose lands or labour power could justifiably be appropriated in the name of a universalised human progress. As Ruth Benedict argued sixty years ago, whilst earlier colonial adventures had been justified by appeals to a variety of systems that delineated alien from self - Romans from barbarians, Christians from heathens - the specific formulae of racism 'would have been impossible before the days of Darwin and of anthropometric measurements'. Anne McClintock also regards the 1850s as the crucial decade in which a 'new global order of cultural knowledge' built around the idea of race emerged. It was, she argues, an idea that enabled Europeans to superimpose the 'alibi of nature' over the forms of imperial domination. Scientific authority has its own history, notes Nancy Leys Stepan, and it was through the 'supposed non-political character' and neutrality of nineteenth-century anthropology and biology - through colonialism's ability to represent ideology as nature- that it acquired its hegemonic effect.

Michael Banton and Jonathan Harwood constructed a similar genealogy for the emergence of the concept of 'race'. While the use of the word can be located as early as the sixteenth century, it did not come to signify divisions of humanity until the late 18th century and did not acquire its full-blown value as a signifier of human

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evolutionary and moral hierarchy until the middle years of the nineteenth. When Europeans ventured beyond the world they knew in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they took with them an arsenal of prior association of blackness with sin, death, and repressed desire which they freely projected onto the ‘monstrous races’ of the new world.\textsuperscript{10} By the 18th century biblical explanations of human difference were in competition with an emerging set of secular theories which attributed the differences between human economic modes to environmental influences and natural differentials of free will.\textsuperscript{11} They were also in competition with ideas such as those advanced by Linnaeus (1707-1778) and Blumenbach (1752-1840) that posited a biological series of animal economy with mankind at its apex, which, while dividing human societies into hierarchies of savage, barbarian and ‘polished’, as yet formulated ‘no innate distinctions between kinds of men’.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1775, in the decade that inaugurated the idea of the universality of human rights, Blumenbach studied the dimensions of the human crania and identified five distinct varieties of humanity, connected along a continuum yet belonging to one zoological class. Against those such as the Baron de Montesquieu, Charles White and Edward Long, who argued that the ‘Ethiopians’ were not human and could thus be ethically enslaved, Blumenbach maintained that the varieties of mankind were divided by ‘imperceptible transition’ and differed only ‘by degrees’.\textsuperscript{13} Blumenbach’s omnibus human was, however, subtended when Petrus Camper and Georges Cuvier proposed, around 1800, that the characteristic ‘facial angle’ of the various types of mankind corresponded with differences in brain size and intellectual capacity and measured racially-defined degeneration from the cranial proportions of classical Greece.\textsuperscript{14}

These were formulae, however, that had yet to assume the ramifications of the nineteenth-century concept of ‘race’. As Ivan Hannaford reminds us, while


\textsuperscript{12} Banton and Harwood, \textit{The Race Concept}, p.17.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 24-5. Young, \textit{Colonial Desire}, pp.6-10.
Montesquieu, Blumenbach, Buffon and Linnaeus may not have ‘rid themselves of the physical baggage of the Middle Ages’ with its monstrous Other, we ought not to assume that ‘their reflections on physiological and anatomical data necessarily anticipated a racial disposition’. Race, he argues, only emerged in its modern form when it ‘developed a will to individual power based on a biology that distinguished superior and inferior races’.

Art historian Bernard Smith concurs that for ‘the greater part of the eighteenth century the concept of race, as it later came to be understood, was unknown, and the word little used’. Prior to the late eighteenth century Christian orthodoxy’s belief that humankind was descended from a common ancestor and had dispersed across the globe after the Deluge, degenerating as it moved from the hub of creation, permitted the application of neoclassical proportions to all representations of humanity, with ethnographic license confined to clothing, decoration, implements and landscape. As Smith observed,

Since all sprang from one family, all belonged to one species, and eighteenth century voyagers did not expect to find major physical differences between one nation and another. Ethnic differences of a physical kind could be and were noted: the breadth of the nose of the Polynesian, the high cheek bones and plump faces of the Nootkans … . But these were empirical observations based on the observation of individuals: they had not been conceptualized or theorized.

Ethnographic representations made by French voyagers to the Pacific in the wake of Cuvier, Camper, Linnaeus, Buffon and Blumenbach, however, laid new emphasis on prognathism and facial geometry and fundamentally changed the parameters of visual representation.

According to Banton and Harwood, the first serious attempt to associate differences in social and moral development with differences in human biology was that of Edward Long, a West Indian planter and slave owner, who in 1774, argued that blacks and whites were of different species, the result of separate acts of creations, and that interbreeding of the two species would eventually produce infertile offspring. Long drew on radical new ideas that challenged the biblical story of human creation, positing not one monogenetic creation of humanity but a multiplicity of godly acts, of

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16 Smith, *Imagining the Pacific*, p.184.
17 Ibid. p.184.
polygenesis; but his theory acquired little credibility. It was, argue Banton and Harwood, forces internal to Europe in the early to mid nineteenth century, when the modern nation states were being forged from diverse ethnicities, that produced the concept of innate differences between varieties of mankind arose. Until the 1840s at least, the concepts of race and class were virtually interchangeable when used in reference to the peoples of the British Isles. Disraeli’s Sybil (1845), for example, depicted social conflicts that cemented the class formations of an industrializing Britain as conflicts between ‘races’. At Cambridge, Thomas Arnold argued that the innate superiority of the Germanic peoples, who had conquered the indigenous Britons, was naturally expressed by imperialism. As Noel Ignatiev argues, the Celts and particularly the Irish were firmly entrenched as the ‘blacks’ of Britain until the new racial categories of imperialism made them ‘white’.

The search for moral and biological causes for the differences between the varieties of men was given a particular fillip by the debates in Europe and America over slavery. Abolitionists and enthusiastic slavery advocates alike argued their positions with reference to human anatomy. Samuel Morton’s measurements of native American skulls, published in 1839, were seized upon by Josiah Nott and George Gliddon in the United States, and by Robert Knox and James Hunt in Britain, to support claims that the Africans were a ‘type’ apart, perhaps even a species apart, from European man, and innately fitted to slavery. Superior races, they claimed, would be contaminated by breeding with the lower races. But, argue Banton and Harwood, such ideas, which fundamentally challenged biblical explanations, were initially rejected in the Southern states. ‘Only with the abolition of slavery in 1865 and the appearance of black people as a political force did theories of biological inequality begin to acquire importance’. Instead, they argue, it was in England, in

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18 Ibid. p.186.
1850, that the ‘first book-length racist statement’ appeared when Robert Knox argued in *The Races of Men* that the moral and intellectual qualities of individuals and the progress of nations was determined by ‘race’.24

Knox’s work appeared at a time when the humanitarian tide that had its high-water mark in the abolition of slavery in British colonies in 1833 had receded, and when the powerful West India lobby, backed by Carlyle’s racial invective, was resurgent.25 Abolitionist hopes that the freed slaves would transform themselves into respectable, independent artisans and labourers had been disappointed and along with them had gone the momentum of the Evangelical revival. By the 1840s, biblical truth and the particular humanitarian sensibilities that drew inspiration from Christian precepts were challenged by new paradigms in biology and a new expansionist imperial chauvinism.

Three years before Knox wrote, Britain’s most eminent ethnologist and philologist, James Cowles Prichard, hitherto an ardent believer in biblical monogenesis and an abolitionist, had reluctantly come to entertain the possibility that the varieties of mankind might equate with zoological speciation between the races of men. He had come to that conclusion, as I will demonstrate in chapter one, largely as a result of intelligence from New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land that seemed to provide ethnographic support for the claim that, in some cases at least, the interbreeding of different races of mankind produced sterile offspring.26

Prichard’s change of mind in June 1847 signaled more than just a change of direction in ethnology. It exemplified the epistemological upheaval that occurred in the decade and a half between the anonymous publication of Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* in 1844 and Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* of 1859. In the practical arena of global colonialism, the possibility that the races of mankind represented different species undermined the humanitarian mediation of Britain’s imperial mission, with its insistence that all could be made

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26 James Cowles Prichard, "On the Relations of Ethnology to Other Branches of Knowledge: Dr. Prichard’s Anniversary Address, 22 June 1847.,” *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, 1 (1848), p.308.
Christian and raised to the level of Europeans, and left the imperial field open to those who would exercise raw power. Prichard’s change of mind thus signals a crucial milestone in the history of race. As Harwood and Banton concluded: ‘[p]rior to the nineteenth century, scholars believed that all peoples could progress. After the 1850s a substantial school of thought held that some people never could advance.’

**Hybridity: Race and its Antithesis.**

Nothing challenged the conceits of race and undermined the solidity of its categories so much as the presence of mixed race bodies. Their presence, as Robert Young observed, records 'the real historic forms of contact' and conclusively indicated that desire transgressed racial borders. The very existence of mixed race bodies was an invitation to governance on the one hand – to the instigation of regulatory regimes designed to control, or promote, sexual congress across artificially imposed racial boundaries – and to disavowals concerning the role of Europeans in their often violent production, on the other. Their presence undermined notions of the civil empire, stimulating anxieties about racial contamination and degeneration that provoked governmental regulation, with its arsenal of surveillance techniques and ethnological production. In the colonial domain, the defence and regulation of racial boundaries served as the chief vector of colonial power relations, with racial hybridity as its chief provocation. 'The idea of race', notes Young, 'only works when defined against potential intermixture, which also threatens to undo its calculations altogether'. Race, he observes, is always played out 'around an ambivalent axis of desire and aversion'.

Categories of race were delineated and mobilised in accordance with the requirements of particular imperial economies and differed from one imperial site to another. The Dutch, Portuguese and the Spanish, the 'old' powers, observed Benedict, 'did not share the horror of miscegenation the English had, nor did the French institute the ironclad caste distinctions the English had.' Later scholars have refined the distinctions. Ann Stoler’s close study of racial classification in Dutch Java illustrates economies of race specific to a mercantile colony in the tropics - to a place deemed unfit for European women. In that locale, where concubinage was regarded as a necessary part of the acclimatization process for Dutch civil servants, the racial

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27 Banton and Harwood, *The Race Concept*, pp. 29-31
28 Young, *Colonial Desire*, p.5.
29 Ibid. p.19.
designation of *metis* offspring of Dutch men and Javanese women varied with the economic position of both parties. Children born of Javanese women of landed families provided their Dutch fathers with access to wealth and the children were readily acknowledged as Dutch and as white; those of less valuable concubines sat in somewhat of a racial limbo. Roger Knight designates nineteenth-century Dutch colonial culture in the Indies as 'inclusivist' and 'hybrid'. ‘European ethnicity’ was ‘a cultural, social - and legal- construct, in which "race" and skin pigmentation were secondary considerations.’ Children were Dutch ‘by virtue of recognition by their fathers’. The term *mestizo* was reserved for those who fell beneath a commonly recognised economic demarcation.\(^{31}\)

Dina Sherzer argues that French ideas on hybridity diverge in a variety of directions. 'Exotic sexual encounters were part of the *imaginaire colonial* by which French men were lured to tropical colonies, yet negative connotations attached to mixed-blood children who were seen to embody 'miscegenation, mongrelization and impurity'. As in Java, issues of class mediated the reading of the hybrid body, with marriages between 'well educated sons and daughters of Vietnamese dignitaries' and French expatriates and creoles being seen as integral to the civilizing mission.\(^{32}\) As Fanon pointedly noted, ‘One is white above a certain financial level’.\(^{33}\)

Geography and economics mediated the politics of inclusion and exclusion as much in the British as in the French empire. William Dalrymple has uncovered lost histories of East India Company traders that reveal that in the eighteenth century it was standard practice for English and Scottish operatives to convert to Islam to promote their trading ventures, to practice polygamy and to send their children ‘home’ to be educated. In the 1780s one third of the company operatives who died in India willed their property to Indian wives and Anglo-Indian children. By the 1850s however, such practices were considered, at least by those at home, to be beyond the pale, and such offspring were struck out of family genealogies.\(^{34}\)

\(^{30}\) Benedict, *Race and Racism*, p.106.
\(^{33}\) Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952]), p.44.
Similarly, Mary Seacole, the daughter of a Scottish planter in the West Indies, was British when she set out from Jamaica in the early 1850s, but by the time she had crossed the Atlantic she was mulatto and was passed over on that account when she sought to join Florence Nightingale's nursing contingent in the imperial cause in the Crimea. In Australia, where, as Wolfe has argued, the primary goal of the colonial project was always the disarticulation of the autochthon from the economic resource of land, there was no economic imperative to claim children of mixed descent on the part of their fathers. There was, instead, practical incentive to project onto the Aborigines an abhorrence of ‘hybrids’ so that the ‘half-caste’ would become doubly dislocated, from land and from their Aboriginal kin.

Nikos Papastergiadis observed, similarly, that when colonial ‘conquest’ was so often advanced through the sexual penetration of women who, according to colonialism’s hermetic logic, ‘provoked [their] own violations’, the regulation of racial purity was a constant theatre of power. The matrix of power relations enacted when racial solidities dissolve into the intimacies of desire in the first instance, are, in turn, potentised when the product of such acts of colonial penetration is herself ‘the lascivious hybrid woman’. In Australia, the ‘half-caste menace’ provoked racialist anxieties and governmental regulation in defence of the white nation well into the second half of the twentieth century, and, I argue, much regulatory technology was directed specifically at the containment and surveillance of girls and young women of mixed descent.

At Coranderrk, where the displaced Kulin survivors found refuge in 1863, the government’s most anxious projections, as I argue in chapters five and six, were directed at those girls of mixed descent who were corralled in the station’s children’s asylum. The practicalities of how their ambiguous bodies could best be exploited to ensure the elimination of the Aboriginal presence in the colony of Victoria preoccupied the Protection Board throughout the 1870s, 1880s and beyond. Anxieties about race, in this colonial context, as in so many others, are heavily interleaved with anxiety about the enigmatic feminine. As Ann Stoler reiterates, following Foucault,

sex – whether it be prohibited or mandated - provides ‘a dense transfer point’ of power and a fertile field of governance.  

Hybridity and Assimilation: the Local Context.
In south-eastern Australia, as Wolfe argues, the particular political economy of ‘settler colonialism’ required not the mobilization of indigenous labour, but the wholesale displacement of the indigenous population from the land. The ‘logic of elimination’ required that the Aborigines first be displaced from their valuable lands through ubiquitous acts of violence, sexual violation – which so often transmitted deadly new diseases - and imposed starvation, then herded into institutions and finally made to disappear altogether through assimilation into the margins of settler society where they would be rapidly and deliberately ‘bred out’.

So-called 'half-caste' children were in most cases simply unacknowledged by their engendering fathers and remained with their maternal kin – a practice in which white and black interests for once coincided. Claiming paternity provided no economic advantage, and moral suasion, leveraged by local and metropolitan philanthropists against colonial corruption, lacked effect. Sexual encounters were the principal cause of violence on the Port Phillip frontier despite the efforts of 'Protectors' engaged by the Colonial Office to prohibit such interactions.

While their biological fathers disowned them, the colonial state was quick to assert racially-posited rights over Aboriginal children of mixed descent. Throughout the study I argue that from the 1840s onwards such children were the focus of continuous moral, scientific and administrative interrogation, their racial location readily mutable in accordance with the variable contingencies of colonial policy. Excluded from the privileges reserved for those considered white, their heredity nevertheless acted as a conduit for state-sponsored operations of displacement on the pretext that the state had a responsibility to rescue these 'half white' subjects from the savageries of Aboriginal life. In chapter two I explore how claims that Aborigines committed infanticide on their ‘half-caste’ offspring crucially mediated the state’s claims over Aboriginal children, enabling the enforced seizure of children from their kin to be presented as an act of mercy rather than one of deliberate cultural destruction.

A few vocal metropolitan critics of colonial policy and a few local humanitarians jostled with an uneasy guilt about the destruction of the Aborigines but in general the much-touted, and sometimes heartfelt, philanthropic sensibilities of humanitarian colonists functioned to turn the tragedy of Aboriginal elimination into a self-reflexive theatre of mourning that cleared the way to a guilt-free future in a land made retrospectively *terra nullius*. In as much as humanitarianism served up capitalism and its imperial expansions in a more digestible form, it was always in imminent danger of compromising entanglement. In the colony of Victoria, philanthropic rhetoric was actively mobilised to break up chains of connection and continuity and to dislocate the colonised. The complicity of humanitarianism in the attempted elimination of the Aborigines of central Victoria is a theme that recurs throughout the history presented here.

By the 1860s children of mixed descent, and girls in particular, had become the principal objects through which the colonial government justified the round up of the Victorian clans, and their concentration on ‘mission stations’. The Board’s Inspector of Aborigines and its first superintendent at Coranderrk, John Green, focused his efforts on rounding up girls of mixed descent and isolating them from their Aboriginal kin in the children’s asylum located at the heart of the station complex. Humanitarians of the Presbyterian variety, like Green, evinced a moral distaste for inter-racial sexuality indistinguishable from that of ardent racialists. Such girls doubly compromised the colony’s racial solidities. Embodying the immoralities of their own production and forecasting future contaminations, their behaviours had to be rigorously disciplined and monitored.

While the girls remained children they could be relatively easily controlled but as they approached adulthood the problem of what to do with them loomed large on the Board’s horizons. In 1877 and again in 1881 the racial identity of Aborigines of mixed descent, particularly of adolescent females, was a compelling subtext, in a pair of enquiries conducted into the management of Coranderrk. Diane Barwick has examined these enquiries for what they tell about the resistance waged by the Kulin against the Board’s efforts to evict them from Coranderrk. My focus in chapters five and six is more directly on the subtext which explored how those girls could be, in

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39 Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism*, p.27.
essence, press-ganged to mother a generation of white offspring. It was they who by the early 1880s were identified as the primary vehicle for the elimination of the Aborigines from the settler nation through the process of ‘absorption’.

In the middle of the 1870s station administrators were instructed by the Board to record Aboriginal 'blood-lines'. This injunction recorded a growing public concern about the purported high cost of maintaining the ever-increasing number of 'half-castes' on the stations, on land coveted by settlers. As the fragile line between the races became progressively less clear, economic considerations collided with a moral panic over miscegenation as, with each generation, the 'visual coding of difference' progressively became more difficult to decipher. Maintaining the boundary between black and white required 'new forms of policing and surveillance' and stimulated the formulation of 'categories of identity beyond the visual (for example, categories of blood ...'). As Sara Ahmed has observed, '[a]mbiguous bodies that do not fit existing criteria for identification keep in place, or are even the condition of possibility for, the desire to tell bodies apart from each other through the accumulation of knowledge'41

It was the 1870s and 1880s that produced the progressively fractured categories of reiterative non-whiteness, quadroon and octoroon, even as covetous settlers called for the expulsion of those deemed ‘more white than black’ from government-funded stations and their ‘absorption’ into the settler economy.

Paradoxically, as Ahmed recognises, the ostensibly inclusivist Australian policy of ‘assimilation’ made the unearthing of concealed but indelible signs of race beneath the skin just as imperative as it was under the American ‘one drop of blood’ model in which the racial calculus was figured not on the extinction of the indigene as in Australia but on the maximizing of the slave labour force.42 Anderson, for example, notes that Tasmanians were simultaneously considered extinct and were subjected to active discrimination.43 In the Australian context, racial boundaries were progressively refracted to preserve the exclusivity of whiteness even as the logic of elimination proceeded to its final stage of declaring Aborigines of mixed descent ‘not-
Aboriginal’ as happened in Victoria with the passage of the Aborigines Act of 1886. Administratively classified as no longer ‘Aboriginal’, after 1886 those of mixed descent were equally, in popular settler sensibility, not white. As a character in Thomas Keneally’s *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* observes, even if Jimmy’s child was to be ‘three parts white’,

> his kid’ll be an eighth black and his a sixteenth. But it doesn’t matter how many times yer descendents bed down, they’ll never get anything that don’t have the tarbrush in it. And it'll always spoil 'em, that little bit of something else.\(^4\)

Similarly, Uday Mehta and Simon Gikandi argue that a whole range of exclusionary effects control the borders of whiteness ensuring that the non-white remain permanent subalterns in colonialism's culture, disbarred from the privileges attaching to ‘whiteness’.\(^4\) Those who are already white, Sara Ahmed observes, reserve to themselves ‘the enunciative power of ... telling the difference’.\(^4\) In the imperial age, science reserved to itself a particularly potent enunciative power. Before Mehta and Gikandi, E. J. Hobsbawm observed that since ‘liberalism had no logical defence against equality and democracy’, it erected ‘the illogical barrier of race’ and called up the ‘trump card’ of science to ‘prove that men were not equal’.\(^4\) In Victoria the careful recording of Aboriginal pedigrees from the 1870s onwards ensured that even after those of mixed descent were classified as non-Aboriginal, they would still be readily identifiable as not white.

**Theories and Practices.**

I begin this study of the linkages between anthropology and colonial Aboriginal policy in the late 1830s as philanthropic concern for the colonised faded, along with the influence of the emancipationist ‘Saints’ of Exeter Hall, into a concern to record the ethnographic peculiarities of the colonised before they passed into oblivion before the advance of civilization. In distant New South Wales that corruption of imperial moral agency was measured in the effective abandonment of the Port Phillip Protectorate by the early 1840s. Settlers and police, as E.M.Curr made clear, took no

\(^4\) Ahmed, “‘She'll Wake up One of These Days','” p. 89.
notice of the impotent railings of metropolitan humanitarians or their colonial lieutenants and colluded to suppress the evidence of massacres.\textsuperscript{48} Philanthropic rhetoric made little impression on the isolated, land-hungry and sex-starved male exiles from Britain’s social upheaval who formed the advance guard of Britain’s much vaunted civil society.

Not infrequently, as I argue in chapter one with particular reference to Major Lettsom’s hostage-taking raids on the Kulin encamped near Melbourne in 1840, governments camouflaged official murder and massacre in the language of a melancholy reluctance, by issuing what Macaulay (speaking of India) recognised as ‘despatches of hypocrisy’ and giving free hand in the field to those whom James Fitzjames Stephen later condemned as ‘the representatives of peace compelled by force.’\textsuperscript{49} To Homi Bhabha such official disavowals of responsibility stand as acts of ‘sly civility’, revealing the cunning through which empire claimed both its ethics and its dominion.\textsuperscript{50}

When Lettsom was sent south on his punitive raid in 1840, officially at least – though never in practice - the Aborigines of New South Wales were theorised as the bearers of rights pertaining to them as both British subjects and as ‘the original occupiers of the soil’. In the ensuing two decades those rights dear to liberal rhetoric were superceded by a new science of evolutionary priority that rationalised colonial dominion and cast doubt on the humanity of the ‘primitive races’. As the colonised transformed into bio-specimens, the mission stations - refuges of last resort for the displaced, starving and debilitated - doubled as ethnological zoos from where data about native capacity and peculiarity was transmitted through the ethnological and anthropological institutes and academies of Europe and the USA. As Sir John Lubbock observed in the 1870s, optimal organization and exploitation of the colonized required acute scrutiny of their habits and the workings of their bodies and

\textsuperscript{49} Quoted in Homi Bhabha, "Sly Civility," in \textit{The Location of Culture} (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p.100.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid. p.96.
minds.\textsuperscript{51} Ethnography was, as Wolfe rightly argues, ‘organic to the settler colonial project’.\textsuperscript{52}

In the Australian colonies, as elsewhere, administrators of native affairs doubled as field workers for the metropolitan ethnological academies. Victorian Aborigines Protection Board vice-chairman E.M. Curr produced a four-volume text on *The Australian Race* in 1886 and conducted a fierce rivalry with the Board’s first secretary Robert Brough Smyth, and with Alfred W. Howitt. The latter, the son of the British humanitarian William Howitt, was a Police Magistrate in charge of rations distribution to the Kurnai clans of East Gippsland, and sat on the bench of the 1877 *Royal Commission into the Condition of the Aborigines of Victoria*. Howitt contributed substantial anthropological data to Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877) on his way to becoming Australia’s first internationally-lauded anthropologist. Curr, who exercised a major influence over the BPA from 1875 to 1884, was a committed social evolutionist who regarded his wards as savages whose child-like intellect and moral degeneration necessitated their permanent segregation from settler-colonists.\textsuperscript{53} In contrast, Brough Smyth, who effectively ran the Board from 1860 until 1875, drew his intellectual inspiration from a pre-Darwinian age and was determined that the Aborigines could be trained to take their place in the colony as citizens. His two volume *The Aborigines of Victoria* of 1876 is a record of his hopes for the elevation of his wards and his frustration with their determined independence and resistance to his efforts to ‘domesticate’ them. All three were active members of the fledgling Royal Society of Victoria which formed part of a global ethnographic interchange that produced, transmitted and processed the raw data of the science of race.

The Australians had a particular notoriety amongst European ethnologists being regularly depicted as the most primitive of human kind, a status they shared


\textsuperscript{52} Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism* p.11.

\textsuperscript{53} The Social Evolutionist school, sometimes called the Social Darwinists, argued that the so-called primitive races were the superceded ancestors of modern mankind, living ‘survivals’ preserved in a cultural limbo in the unseen regions of the globe, and separated by both evolutionary process and by geographic marginality from the consummate Imperial European. Biologically and culturally the lesser races showcased the stages of European (and therefore human) evolution. This modernist conceit had clear ideological value for the colonial project. Its chief British protagonists were John Lubbock, Edward Burnett Tylor and John Ferguson McLennan. For a discussion of the term and its contradictory
with the people of the Kalahari Desert and the Andaman Islanders. They were deeply implicated in Europe's response to Darwin's thesis on the mechanics of evolution. When Thomas Huxley debated Richard Owen in the early 1860s over the question of where man and ape parted evolutionary company it was the Aborigines of Australia who featured as sentinels, representing the lowest form of humanity, suspended in the liminal space between the zoological orders. Bodily remains taken from burial grounds and directly from the Melbourne Hospital featured in European and American ethnological and anthropological museums and were subjected to minute examination and dissection in the interest of defining the line between modern and primitive, and between man and ape. Ian Anderson has noted the anguish of Tasmanian, Trugganana, lest she meet the same fate on her death.  

Visiting and local ethnologists regularly trekked out to the Aboriginal station 'Coranderrk' at Healesville to measure, photograph and observe the inhabitants. On more than one occasion the heads of the living were encased in gypsum to produce casts for exhibition at local and international Colonial Exhibitions. One cast, housed in the Melbourne Museum, still provocatively captures the individuating discomfort of its child-specimen.

The British Association for the Advancement of Science was, in a direct way, party to the establishment of Coranderrk. The BAAS's ethnographic circular, *Queries for Travellers*, first issued in 1841 by a committee that numbered both Darwin and Prichard amongst its personnel, and which particularly sought information about peoples deemed to be in imminent danger of extinction, stimulated the establishment of the Victorian *Select Committee on the Aborigines* of 1858.  

Coranderrk was established as a recommendation of that committee. Coranderrk was also on the empire-wide network of sites from which social reformer Florence Nightingale collected health statistics in 1863, from which Thomas Huxley commissioned anthropometric photographs in 1869 and at which members of the joint Admiralty and


54 Anderson, “I, the Hybrid,” p.6.

Royal Society's *Challenger* expedition observed, with an acute ethnographic eye, the natives playing cricket (and collected platypus specimens) in 1874.  

Structurally, from the 1860s onwards, the Australians feature in the foundational evidence of Social Evolutionism as the essential antipode to Europe’s climactic modernity. Wolfe describes a uni-directional flow from theory to practice in which ‘metropolitan anthropology was turned to local ends’, in which ‘the global scope of anthropological theory came to be whittled down for local appropriation’, and in which metropolitan text called up antipodean observation. Here I argue for a more tangled set of connections as have Ann Stoler, Frederick Cooper, Catherine Hall and Simon Gikandi. Colonists did appropriate metropolitan constructions but metropolitan anthropology also borrowed freely and creatively from ethnographic categories constructed in reference to local, colonial ends alone.

Two series of ethnographic projections explored in this thesis both originated in the ethnographic folklore of New South Wales and Port Phillip before finding their way into the inner recesses of European and American anthropology. The first relates to the alleged practice of infanticide of ‘half-castes’, the practical implications of which I consider in chapters 2 and 5. In chapter two I discuss the entanglement of the ethnography of ‘half-caste’ infanticide in the state’s incarceration of Aboriginal children in the 1850s and 1860s. In chapter five I show how allegations that the Australians customarily practiced infanticide placed them at the far end of the social evolutionary continuum constructed by L.H. Morgan and J.F. McLennan, and naturalised their extinction. I argue that close examination of the foundational texts on which the theories were based reveals how anthropology articulated with colonial power to manufacture scientific 'truths' that, sometimes contradictorily, warranted the resuscitative and curative interventions of colonial governance.

The other series stemmed from the ethnographic observations to which Prichard had alluded: that the Australians were dying out because the fertility of Aboriginal women was compromised by contact with white men. Paul Strzelecki's
theory of hybrid infertility, which Prichard and others interpreted as evidence of a
specific differential between the varieties of mankind, became the focus of sustained
debate in ethnological societies in Europe and America across the span of three
decades - despite clear indications from Australia of an increasing population of
Aborigines of mixed descent after 1850. Its notoriety coincided with the rise of
Darwinism and the racialist controversies of the United States Civil War period. It
drew the attention of Darwin, Huxley, Nott and Gliddon, Richard Cull, Alfred
Wallace, De Quatrefages, amongst others, and particularly of Paul Broca, Secretarie
Generale to the Société d'Anthropologie de Paris whose work On the Phenomena of
Hybridity in the Genus Homo drew substantially on the Strzelecki theory.59 Broca
identified the Australians as a race so lacking in evolutionary development that
amalgamations between them and Europeans would produce only 'non-eugenetic',
degenerative or wholly infertile offspring. Echoes of Strzelecki's theory continued to
infect anthropological and eugenic theory and practice across the span of a century.
In 1938-9, Tindale and Birdsell still searched for evidence of 'disharmonic results' in
their joint Adelaide University-Harvard Survey of the Half-Caste Problem in South
Australia.60

Projections that charged the Aborigines with the wanton killing of their infants
and with having an anatomy so peculiar that their fertility was compromised by
contact with white men, originated in the imagination of settler-colonists before they
found their way into the foundational precepts of theoretical social evolutionist
anthropology and circled back to the colony reified as scientific fact. Both projections
were underscored by settler and metropolitan anxieties about racial amalgamation,
degeneration and hybridity, yet each, contradictorily, pronounced the impossibility,
the non-existence, of the hybrid form. As I will argue in chapter three, by the 1870s,
the two theories occupied the entire explanatory field when it came to accounting for
the decline of the indigenous population of southern Australia so that the disposal of
one theory necessarily confirmed the truth of the other, leaving settler colonists free of
responsibility in the matter.

59 Paul Broca, On the Phenomena of Hybridity in the Genus Homo, trans. C.Carter Blake (London:
Longman,Green,Longman & Roberts, 1864)
Language and Predicament.

Colonialism’s rising anxiety with the implications of hybridity is closely recorded in the development of language. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1856, (8th edition) restricted its entry on hybridity to matters of botany and zoology. It defined *Hybrid* as a term deriving ‘from the Greek ... a mule’, denoting simply, ‘the offspring of animals or plants of different species’. Hybrids were ‘generally barren’ and, ‘nature seems to abhor such intermixtures’. By the 9th edition of 1881 however, the term had assumed a moral turn and its locus had moved to the human realm. The subject of hybridity had ‘of late years ... acquired a high degree of scientific interest in relation to the theory of descent’, wrote the author of the 1881 entry, George Romanes. *Hybrid* now connoted ‘an insult or outrage, with special reference to lust; hence an outrage on nature, a mongrel’. Upon those of mixed race, anthropology had imposed an interiority of moral disapprobation that made them the object of ‘systematic scrutiny and analysis’.\(^61\) They were endlessly dislocated and disinherited by labels – *half-caste, half-breed, mongrel, hybrid, mulatto, metis, mestizo* (and later, as the calculus of 'blood' became more intrusive) *quadroon* and *octoroon* - that undermined subjectivity and suspended them in a state of permanent liminality and contamination.

Such language still has acute resonance in a racially anxious opening to the twenty-first century in Australia. If India has cast off the shackles of colonization and found its voice, so that the hybridity (of culture) described by Bhabha connotes a doubling of possibility, Aboriginal Australia is still weighed down by the effects of a continuing daily struggle for survival in the face of resurgent assimilationist doctrines that still privilege social evolutionism and caste. In this context, as indigenous writers observe, 'hybridity' has none of the post-colonial pleasures associated with Bhabha's explorations. Here it continues to be utilised, as it was in Victoria in the 1880s, to undermine Aboriginal continuities, by portraying Aboriginality as compromised, suspicious, contaminated, inauthentic, and indeed, self-inflicted. Being ‘part-white’, reveals Lillian Holt, does not ‘alleviate the pain of being the target of racism’, or of being permanently *beside one’s self* as ‘whiteness permeates the psyche’.\(^62\)

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61 Anderson, "I, the Hybrid," p.4.
62 Lillian Holt, "Psst...I Wannabe White," in *Unmasking Whiteness: Race Relations and Reconciliation*, ed. Belinda McKay (Brisbane: Griffith University, The Queensland Studies Centre, 1999) pp. 39-44. Sara Ahmed makes the same point when she argues that ‘in the act of passing for an-
Aileen Moreton-Robinson is critical of contemporary anthropological methodologies which negate the negotiated changes and the continuities that colonialism has necessitated by privileging the ‘biologically pure’, and continuing to imply a ‘causal connexion between the dilution of blood and the loss of Aboriginality’. Moreton-Robinson argues that such essentialist notions preserve assimilationist logic and are in no way coeval with Aboriginal realities. She urges the historicisation and deconstruction of the concepts of caste, blood, race, hybridity as well as a refocusing of attention on the ‘particularity of white people’. Hybridity, she argues, is not a state of the indigenous body but remains a technology of colonialism that still negates the presence and the territorial rights of the colonised.

While the English scholar Paul Gilroy accuses researchers who still write histories of race of complicity ‘in the reification of racial matters’, Marcia Langton regards it as ‘a matter of basic civility that we should understand the historical development of ideas about race in Australia in order to avoid the real threat to civil society which racism has presented in the twentieth century’. Recently, too, Michael Dodson has called for an examination of how the idea that intra-family violence was integral to Aboriginal culture took hold. Like other indigenous leaders, he argues that such cultural impositions and the legacy of dysfunction they leave on Aboriginal communities, are part of the web of colonizing power. It is my hope that sifting through colonial ethnologies will contribute to the understanding of how colonial ‘knowledge’ continues to be imbricated with colonial power. Martin Nakata

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has recently provided an example of such an excava[tional reading of contaminated colonial texts through his reworking of the records of A.C.Haddon’s 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits. Nakata’s reappraisal of A.C.Haddon’s Torres Strait genealogies have, amongst other things, provided vital evidence to undermine settler claims that Aborigines customarily practiced infanticide. Nakata insists that the task of divesting western racial discourse of its power to ensnare necessitates a dialogue between Indigenous and non-indigenous scholars.

**A Short History of Coranderrk.**

The history of Coranderrk can be divided into four phases. The first attempts to segregate the Kulin people began in the 1840s in the long moribundity of the Port Phillip Protectorate. These efforts fell into abeyance during the first years of the gold rush to be renewed under the auspices of Anglican and Moravian mission societies in the mid-1850s. The Kulin clans were proactive in claiming land in line with the recommendations of the 1858-9 Select Committee on the Aborigines and some of their number eagerly took up residence at Coranderrk in 1863. Others preferred to remain beyond the control of the Board appointed ‘to watch over’ their ‘interests’. The Board's principal point of leverage over those who declined to come under its wing was its claimed duty of care over orphaned and neglected children, and particularly those ‘half-castes’ whom popular projection held to be in imminent danger of infanticide from their maternal kin. With the passage of the first Aborigines Act in 1869 the colonial government acquired the power to order the people onto the reserves and appropriated full control over their children.

In the second stage, from 1863 to 1875, under the direction of Robert Brough Smyth, the Board’s activities were premised on the idea that the Aborigines could be civilised and reconstituted as citizens of the settler nation. When administrative ineptitude and parsimony forced the Kulin to conduct a prolonged campaign of organised resistance for the retention of their rights to live on the station as free citizens and to work to make it self-supporting, their forthrightness was interpreted by

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a new generation of administrators as evidence of an innate incapacity for civilization and the notion of Aboriginal citizenship collapsed.

In the third phase of the station's history, with the Board under the leadership of E.M.Curr from 1875 to 1884, experiments in civilizing the Kulin were replaced by social evolutionist constructions of the Aborigine as irreclaimable primitives marooned in ancient time who required a regime of harsh and arbitrary discipline. By the late 1870s state surveillance and regulatory operations at Coranderrk had transformed the 'Goshen' promised to the Kulin in 1859, into a state training institution that sometimes resembled a penitentiary, in which Aborigines were drilled in skills and disciplines required by modern working class subjects yet kept segregated from white society.

Confounded, however, by the continuing evidence of Aboriginal competence, and under heavy pressure from settlers who coveted the Coranderrk lands and demanded the expulsion from the stations of those deemed inauthentic and parasitic on 'real Aborigines', in the late 1870s the Board inflicted a racialised divide between 'pure Aborigines' and their 'half-caste' kin. In 1886 the Kulin were finally granted the long-promised title to Coranderrk; and then almost immediately those of mixed descent were declared to be no longer Aborigines and expelled from the station. Only those deemed 'pure bloods', and bound for extinction, could rightly enjoy the beneficence of the 'philanthropic' state. In this fourth stage, the Board revisited discourses of Aboriginal improvement and civil advancement but it now articulated those discourses to the concept of race. Aboriginal advancement was now predicated not on cultural reformation but on biological amalgamation with Europeans and on the mandated 'breeding out' of Aboriginal 'blood'. In the disjunctural circuitries of nineteenth-century theories about race, the 'logic of elimination' could, as Wolfe observed, be advanced as well by 'breeding the colour out' as by fostering the natural demise of the superceded 'primitive' who was deemed to represent the living relic of modern man.69

As I will argue in the final chapters, the pernicious idea that the 'half-castes' could be divested of the final residue of rights to land by being made (not quite) white, originated in pragmatic settler cupidity in the 1860s but gravitated into the realms of science in the 1870s. In that decade the eminent French anthropologist Paul

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69 Wolfe, Settler Colonialism. Ch.1.
Topinard revived an arcane theory that the Australians were ancient Caucasians. Topinard’s thesis provided a scientific foundation for the Board’s determination to bring ‘finality’ to the colony’s Aboriginal ‘problem’ in the 1880s by restoring them to an original pure whiteness. By the early years of the twentieth century, I will argue, the theory had become reified as scientific fact, and remained so into the 1960s. Hybrid bodies, more than any others, became the principal objects through which the Board claimed a moral and scientific warrant to displace, incorporate and erase the Aborigines of Victoria from the colonial landscape in the name of philanthropy, paternal civility and evolutionary modernity. In this genocidal process, colonial practice and imperial anthropology continuously cross-fertilised and reinforced each other.

While the history of Coranderrk is a story of colonization and displacement, it is also a story of dogged staying-on in traditional country, of continuous resistance, and of the continuing production of culture in response to colonial circumstance. Imperial ethnological templates that described the Aborigines as the archetypal ‘lesser race’ were continuously challenged and reconfigured in the course of the daily negotiations between residents, station officers and administrators of the Central Board.

Texts and Contexts.
The history of the station has been extensively examined by Diane Barwick, whose monumental and posthumously edited Rebellion at Coranderrk, records the detailed cycle of colonization and defiant self-defence in the decade preceding the passage of the 1886 Aborigines Act which exiled those declared by the government to be inauthentic Aborigines from the station. In a preliminary, unpublished exploration of the history of the station (1968) Barwick argued that ‘racial’ division within the station community between ‘full-bloods’ and ‘half-castes’ had been implicated in the BPA’s closure of the station. Claims made by her in other work that station life raised the status and power of Aboriginal women in relation to Aboriginal men were criticised by Pat O’Shane in 1976. O’Shane argued rightly that Barwick had constructed a false divide between traditional and modern Aborigines, ‘full bloods’

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Barwick, Diane E., "Rebellion at Coranderrk: Seminar Paper Presented to Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra" (1968) Unpublished.
and ‘half-castes’, had failed to critically interrogate E.M.Curr’s ethnography, and had simply reiterated his self-interested projections on this score. Perhaps in response to O’Shane’s critique, Barwick’s expanded and revised text of 1998 argues instead that the claim of a split in the Kulin community was a spurious one promulgated by the Board with the deliberate intention of breaking their hold on the station. 71

Barwick’s close and detailed investigation of BPA records relating to Coranderrk constitutes an invaluable foundation for this study. 72 As I argue more fully in chapter five, my focus differs somewhat. While Barwick’s focus was on the minutely detailed relations between the Kulin and the various factions at the Board, this study situates events at Coranderrk in an imperial domain, as one node in the empire-wide reticulation of imperial power and knowledge. In addition, I focus more closely than Barwick on the Coranderrk dormitory project and the gendered turn of local constructions of race. In situating the actions and beliefs of the humanitarian supporters of the Kulin in an imperial field, this study also offers a more critical assessment of the way they colluded in the dispossession of the Kulin.

Aspects of the history of the station and of the rebellion have also been told by Michael Christie and Aldo Massola. 73 Christie’s Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86 still stands as a seminal survey of the effects of colonialism in Victoria and of Aboriginal resistance. In passing, he noted the particular emphasis paid by the Board to the round-up of Aboriginal girls of mixed descent and its efforts to regulate their sexual interactions. Massola’s Coranderrk: A History of the Aboriginal Station was a less detailed but equally critical account of the years from 1858 when the Kulin


72 A comprehensive bibliography of Barwick’s work is contained in Johanna Kijas, ”An ’Unfashionable Concern with the Past’: The Historical Anthropology of Diane Barwick,” Australian Aboriginal Studies 1 (1997), pp.48-60.

were promised a place to settle, to 1924 when Coranderrk was closed. In pursuing the Coranderrk story beyond 1886, Massola noted that in 1888 the Victorian Board proposed the regulation of Aboriginal marriages so as to encourage the marriage of Aboriginal women to white men. Christie and Massola concurred that by the 1880s the Board’s intentions were unashamedly ‘genocidal’.

Despite Massola’s identification of the genocidal intent of the ‘breeding out’ policies enacted by the Victorian Board in 1888, until recently, as Chesterman and Galligan note, surveys of Australian assimilation policies had failed to pay due attention to the Victorian experience as a prelude to later assimilation practices. Wolfe for example dated the beginnings of a ‘positive strategy whereby the products of ‘miscegenation’ were taken from their kin and incorporated into the settler domain’ to 1911 when Baldwin Spencer became the Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory. The 1997 report of the National Enquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Children from the Families Bringing Them Home also passed over the Victorian experience without attributing due weight to it as the template for later policies. More recently, however, Richard Broome observed that New South Wales ‘adopted the Victorian Act almost word for word in 1909’. Broome also reiterated, after Christie, that, as in Victoria, girls of mixed descent were the primary targets of the government agents who rounded up children under the New South Wales Act. Anna Haebich also notes that in the wake of the 1886 Act the Victorian BPA ‘opposed marriages between Aborigines and ‘half-castes’” in a measure designed to ‘sweep Aboriginal identity away’.

As I will argue, the Board had no legislated authority to regulate marriages in that manner, but from 1888 onwards it deployed its general powers to interfere in Aboriginal relationships by channeling those girls that it had ‘rescued’ and ‘trained’ into the hands of white men – thus completing the cycle of colonization. Archibald Meston, Queensland’s Protector

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75 Christie, Aborigines in Colonial Victoria p.205. Massola, Coranderrk. p.34.
77 Wolfe, Settler Colonialism pp.10,11,31.
79 Broome, Aboriginal Australians pp.86 and 87.
of Aborigines advocated similar exterminatory social engineering programs, by 1900. By highlighting the continuous gender bias of the Board’s concentration policies from the 1860s onwards, I argue that this last phase, in which girls were served up to white men, was not so much a new policy but merely the extension of earlier programs of moral policing. John Green may have couched his round up of girl children in the language of philanthropy, rescue and Protestant moralism rather than ‘finality’ and eradication, but Green’s intention was to regulate sexual relations and inhibit unregulated reproduction. His Presbyterian moral rhetoric represented one voice in a dialogue between white men about which white men should control the bodies of Aboriginal women. In each phase of this colonizing process female bodies were the essential objects against which colonial power was made actual.

A Cautionary Note.
In the early 1980’s Nancy Stepan cautioned scholars that ‘trying to correlate specific scientific arguments about race with events in the history of racism, nationalism or imperialism too often results in histories that are vague and do injustice to the complexities of the scientific issues involved’. The connections between the appearance of new theories of race and their manifestation in colonial practice are indeed often complex and indirect. Obscure ideas hatched in one decade reappear in another incarnation years later, or the practical concerns of one time become theorised only decades later. The obscure idea stemming from philological tracings in the 1840s that the Australians were distant Caucasians (which prompted Charles Sturt to see ancient freemasons in the deserts of South Australia) reappeared in the late 1860s in Huxley’s ruminations on race, and in Robert Brough Smyth’s attempts to explain Aboriginal competence, before it assumed the status of fact and gave theoretical foundation to the absorption policies of Australian governments. Degenerationists continued to hold sway at the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines into the 1870s, long after such ideas had been superceded by Darwinian theories. Strzelecki’s mysterious law of Aboriginal sterility of 1845 was roundly discounted before it was revived and raised into a crucial fact of social evolutionism. The idea that Aborigines customarily despatched newborns, particularly those of mixed descent, has infected European attitudes to Aborigines from the late eighteenth

81 Ibid., 136-7.
century when Malthus took it up, until 1999 when it reappeared in the Federal Court of Australia amongst the rationalizations brought by the Commonwealth to defend the institutionalization of Aboriginal children in the 1950’s. While the connections are sometimes attenuated and obscured, they can nevertheless be reconstructed. As I argue here, the inflation of colonial prejudice into scientific ‘fact’, by whatever indirect route, serves only to emphasise how inseparably complicit are colonial power and knowledge.

The Chapters, Briefly.

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 follows the transmutation of Evangelical philanthropy into ethnographic survey: from a concern with raising the colonised into Christian subjects of empire, to a concern with recording their ethnological peculiarities before they passed into extinction. The records of the Protectorate period indicate too clearly how humanitarian rhetoric was deployed as a dissimulatory device to conceal the dire effects of the invasion. Chapters two and three trace the passage through European, American and antipodean ethnology of a pair of theories about infanticide and hybrid sterility that attributed the decline of the Aborigines to Aboriginal biology and culture and positioned the Australians as the evolutionary counter-weight to the imperial Europeans. Together these theories buttressed the transformation of the Aborigines from subject-citizen to specimen and underwrote their segregation onto Aboriginal stations.

Chapter four acts as an interlude which follows the Kulin from their first encounters with Europeans, the exile of the starving, enervated and despairing survivors from the environs of Melbourne, their hopeful regrouping at the Acheron station and their settlement at Coranderrk in 1863. The chapter serves to highlight Aboriginal resistance to the invasion, Aboriginal endeavours to accommodate the new circumstances that confronted them, and their profound determination to remain in place at Coranderrk despite the Board’s attempts to move them on again after 1868.

The fifth chapter focuses on the early days at Coranderrk, on Brough Smyth’s attempts to reconcile his views of Kulin competence in the modern world with a

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growing body of anthropological intelligence which declared them so primitive as to be beyond salvation. In this chapter I also consider the gendering of the colony’s racial categories that resulted when pragmatic economic considerations intersected with panics about racial and moral ‘hygiene’. Under the philanthropic John Green, the ‘rescue’ of Aboriginal children, and their segregation in the Coranderrk Children’s Asylum, was premised on a Calvinist moral agenda that regarded ‘half-caste’ girls as the very embodiment of moral dissipation. Children were frequently secured for the asylum by police intervention.

The final chapter follows the battle between the Kulin and the Board for control of the station in the 1870s and 1880s. It was a battle to defend their rights to live as free men and women on the last of their homelands, and for control over the generation of children that the Board had forced into the children’s asylum. Having separated the children from their kin, the Board pressed on with its campaign to ‘bring finality’ to the Aboriginal presence by declaring Aborigines of mixed descent to be no longer Aborigines, and by implementing strategies that would ensure that the young women birthed ‘non-Aboriginal’ children. Anthropology, as always, provided the architects of the project with a scientific warrant. At the heart of this history is European control over indigenous female sexuality and reproduction and anxieties about the presence and implication of hybrid bodies produced through the penetration of power across that sexual and racial grid.

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Marsh, "'Lost', 'Stolen' or 'Rescued'?" *Quadrant* (June 1999), pp15-18; Peter Howson, "Rescued from the Rabbit Burrow: Understanding the ‘Stolen Generation’", *Quadrant* (June 1999), pp.10-14.
CHAPTER ONE

From Philanthropy to Race: 1835-1848.

For a brief period in the 1830s the Evangelical 'Saints', who had been the powerhouse of British politics from the 1790s to the 1820s, once more directed public debate in Britain. These Protestant fundamentalists, who looked to Wilberforce’s *Practical Christianity* with its fearsome God and its concern for the liberties of man, thundered against slavery and finally achieved its abolition in 1833. The following year they turned their sights on the moral corruptions that accompanied British colonialism across the globe. In July 1834, at the behest of the new Evangelical leader Thomas Fowell Buxton, the House of Commons declared itself deeply impressed

> with the duty of acting upon the principles of justice and humanity in the ... relations of this country with the native inhabitants of its colonial settlements, of affording them protection in the enjoyment of their civil rights, and of imparting to them that degree of civilization, and that religion, with which Providence has blessed this nation.²

Not for Britain 'the tyranny of Holland' or the 'ferocious bigotry' of imperial Spain.³ This was to be an empire built on shared wealth, Christianity and philanthropy.

By the end of the following decade that grand imperial projection of perpetual remediation and universal Christian brotherhood had begun to unravel, to be replaced by a project in which relations of power were mediated through the unbreachable biological differentials of race. By the 1850s, race had become the most fundamental category through which imperial power was deployed. Here I trace the transformation of the

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Kulin people in the colony of Port Phillip from the salvageable subjects of Evangelical and missionary desires, to the bio-racial specimens of evolutionary biology over whom Britons exercised natural mastery.

A year after Buxton’s resolution of 1834, the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines (British Colonies) began a lengthy interrogation into the effects of British colonization on the ‘natives’ of Britain’s expanding colonial network. The Port Phillip Protectorate was commissioned in 1837 as a direct result of the recommendations of that committee. I begin this study with a consideration of the proceedings of the Select Committee, before moving to the colonial domain in search of the practical effects of such grand humanitarian gestures. If colonial natives were theorised in London as confreres in a racially impartial empire, in New South Wales and Port Phillip they were regarded by many colonists as little more than vermin who competed for sustenance with the settlers’ sheep. The ‘Protectors’ sent from London to protect their rights were held in utmost contempt by settler and administrators alike. Here I follow the slippage from the metropolitan rhetoric of Pax Britannia to the colonial terror that was its unlovely antipodean offspring. I argue that the comfortable rhetoric of philanthropy that embellished official directives to frontier agents of the Crown not only camouflaged but enabled acts of terror by presenting them as exceptional and necessary suspensions of civility. Throughout the whole of the period surveyed in the thesis, from 1834 to 1888, humanitarian rhetoric covered the traces of the dispossession of the Aborigines of Victoria.

In the latter half of the chapter I follow the decline of popular metropolitan interest in ‘native’ welfare and rights and its replacement by the late 1830s by a fascination with the ethnographic peculiarities of the colonised. The sort of self-flagellatory guilt that had caused the Evangelicals to look to their collective consciences over the treatment of the natives of empire had given way to an accommodation with imperial destiny and a prurient desire to know the natives now collected under Britain’s flag unto their most intimate recesses. The early-Victorian transformation of the colonised from subjects whom imperial agents could make civil and Christian into ethnological specimens is

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crucial to the subsequent exclusion of the Aborigines of Port Phillip from the Australian polity then in formation.  

Crisis and Restoration.
On the last day of July 1835, the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Colonies) began what stretched into a two-year enquiry into the effects of British colonialism on native peoples across the globe. Amongst the first witnesses to be questioned by the humanitarians on the committee was the Anglican Archdeacon of Sydney, W.G. Broughton. Broughton testified that the natives of NSW were degraded, rather than raised up, by colonization, that the population was rapidly decreasing and that those who survived in the environs of Sydney were reduced to begging. All efforts to ameliorate their condition had failed. They took a passing interest in Christian belief and ritual but few had become Christian converts. They were a ‘quick, intelligent people’ whose children were as easily educated as the children of the colonists, but the British had found it ‘impossible to excite any want in them’ sufficient to induce them ‘to remain under a state of restraint’. They were unwilling to either settle in one location or leave their children to the care of the alien newcomers.

If the colonists had nothing to excite the interests of the Aborigines, the Aborigines had one ‘commodity’ that white men coveted almost as much as they coveted Aboriginal land: women. So many women had been debauched by convict settlers -'encouraged by many whose superiority in knowledge ought to have been directed at some less unchristian purpose' – that those who still survived were grossly infected with venereal disease and addicted to alcohol. Unless something could be done to save them,

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6 Broughton to “Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), 1836”, 3 August, 1835, letter, Minutes of Evidence p.15.
Broughton observed, they seemed destined to become 'extinct'. The reverend John Beecham, of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, confirmed that ‘White men on the spot, generally think that the black will become extinct within the colony'.

Defending colonial civility against Buxton's insinuation that the Aborigines had been deliberately exterminated, Broughton voiced a collective antipodean amnesia when he argued that 'without any absolute ill usage of them' and 'without outrage practised against them', they simply seemed to 'decay' when they came into contact with Europeans. This disavowal of colonists’ agency in Aboriginal decline, and the concomitant implication that the Australians carried some inherent inability to survive in the presence of Europeans, set a template for a century and more of European imperial rationalization.

While Buxton fulminated against the moral depravities of Britain’s corrupt colonists who heaped ‘calamity on the heathen and savage nations’, and charged that the ‘most acceptable boon to the natives would be to be left in ... barbarism and independence’, so that they could enjoy what belonged by right to them alone, safe from further ‘intrusions’ by Europeans, the leaders of Britain’s three principal mission societies determinedly carved out a more pragmatic imperial enterprise. In contrast to Buxton, the missionary leaders argued that it was only by expanding the missionary project that the Aborigines could be saved – from white men, from their own appalling ignorance, and from the brutality that was quintessentially expressed in the natives’ customary abuse of their own women.

To that effect, Dandison Coates of the Church Missionary Society presented the committee with an account of the appalling conditions under which that society’s new missionary at Wellington Valley, NSW, laboured. The account, from the journal of missionary William Watson, related ‘to the illicit intercourse of Europeans with the female Aborigines’ which, Coates told the Committee, was ‘a source of the most

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7 Broughton to ibid. 3 August, 1835, Question 243, Minutes of Evidence p.17.
8 Beecham to ibid. 6 June 1836, Q 4320, Minutes of Evidence p. 498.
9 Broughton to ibid. 3 August 1835, Q.243-5, Minutes of Evidence p.17.
afflictive and distressing consequences’ and led ‘beyond all question, to infanticide’ because of ‘the obnoxiousness to the natives of the half-caste child’.  

Watson’s journal detailed the prevalence and effects of venereal disease amongst Aborigines in contact with convict stockkeepers in the district. ‘I often think’, he wrote early in 1833,

that to have our residence in a charnel-house would be scarcely more disgusting than our employment here. We have generally some sick, and occasionally from half a dozen to a dozen at the same time apparently destined to an early dissolution; filthy and corrupt in their bodies from the ravages of the venereal, covered with sores … and unwilling to move from their place on any account, or to do anything for themselves’.

‘Prostitution’, lamented Watson, in a displacement of agency from white to black, was practiced ‘to an extent that finds no parallel in the history of savage nations’. ‘No class of human beings on the earth can possibly be in a more wretched and pitiable condition than the aboriginal females of New Holland’. They were ‘prostituted to all the youths in the company’ and if they were ‘sometimes compelled to yield to the brutal desires of white men against their will’, it was Aboriginal men who sanctioned the trade. One convict stockkeeper near the mission had traded handkerchiefs for the use of ‘three or four of these young girls, from eight to twelve years of age, with whom he lives in a state of adultery.’ Watson had observed a newborn child that ‘was literally covered with that most loathsome of all diseases’.

As Buxton pressed the point that ‘the seizure of the territory belonging to the natives, by European governments, has a tendency to produce moral evil, and…to diminish the population’, the mission society heads instead argued that a mission-led colonialism would ‘improve the habits of the people’ both colonist and colonised, and would stimulate ‘civilization, education and commerce’. John Beecham, secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, explained the case at length. Conceding that colonization was now carried out ‘on a principle of injustice and wrong’, with lands upon which the natives had ‘a prior right’ being ‘disposed of as though they were waste and uninhabited regions’, that state of affairs might yet be redeemed. Beecham argued that

11 Coates to “Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), 1836”, 6 June 1836, Q 4280, Minutes of Evidence p.486.
12 “Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), 1836”, Q.4288, pp487 ff., Watson’s Diary.
13 ibid. p. 489: Watson’s Diary entries for 14 December 1833, 10 March 1834.
14 “Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), 1836”, Minutes of Evidence Q.4345-7, p.504.
the suffering natives were ‘entitled to all the compensation which it is in our power to make.’ He could, he concluded (presenting an equation with a truly breathtaking exchange rate)

see one and only one way by which our country can now place itself on something like the broad ground of justice, and make compensation to the natives whom we have injured; and that is by furnishing them with the means of Christian instruction and social improvement. Now that, I think, will be something like a fair remuneration for the loss of their lands…[N]othing less than this would discharge the debt of justice.\textsuperscript{15}

In chorus, Ellis, Coates, and Buxton, who had clearly pressed his rhetorical argument beyond its practical limits, applauded this moral sleight of hand. With Beecham’s equation, the British nation could be morally redeemed whilst continuing the profitable adventure that was the colonial project. And in the colonies, white men could continue, as before, to raise Aborigines from the base savagery sign-posted by Watson’s vivid descriptions of ‘prostitution’ and ‘infanticide’.

When the Select Committee handed down its report in February 1837, it affirmed ‘that the native inhabitants of any land’ had a plain, sacred, and ‘incontrovertible right to their own soil’.\textsuperscript{16} But, Buxton argued, when that right had already been usurped, it could not practically be reconstituted. Instead, Buxton proffered the rights of law. Since the Aborigines of New South Wales came, as a result of that usurpation, ‘within the allegiance of the Queen’ they were due the full protection of the law and any affront to life or property by settlers or any ‘appeal to arms for adjusting controversies with any part of the primitive race, exposes those by whom blood may be shed to the same responsibility, and to the same penalties, as if the sufferers were white persons’.\textsuperscript{17}

With a rhetorical flourish, designed principally for the edification of the domestic audience, Buxton warned that

He who has made Great Britain what she is will inquire at our hands how we have employed the influence He has lent to us in our dealings with the untutored and defenceless savage; whether it has been engaged in seizing their lands, warring upon their people, and transplanting unknown disease, and deeper degradation...or whether we have...informed their ignorance, and invited and afforded them the opportunity of becoming partakers of that civilization, that\textit{innocent commerce}, that knowledge and that faith with which it has pleased a gracious Providence to bless our own country.\textsuperscript{18}

\footnote{15}{ibid. Q4367, pp515-6.}
\footnote{16}{Commons, "Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) 1837," Report, p.5}
\footnote{17}{ibid. Report p.82-3.}
\footnote{18}{Commons, "Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) 1837," Report, p.75-6}
The colonial project, condemned by Buxton as ethically untenable a year earlier, now emerged as a moral imperative for a civil nation. Providence itself demanded the intervention of humanitarians to protect the natives from convict settlers and to raise them up from their own ignorance and degradation.

**Philanthropy and Terror**

The committee's principal practical recommendation for the colony of NSW was the establishment of an Aboriginal Protectorate to operate in the newly-invaded District of Port Phillip. The idea had been proposed by the Presbyterian colonist John Dunmore Lang and taken up by the Wesleyan missionary leader, Beecham. The officers of the Port Phillip Protectorate were to stand between settlers and Aborigines, defending the rights of the latter under British law. They would learn the native languages, acquaint themselves with the intricacies of Aboriginal culture, assist missionaries with the education of the young, and introduce them to European commodities that would draw them into the networks of imperial commerce. The Protectors would carry the commission of magistrate and would be empowered to impose the full weight of British law on white miscreants. They would also furnish the Colonial Office with 'accurate statistical information' relating to their wards. Through them, the Aborigines were to be converted into civil, Christian and commercial subjects of the Crown, members of the global Christian enterprise, *Pax Britannia*. There would be hierarchies, with Englishmen guiding the 'lesser races' to moral and spiritual salvation and civilization, but there would also be brotherhood.

In colonial Port Phillip and Victoria, as across the empire, appeals to 'philanthropy' rendered the realities of territorial occupation and Aboriginal decline opaque. This obfuscation was a process in which colonists and metropolitan administrators colluded. John Batman, for example, who shipped sheep and a company of settlers across Bass Strait from Van Diemen’s Land in June 1835, deployed the

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19 Commons, "Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) 1836," letter of John Dunmore Lang, Attachment to Minutes of Evidence, p.683.

language of philanthropy, evangelicalism and prior native land title to argue that his claim on 600,000 acres of Port Phillip had proceeded upon an equitable principle, that my object has not been possession and expulsion or what is worse extermination, but possession and civilization and the reservation of the annual tribute to those who are the real Owners of the soil.21

In April 1836, as Buxton’s Select Committee prepared to begin its second session, Batman’s London agent, George Mercer, also stressed that the settlement was founded upon ‘principles of conciliation and civilization, of philanthropy, morality, and temperance’ and, in contrast to Van Diemen’s Land, would not see settlers ‘exterminating’ the natives.’22 Batman’s disingenuous appeal was summarily dismissed by the Evangelical Glenelg at the Colonial Office on the grounds that the claim was to land that the Crown had already usurped. More pragmatic than Buxton, Glenelg nevertheless conceded that it was unrealistic to seek to ‘repress the spirit of adventure and speculation’ on which the nation’s wealth and industry rested. Even as the antipodean governors warned that they were unable to protect the natives from the violence of settlers on the expanding colonial frontiers of New South Wales, Glenelg turned a blind eye as the settlement at Port Phillip expanded.23 The notion of the philanthropic empire was everywhere hedged around with such permissive equivocations, and colonial practice exhibited little connection with the rhetoric pronounced in the remote imperial metropolis.

Everywhere, a similar atrophying occurred as directives laced with good intent and philanthropic sentiment progressed down the line of command from Colonial Office to colonial governor to colonial agent. When the 1836-7 survey expedition into Australia Felix led by Major Thomas Mitchell was revealed to have murdered seven Aborigines in one party, including women and children, and shot and killed others along the route, Governor Sir Richard Bourke defended his own position by assuring the colonial Office that Mitchell had been instructed to conciliate the Aborigines and to exhibit towards them

‘the utmost forbearance, even in the event of a hostile demonstration’, and to abstain
‘from the use of Fire-Arms unless the safety of the Party should absolutely require it’. In its turn the Colonial Office colluded with Bourke's protection of ‘Mitchell's well-
 earned reputation’, lamely reiterating at the same time that the Aborigines were subjects of the Queen and that ‘[t]o regard them as Aliens with whom a War can exist, and against whom H.M's troops may exercise belligerent rights, is to deny that protection to which they derive the highest possible claim’. But as land-hungry squatters flooded into Port Phillip in Mitchell’s wake, interracial violence became a regular event. Behind the squatters came the machinery of government in the form of Superintendent Lonsdale and a squad of mounted police, and a plan to encourage the Aborigines to leave their children at George Langhorne’s Anglican mission station to be fed, educated and made Christian.

Late in 1838 the four Assistant Protectors, William Thomas, Charles Sievewright, James Dredge and Edward Stone Parker, appointed in England following the recommendation of Buxton’s Select Committee, arrived in Sydney with their wives and children to join Chief Protector George Augustus Robinson as the defenders of Aboriginal rights. Robinson was fresh from overseeing the exile of the surviving Aborigines of Van Diemen’s Land to Flinders Island, but his assistants were all new chums, three of them schoolmasters. Only Sievewright, once a soldier, was experienced in the rigours of outdoor life. The Protectors disembarked in Sydney late in 1838 amidst calls by the NSW legislature for the abandonment of the Protectorate and with the colony in a state of unrest over Governor George Gipps’ determination to prosecute to the full extent of the law eleven convicts and ticket-of-leave men who had massacred a party of

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23 Glenelg to Bourke, ibid. p.380.
28 Aborigines -some said 70 – at Myall Creek on the northern plains.\textsuperscript{27} The inaugural meeting of the NSW branch of the British and Foreign Aborigines Protection Society in October 1838, instigated by Robinson and addressed by the missionary Threlkeld and the newly arrived Assistant Protector Edward Stone Parker, deteriorated into uproar when Richard Windeyer, legal advocate for the Myall Creek defendants, objected to that society's defence of Aboriginal rights over those of colonists.\textsuperscript{28} As a member of the NSW legislature, Windeyer was later influential in decommissioning the despised Protectorate.\textsuperscript{29}

Clashes between black and white were also prevalent in Port Phillip by the middle of 1838.\textsuperscript{30} In April 1838 news was received in Sydney of the killing by Aborigines of eight members of George Faithfull's overlanding party at the Ovens River. Gipps alienated colonists when he made it clear that in his opinion the most common cause of 'outrages' was 'the forcible retention by white men of women belonging to the Aboriginal Tribes' and reissued a government notice forbidding white men to barter for Aboriginal women, first posted in September 1837. Nevertheless, Gipps despatched mounted police and a magistrate all carefully instructed on the legal rights of the Aborigines.\textsuperscript{31} Such directives were interpreted as an attack on the rights of settlers to defend themselves. In July, Port Phillip settlers petitioned Gipps to conduct all out 'war' against the Aborigines.\textsuperscript{32}

In this climate of animosity between government and settlers, the Port Phillip Protectors began the invidious task of defending the rights of the Aborigines. From the western districts Assistant Protector Sievewright reported in March of 1839 the murder of an undisclosed number of Aborigines whose bodies were burned to conceal the

\textsuperscript{27} Gipps to Glenelg, 19 December 1838, Despatch No. 200; Gipps to Glenelg, 17 July 1839, Despatch No.201; \textit{HRA Series I}; Vol. XIX, pp.700-5. Russell Blanch, \textit{Massacre : Myall Creek Revisited} (Delungra, N.S.W.: Grah Jean Books, 2000).
\textsuperscript{29} Windeyer chaired the NSW Legislative Council “Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines”, 1845: NSW Parliamentary Papers, Session 1845, pp. 937-1001.
\textsuperscript{31} Gipps to Glenelg, 27 April 1838, Despatch No.68, \textit{HRA Series I}; Vol. XIX, p397-8.
\textsuperscript{32} Gipps to Glenelg, 21 July 1838, Despatch No. 115, \textit{HRA Series I}; Vol. XIX, p.508-10.
offence. Sievewright recorded that '[t]he sentiments of the ... squatters throughout this district are hostile to the Aborigines, to extermination'. From the Loddon in June, Parker reported that convict stockkeepers were so hostile that they were determined to ‘shoot any black man, woman or child that they could fall in with’.\(^{33}\) All the squatters’ stations had arsenals, one including a 'swivel gun' intended for use against Aborigines. Some clans, noted Chief Protector Robinson, were already 'extinct' by 1841.\(^ {34}\) The practical sentiments of the frontier bore no resemblance to the humanitarian theories of the metropolis.

Sensibilities of class even in this remote colony ensured that ‘stockkeepers’ would bear the brunt of accusations of violence and sexual abuse of Aborigines, but their employers were equally implicated. At Portland Bay, Henty, like all other squatters in the district, relied upon Aboriginal labour, pastoral, domestic and sexual, yet he told Robinson that the natives ‘should be exterminated’.\(^ {35}\) Another well-to-do settler, Dr Kilgour, freely admitted to Robinson that many bands had already been annihilated by shooting parties which charged into native encampments whereupon ‘the natives would be terrified into an offensive position’ leaving their assailants ‘able to swear the natives made the first attack’.\(^ {36}\) The local Police Magistrates, Blair and Tyers, shared the local sentiment that, being barely human, it was no crime to kill them.\(^ {37}\) Years later, E.M.Curr, by then a member of the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, but a squatter on the Murray in 1841, also recollected the disdain with which settlers and police regarded the 'philanthropic' sentiments of the government and the Protectorate.\(^ {38}\) Stockkeepers, recorded Robinson, 'are veritably encouraged by their employers to destroy the blacks'.

\(^{33}\) Assistant Protectors Parker and Sievewright to Robinson, in : “Papers Relating to Victorian Aboriginal Peoples, 1839-43”; Dixson Library MS (microfilm) CY3898 Add 89.
\(^{36}\) Robinson, Sunday 2 May 1841, ibid.; p.179.
‘Old hands’ were preferred to emigrants as the conscience of the former was ‘seared and they will meet [their employers’] wishes in destroying the blacks’. 39

Many Aborigines were employed under duress - forced into a terrifying proximity to men who readily exterminated their kin - their own economy having been desecrated. Young girls in particular, Robinson found, were kidnapped, or sometimes traded, as a matter of course and pressed into sexual service by men whom he designated as 'white savages'. 40 Such trade, as Gipps well knew, was the root of much of the violence and hostility that characterised the frontier. One squatter, Sievewright recorded, shot Aboriginal women found at his camp because, as he saw it, they infected his stockkeepers with the venereal, rendering them less fit for labour. 41 As Miriam Dixson observed, sexual relations in Australia were from the beginning 'grossly antipathetic to women' and Aboriginal women in particular became the victims of men already brutalised by poverty and convict disciplinary regimes. 42

For more than a decade, from 1838 to 1849, declamatory missives from the Colonial Office purporting to uphold the rights of the Aborigines of Port Phillip were directed through the impotent Protectorate, sabotaged as it was not only by colonists’ hostility but by the refusal of either the colonial or the metropolitan government to overturn the directive that Aboriginal evidence was not permissible in court. 43 Between the self-promoting pronouncements of good intent at the Colonial Office and the exterminatory practices of the frontier, there was a decay of moral application which serves to illustrate, as Homi Bhabha has argued, the incompatibility of empire and liberal ethics. Colonialism, he argues, ‘puts on trial the very discourse of civility within which representative government claims its liberty’. 44 While colonial despatches prescribing governance from afar enabled crucial slippage from good intention to bad results, this

40 Ibid. 30 May 1841, 23 June 1841, pp. 36, 58.
41 Sievewright to Robinson 17 April 1839, “Papers Relating to Victorian Aboriginal Peoples 1839-43”, Dixon Library MS (Microfilm) CY3898 Add 89.
43 For detailed histories of the Port Phillip Protectorate see Christie, Aborigines in Colonial Victoria , Jan Critchett, A "Distant Field of Murder": Portland Bay District Frontiers, 1834-1848 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988).
was not the product so much of intentional hypocrisies whose shameful discontinuities could be amended, argues Bhabha, as an inherent product of the ‘form of multiple and contradictory belief that emerges as an effect of the ambivalent, deferred address of colonialist governance’. At each point of reissue, despatches were qualified, diluted and renegotiated so that the impossible ideals of the metropolitan nation became attuned to the imperatives of colonial administration. Macaulay similarly observed, speaking of India, that declarations expressive of ‘just and humane sentiments’ collapsed into ‘despatches of hypocrisy’: ‘being interpreted, [they] mean simply, “Be the father and the oppressor of the people; be just and unjust, moderate and rapacious”’. Britain was not alone in actively exploiting this process of moral shape-shifting. De Tocqueville observed a similar dissolution of humanitarian intent in the United States. The Americans, he wrote in 1835, had advanced their continental empire ‘legally, philanthropically … and without violating a single great principle of morality in the eyes of the world.’ It was, he wrote, ‘impossible to destroy men with more respect for the laws of humanity’. One example will serve to illustrate the operations of this process of ethical decay in Port Phillip.

In July 1838 Gipps informed Glenelg at the Colonial Office that in the light of the parlous state of relations between white and black in NSW, he had instructed the police that where particular Aboriginal offenders could not be apprehended or identified, ‘other individuals not exceeding the number of men murdered, should be secured including if possible some of the Chiefs’ to be held as ‘temporary hostages’. While Glenelg reminded Gipps of his obligation to uphold ‘principles of humanity’, he nevertheless permitted the order to stand. The licence to take hostages unleashed a wave of officially sanctioned terror against which the Protectors could mount no defence.

Late in August, 1840, Gipps instructed Major Lettsom of the 80th Regiment to proceed south to the Ovens River where stations were under attack from Aborigines in reprisal for the murder of one of their own. Lettsom’s orders contained the standard warning that ‘the Black Natives of New South Wales are in every aspect to be considered

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45 ibid. p.95.
46 Quoted in ibid. p.95.
as subjects of the Crown and not as aliens against whom the Queen’s Troops may
exercise belligerent rights’, and Lettsom was instructed to ascertain whether the initial
difficulty had arisen from settlers detaining Aboriginal women against their will. Yet he
was also authorised, in words directly lifted from Glenelg’s return despatch, to ‘detain as
hostages for the good conduct of any tribe, a reasonable number of individuals belonging
to it, if the actual perpetrators of any outrage cannot be apprehended and in the selection
of such hostages…to endeavour to secure the persons of some of the Chiefs of the tribe or
of the sons of the Chief’. 49

Lettsom was also supplied with an anonymous paper entitled The Blacks, which
detailed how emancipist stockkeepers, ‘consider killing blacks no murder … [and] put
the Blacks to death when [they] can get a chance’. The paper described how frontier
violence, and prejudice, escalated:

the Blacks then kill the Whites and generally eat them, and then after that probably a great number
are destroyed immediately in the vicinity, this leads to more murders of Whites and more
slaughter of Blacks till they gradually disappear from the country with the exception of a few
miserable crawlers about the huts. 50

The anonymous author proposed that settlers be given summary powers to flog or hang
Aborigines on the spot. Whatever Gipps’ intention in providing this essay amongst
Lettsom’s instructions, it can only have reinforced his prejudices and extended the degree
of licence with which he conducted his expedition.

Unable to locate the accused Aborigines, Lettsom took one hostage at the Ovens
River and pushed on to Melbourne where members of the Kulin clans were gathered at an
encampment just north of the town. In April, some 400 Kulin had massed there for
ceremonial and business purposes – and in the hope of pressuring La Trobe into
distributing rations to them - and had refused to leave despite La Trobe’s persistent
efforts to press Assistant Protector William Thomas to move them on.

The camps were visited nightly by men from the township, and drunkenness,
vioence and sexual traffic prevailed. While such congress caused deep resentment

48 Gipps to Glenelg, 21 July 1838, Despatch No. 115; Glenelg to Gipps, 21 December 1838, Despatch No.
49 Gipps to Lettsom, August 28 1840; “Papers Relating to Victorian Aboriginal Peoples 1839-43”, Dixon
Library MS 89 (Microfilm) CY 3898 Add 89, N5214, 31 August 1840. Gipps to La Trobe, 29 August 1840
in A.G.L. Shaw, Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence 1839-1846 (Melbourne: Melbourne University
amongst the Kulin, the trade in women provided income and goods without which they could no longer survive. Others came to gawp at the Kulin ceremonies, despite Kulin efforts to keep them at bay. \textsuperscript{51} William Hull, for example, later recounted that the Boon wurrung clan head, Derimut, had attempted to spear him when he approached a corroboree on the edge of the township.\textsuperscript{52}

While La Trobe objected to their disorderly presence on the outskirts of the town, the gathered clans provided a useful labour pool in a town 'suffering dreadfully from a want of labourers of all descriptions'.\textsuperscript{53} Sometimes, however, such exchanges led to violent confrontations, as in April 1840 when Bor-rer-bor-rer assaulted a woman who had cheated him out of the bread she had promised when he chopped wood for her, and in May 1840 when two to three hundred reportedly massed at Bolden's station six miles from Melbourne and threatened to burn down his hut, making it clear that 'they did not care for the white man'.\textsuperscript{54} As a result, one band had been pursued by mounted police to the upper reaches of the Yarra. Shots were fired at the police and the Aborigines escaped.\textsuperscript{55} When Major Lettsom and his mounted troopers arrived in Melbourne in September with a warrant to seek out their quarry or to take hostages, Lieutenant Governor La Trobe seized on it as an opportunity to terrorise the Kulin into evacuating the town. Taking his lead from the vacillating Gipps, La Trobe in his turn authorised Lettsom 'to employ the means at your disposal in such a manner as to overcome opposition' and added the now standard disclaimer that ‘nothing but extreme and imperative necessity can palliate the shedding of blood’.\textsuperscript{56}

For some time, Protector William Thomas had been engaged in diplomatic efforts to persuade the Kulin to vacate the encampment. He was much relieved when early in September 1840, a 'Grand Debate' took place after which they announced their intention to decamp to Narre Narre Warren, another traditional gathering place at which Thomas

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Anon, \textit{The Blacks} in “Papers Relating to Victorian Aboriginal Peoples 1839-43” Dixson Library.
\item \textsuperscript{51} \textit{Port Phillip Herald} 28 April 1840 ‘Murder of a Black’.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Victorian Parliamentary Papers; Session 1858-9, "Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines (Chairman: T, Mc Combie)," (unnumbered papers) Minutes of Evidence: William Hull. p.9.
\item \textsuperscript{53} \textit{Port Phillip Herald} 1\textsuperscript{st}. May 1840, 1/5/1840.
\item \textsuperscript{54} \textit{Port Phillip Herald} 24 April 1840, 5 May 1840.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{Port Phillip Herald} 15 May 1840.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Gipps to La Trobe, 24 October 1840 in Shaw, \textit{Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence} ; Letter 34 and n.1 .
\end{itemize}
had established a protectorate station. Informed late in September of Lettsom’s commission and of his authority to take hostages, Thomas remonstrated with La Trobe, arguing not only that it would undermine his work with them but that ‘if the Major persisted upon hostages ... the whole colony might become a scene of carnage.’

At dawn on 1st October, 1840, eleven mounted police rode into the Kulin camp at full gallop and seized two male hostages, binding them in ‘double irons’ and incarcerating them in the Melbourne lock-up. 'Oh that a British Parliament could behold the sight' raged the impotent Protector Thomas, oblivious to the fact that the ultimate authority for the hostage taking raid was the Colonial Office which had acceded to Gipps’ plan of action. The people were stricken with panic, ‘many jumped into the river, others climbed trees, the women and children running into huts or wherever they could shelter themselves’. It was, recorded Thomas, an act of ‘persecution and terror upon a body of innocent unfortunate Aborigines ... a stain upon the history of Australia Felix’.

On Sunday 11th October, 1840, with Thomas absent, La Trobe gave permission for a second raid on the encampment. The people were ‘surrounded ... on south bank of the Yarra and led captive to jail men, women and children'. Thomas lamented the death of Windberry, a young man, twenty-three years of age, of the Daung wurrung people, shot dead by a military officer in the skirmish. While the local press regarded him as a scoundrel, Thomas revered Windberry as ‘one of the noblest minded blacks I ever met with [who] had saved the lives of many shepherds and travellers on the Goulburn’. Thomas bitterly denounced this attack on ‘hundreds who but a few years back was [sic] the undisputed proprietors of the soil.'

57 William Thomas, "Quarterly Report to Chief Protector Robinson, 1st March, 1841," in Papers Mainly Relating to Australian Aborigines Sydney: 1841; Dixson Library MS (microfilm) CY 3713 Add 77-79
58 Port Phillip Herald 6 October 1840.
60 Gipps to Lettsom, 10 October 1840, in “Victorian Aboriginal Peoples, Papers 1839-50”, Dixson Library MS (microfilm) CY 3898 Add 89 N5214.
61 Thomas, "Quarterly Report to Robinson, March 1841,”
63 Thomas, "Quarterly Report to Robinson, March 1841,"
Of the four hundred or so who were herded through the streets of Melbourne following the second raid, thirty-three men were held in double irons at the town jail and another party of Daung wurrung people ‘consisting principally of women’ and children, were held at the government store. All their weapons were seized and La Trobe ordered their hunting dogs shot. Crowds of town folk gathered to view the captured Aborigines.  

During the night many of those locked in the store escaped. Thomas, deeply distressed, reported to Robinson that 

many effected their escape by undermining the wall that enclosed them and one young man Nerruknerlook shot dead, the lubras terrified I was informed repaired to Narre Narre Warren for protection and one … far advanced in Pregnancy drop’d her hapless infant as she entered on the station.  

The *Port Phillip Herald* reported that Nerruknerlook’s body was subsequently ‘dreadfully mangled, apparently with sabre cuts’.  

Despite Thomas’s remonstrance that the ‘policy of surrounding a large body of natives to get possession of a few’ was not ‘consonant to English jurisprudence’ and that the captives were unlawfully detained since no charges were laid, thirty-three Aborigines remained imprisoned in the Melbourne jail for five weeks.  

As the *Herald* reported some days after the raid, interrogations had failed to implicate any of the captives in the original crime on the Ovens River.  

Ten men were eventually charged with offences relating to the theft of sheep and sentenced to ten years transportation, which Thomas regarded as extreme punishment. Their evidence, he records, was not admitted to court and they were convicted on the evidence of two convicts ‘one of whom was a notorious character for bribing the Blacks for their lubras … robbing his Master to gratify his base lusts’.  

Lettsom returned to Sydney soon afterwards. On 24 October, 1840 Gipps, his humanitarianism compromised by these events, wrote to La Trobe to caution him to treat the Protectors with ‘the utmost circumspection’ in connection with the killings and

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64 *Port Phillip Herald* 13 October 1840.  
65 Thomas, "Quarterly Report to Robinson, March 1841,"  
66 *Port Phillip Herald* 20 October 1840.  
68 *Port Phillip Herald* 16 October 1840, 20 October 1840.  
incarcerations. ‘Their representations … in England’ he warned, ‘will be credited (I do not mean by the Government - but by Persons perhaps more powerful than the Government) whilst the reports of all persons filling official stations here, will be received with suspicion – or entirely disbelieved.’ Gipps also informed the Colonial Office that if Lettsom had ‘departed in some degree from his instructions’, he had not ‘exceeded his discretionary powers’. Once again, the equivocal issue of discretionary powers allowed colonial officials to rehearse the philanthropic and protectionist credos of metropolitan humanitarians, and simultaneously prescribe acts of colonial terror. The episode was brought to a close when the Colonial Office issued a mild censure on Gipps, La Trobe and Lettsom.

The captives who fled to Thomas’s Narre Narre Warren Protectorate station after their escape from custody were 'cow'd in spirit' and Daung wurrung elder, Yabee Billy Hamilton, spoke for all when he told Thomas: "Poor Blackfellow me now, no like long time ago before white man came here, no tomahawk, no spear me now, plenty hungry poor Blackfellow now'. The issue of rations could not dispel their fear that the police would hunt them down again, and they refused to settle at the new station. They now regard Thomas 'as a spy and not as a friend'. 'They were determined on leaving', recorded Thomas, believing that 'in consequence of the nine Goulbourn blacks being kept in jail, the Mindi (a plague of which many died some years back...) would come, that they would all die if they stopped'. His work undone, Thomas complained bitterly to Chief Protector Robinson that Lettsom's first raid had come 'on the very morning of the day it was proposed to embrace the boon of Government'. Only through the gratuitous distribution of rations could he now ‘secure the rising generation’ in one location and save them from 'speedy extinction or vagrancy'. La Trobe, always antagonistic to Robinson and his underlings, was determined though that the Aborigines should work for their rations. As a Protectorate station, Narre Narre Warren was marked for failure by

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70 Gipps to La Trobe 24 October 1840 in Shaw, Gipps-La Trobe Correspondence Letter 34.
71 ibid. Letter 34 n.1
72 Thomas, "Quarterly Report to Robinson, March 1841,” .
73 ibid.
these events and abandoned by 1842.\textsuperscript{74} It was a failure ensured by the decay of dissembling humanitarian rhetoric into warrants for colonial terror.

Far from serving as a bulwark between settlers and Aborigines, the Protectorate became a scapegoat in the colonial matrix and the language of philanthropy a cover for acts of displacement and extermination. In February 1841 Gipps reported to Lord John Russell at the Colonial Office the widely held opinion of settlers that 'the presence of the Protectors is the occasion of outrage, inasmuch as their appointment has tended to embolden the Blacks, and to render the Stockmen or Servants of the Settlers less resolute than they used to be in defence of their Masters' property.' His 'hopes of any advantage being derived from the employment of the Protectors [were] every day diminishing'.\textsuperscript{75} From Port Phillip, settlers called for the abandonment of the Protectorate and for local magistrates to be empowered to exercise summary justice against Aborigines 'to be inflicted on the spot'. Nevertheless, when one group memorialised Gipps in 1840 they adopted the language of philanthropy, stressing that they were 'not insensible to the claims of that unfortunate race to humane and kindly treatment' and acknowledging that as 'the original occupants of the soil' the Aborigines had an 'irresistible claim on the Government of this country to support'. They suggested therefore that the government enclose the Aborigines within reserves ‘with a view to weaning them from their erratic habits’. They rounded out their appeal for the wholesale displacement of the Aborigines onto reserves by claiming that their 'judicious plan for the civilization of the natives would be liberally supported by many philanthropic individuals who desire to preserve them from extinction and to see them raised to the rank of Christian and civilised men'. Their carefully constructed appeal was reproduced, approvingly, in the journal of Buxton’s own Aborigines Protection Society of London.\textsuperscript{76} As the philanthropic pretext of \textit{Pax Britannia} issued into colonial terror and a mounting anticipation of Aboriginal extinction, the humanitarians at the Colonial Office were at least without guilt.

Colonial Office despatches continued to reiterate that Aboriginal rights were to be upheld, but beyond the early 1840s they represented empty formulaic gestures. Ignoring

\textsuperscript{74} La Trobe to Colonial Secretary in Sydney, 10 October 1842 “Colonial Secretary In Letters (CSIL)/11 42/7831, Dixson Library.
\textsuperscript{75} Gipps to Russell, 3 February 1841, \textit{HRA Series I}, Vol. XXI, p.208.
the impossibility of the Protectors’ brief and the contradictions inherent in the idea of a humanitarian colonialism, in May 1842 Governor Gipps sheeted home the blame for the failure of the Protectorate system to the individual failures of character of the underresourced and legally impotent Protectors. In a despatch to the Colonial Office he charged that ‘it would be difficult ... to find men less equal to the arduous duty of acting as Protectors of the Aborigines. ... With power in their hands to command the respect of the Settlers, they have failed to make themselves respected.’77 At the end of 1842, Colonial Secretary, Lord Stanley, lamented the evident failure of the Protectorate and with ‘pain and reluctance’ transferred control of the treatment of the Aborigines to Gipps in the vain hope that Gipps' proximity to the frontier - or was it his distance from the metropolis? - might enable him 'to suggest some general plan, by which we may acquit ourselves of the obligations which we owe to this helpless race of beings.'78 The ambiguity of Stanley's phraseology nicely encapsulated a crucial redirection of British colonial policy, when, with an appropriate note of melancholy, the Colonial Office washed its hands of the obligations it had so recently proclaimed as the ethical foundation of its imperial project.

At Port Phillip, Aborigines continued to visit the Protectorate stations to collect what scanty rations the Protectors could cobble together after La Trobe ordered the cessation of regular distributions in 1843, and to take sanctuary from settler and police hunting parties. They continued to be ravished by measles, whooping cough, influenza and by the venereal disease which rendered many of its victims barren, or claimed the newborn.79 Many were debilitated by malnutrition, and many starved to death as settlers hunted them off grazing lands; others succumbed to the sheer despair of watching their kin decline before their eyes and their sacred oblations go unattended. A population that probably numbered in excess of 50,000 in 1788, stood at 3,900 souls in 1843.

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77 Gipps to Stanley, 16 May, 1842. HRA Series I, Vol. XXII, p.54.
western district of Port Phillip, Chief Protector Robinson observed that whole villages adjacent to extensive canals and eel races had been abandoned.\textsuperscript{80}

To their 'Protector', Aborigines grieved the loss of their kin and the invasion of their country. One elderly woman chronicled for Robinson events connected with 'the long long history of her country', thereby proclaiming her inalienable entitlement.\textsuperscript{81} Others were equally forthright in defence of their country. In the wake of Lettsom's raid on the settlement of the Port Phillip clans, Robinson was informed in June 1841 that Port Phillip 'blacks' had been to the Portland Bay district and had called on their confreres to take up arms against the invaders.\textsuperscript{82} Early the following year Robinson was ordered back to the Western District to quell two bands of Aborigines who were conducting guerilla raids in the district which had led to the abandonment of at least one station.\textsuperscript{83}

**Citizens and Natives**

Stanley's abjectly sentimental abandonment of the Aborigines to the caprice of Robinson's 'white savages' coincided with a renewed positivity towards colonialism and colonial commerce in Britain. In 1841, as the Aborigines Protection Society lamented its failure to attract popular support, Dr Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School and newly appointed Professor of History at Oxford, delivered a series of lectures in which he attributed Britain's imperial preeminence to a racial pedigree that linked the English to the Romans and Greeks through Aryan and Germanic connections. Civilization, he argued, progressed as the dominant race of each era bequeathed the products of its civilization to a still stronger race. Britain's dominion over the globe was a racially-determined historical inevitability. Arnold's schema constituted 'one of the earlier racial


\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. 22 June, 1841. The entry is ambiguous but is open to this interpretation.

interpretations of European history'. Invoking Locke, Arnold also laid siege to the Evangelical defence of indigenous proprietary rights to land, arguing that land only became property through the application of labour.

Half a decade later, in 1846, Stanley’s successor at the Colonial Office, Earl Grey, called up Arnold’s lectures to underwrite a new thesis of imperial right. In connection with the revision of the New Zealand Charter in 1846, Grey challenged the opinion assumed ...by a large class of writers ... that the aboriginal inhabitants of any country are the proprietors of every part of its soil of which they have been accustomed to make any use, or to which they have been accustomed to assert any title. This claim is represented as sacred, however ignorant such natives may be of the arts or of the habits of civilized life, however small the number of their tribes, however unsettled their abodes, and however imperfect or occasional the use they make of the land...

From this doctrine, whether it be maintained on the grounds of religion, or of morality, or of expediency, I entirely dissent.

Instead, Grey asserted that

the true principle with regard to property in land is that which I find laid down in the following passage from the works of Dr. Arnold, which I think may safely be accepted as of authority upon this subject ... Men were to subdue the earth; that is to make it by their labour what it would not have been by itself; and with labour so bestowed upon it came the right of property in it ... so much does the right of property go along with labour, that civilized nations have never scrupled to take possession of countries inhabited only by tribes of savages -countries that have been hunted over, but never subdued or cultivated. [O]ur fathers ... only exercised a right which God has inseparably united with industry and knowledge.

The justness of this reasoning must ... be generally admitted ... and is fatal to the right which has been claimed for ... aboriginal inhabitants.

In the shadow of this new doctrine, Robinson’s call early in 1848 for large tracts of land to be reserved for the exclusive use of Aborigines lest they be left with ‘no place for the sole of their feet’ was dismissed out of hand by Grey. As Michael Christie has demonstrated, after 1843 the Protectorate was an impotent institution, beleaguered by


85 The Times 29 December, 1846.

settlers and by local officials and finally abandoned by the NSW legislature with the permission of the Colonial Office in 1849.\(^7\)

**From Philanthropy to Science**

If humanitarian interest in the salvation of colonial Aborigines had declined, curiosity about the peculiarities of the 'varieties of mankind' now subject to British authority, was everyday increasing. By 1840 the Aborigines Protection Society had accumulated an impressive list of European and American members and fostered connections with new ethnological societies in France and Germany. Its correspondents sent 'intelligence' from colonists from across the globe on the effects of colonization. While it continued to monitor and publicise the treatment of the colonised as Buxton had intended it should when he established the society in May 1836, and railed against those who 'sought to vindicate by falsehood our cruel treatment ... upon the monstrous assumption, that they are naturally incapable of improvement', by 1839 the APS had perceptibly shifted its focus from a concern with the welfare of natives to a focus on those 'details respecting the character and condition of the coloured races generally, including their physical, intellectual, moral, and social state ... as may interest the scientific portion of the community'. \(^8\) Such information, it argued, was 'demanded by the spirit of the age, by the extension of colonial enterprise, by the increasing demand for emigration, by the facilities of intercourse created by the improvements of modern science, by the progress of discovery and geographical knowledge, and by the advantages to be secured by the progress of civilization among the aboriginal tribes.' \(^9\) The APS, once disdainful of colonialism, now positively fostered it.

Amongst those whose name appeared beside Buxton's on the inaugural list of APS members, was Dr James Cowles Prichard, a Bristol physician and the most eminent comparative philologist of his day. \(^0\) Biblical creationism had been under attack for half

\(^0\) Aborigines Protection Society, *Second Annual Report of the Aborigines Protection Society*, (May 1839), membership list, p.3.
a century by the late 1830s but Prichard took the Old Testament as an historic template and recorded the linguistic traces that mapped the diaspora and degeneration of the tribes of Israel. At the APS, humanitarians and scientists together argued that knowledge about 'aborigines' would reduce prejudice and cause men to 'abandon the false and groundless opinions' which led some to question their humanity.  

In a series of volumes published in the 1820s and 1830s, Prichard argued that the observed differences between the 'varieties' of humanity had come about primarily through the effects of climate and that periods of improvement alternated with 'reverses and retrograde changes', sometimes ‘favouring the progressive improvement of our race, and, in other instances, preventing it, or forcing a tribe already civilized to return to the brutality of savage life.  

Against challenges issuing from America that the varieties of mankind represented different species within a human genus, and that amalgamation would cause the degeneration of the white race, Prichard argued resolutely that all the ‘varieties’ of the race of mankind shared the basic 'animal economies', and all were cross-fertile: all therefore constituted one species. In 1839, in a letter to Thomas Hodgkin, a committee member of the APS, Prichard called for increased efforts to preserve those ‘lesser races’ threatened with extinction, but he did so in a manner that exemplified the slippage of the native from brother to ethnological curio. Lauding the society's attempts to 'preserve from utter ruin and extermination, many whole tribes and families of men, who, without such interference, are doomed to be swept away from the face of the earth', he went on to cogitate on the urgency of the society's scientific quest in the face of those extinctions.  

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92 James Cowles Prichard, The Natural History of Man, 5 vols., vol. 2 (London: 1855),p.658-9. Prichard was a prolific writer. His two best known works, The Natural History of Man and Researches into the Physical History of Mankind, both appeared in a number of volumes and editions, including posthumous republications. The first edition of Researches was published in 1813; a second edition in two volumes appeared in 1826, and five volumes of a third edition appeared from 1836 to 1847. Similar material appeared in a more publicly accessible form in The Natural History of Man in 1843 and was republished in 1845, 1848 and 1855. For a selected bibliography of Prichard’s publications see George W. Stocking Jr’s ‘Introduction’ to James Cowles Prichard, Researches into the Physical History of Man (Chicago,: University of Chicago Press, 1973)  
Unapologetically, Prichard revealed the ethnocentricity of the view from the imperial metropolis. 'How many problems of the most curious and interesting kind’, he asked will have been left unsolved, if the various races of mankind ... shall have ceased to exist ... and the opportunity of obtaining a more accurate and satisfactory knowledge will have been for ever taken away. The physical history of mankind ... will have been left for ever imperfect ... if entire races of men at present uncivilized and without self-defence, and with them whole families of languages should be rooted out and lost, as they are certainly doomed to be, unless preserved by the intervention of this truly philanthropic society.'

Such a notice bespoke a metamorphosis of the colonised from subjects whose welfare and rights were paramount, to populations about whom 'facts' could be collected, like commercial capital, in the pursuit of a science that would lay open the human wealth of empire.

At the annual congress of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in June, 1839, Prichard joined with the young Charles Darwin to prepare 'a series of questions and suggestions for the use of travellers and others with a view to procure information respecting the different races of Men, and more especially of those which are in an uncivilized state'. Copies of the British Association’s *Queries Respecting the Human Race* were distributed two years later to missionaries, mariners and to travellers likely to visit those quarters in which natives exist, but of whom imperfect accounts have hitherto reached us, and whose altered condition, or extermination, is likely in a short time to deprive us of the possibility of obtaining a knowledge of what they have been, unless it be promptly collected.

Under the tutelage of the British Association, philanthropy was further sacrificed to the interests of science and nation. As the preface to the *Queries* noted, while the ‘much neglected’ science of Ethnography and a ‘practically benevolent interest in some of the feeble and perishing branches of the human family’ might be served by their issue, the principle value of the *Queries* was what they might contribute to the ‘interests of science [and] of our country’. At the dawn of the Victorian era, science was integral to the advancement of the nation and national advantage took priority over any moral queasiness about the welfare of the colonised specimen populations under study.

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With marvellous disregard for that welfare, Prichard’s correspondent Thomas Hodgkin proposed to the British Association in 1841 that in the interests of science and nation, live specimens be 'brought home' - 'well-selected aboriginal youths' who could be trained in the arts of civilization and observed by ethnologists, physicians and statisticians.97 Like Dr. Richard King who instigated the formation of the Ethnological Society of London in 1844, Hodgkin held that the collection of ‘facts’ about the colonised, rather than sermonising, would best ‘facilitate communication between the oppressor and the oppressed’.98

All three remained firmly convinced that the investigation of ‘the great laws of animal economy’ would prove ‘that no insurmountable line of separation exists between the now diversified races of men’ and ‘that all mankind are descended from one family’.99 At the British Association’s annual gathering in June 1847, Prichard employed Lancelot Threlkeld's vocabularies gathered from the extinguishing clans of central New South Wales to support his conjecture that the languages of the Australians - the 'most miserable of the human family' – indicated a linguistic pathway that connected them with the peoples of Lapland, Finland, Hungary, 'High Asia', Siberia, Japan, and peoples from those parts of India, such as the Dekhan Plateau, not linked into the ‘Arian’ Indo-European language chain.100 Miserable as they were, he argued, the Australians would yet be found, when more closely observed, to possess 'the same principles of a moral and intellectual nature, which, in more cultivated tribes, constitutes the highest endowments of humanity.'101 If they survived the colonizing onslaught of the ‘Indo-Europeans’ whose roots could be traced to Greece and Rome, through Germany to Britain, and who 'seemed

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97 Ibid. pp.54-5.
destined to supplant the aboriginal inhabitants' of any nation they colonised,
they might yet be raised into the modern world.

Despite such confident assertions, Prichard’s faith in monogenism and the zoological unity of mankind was under severe strain by 1847. Two years earlier startling new evidence had come from south-eastern Australia by the pen of the Polish refugee and explorer, Paul Strzelecki, that appeared to indicate that some colonial unions produced no offspring or produced ‘hybrid’ offspring who were sterile. As I will argue in chapter three, Strzelecki’s observation seemed to provide the most crucial support to the polygenists, for if colonial unions, such as those between Australian women and Robinson’s ‘white savages’, were infertile, it lent support to those who argued that the races of men were separately created and constituted different zoological species. In his presidential address to the Ethnological Society in 1847, Prichard passed with palpable reticence over what he admitted was ‘a matter of great moment’ to the question of human origins. Referring to ‘the theory of Hybridity, or to the general observations made with respect to mixed breeds and their supposed sterility’, he remarked only that ‘the bearing of these questions on the physical history of mankind is very obvious’, and declined ‘to enlarge upon it at the moment’. Strzelecki’s observation was indeed so undermining of the monogenist creed that it required no further amplification.

As Prichard wavered at the precipice of a new science that seemed to warrant an unrestrained colonialism predicated on biological imperatives, the Colonial Office finally abandoned the Protectorate that stood impotently between settlers and Aborigines at Port Phillip. Reminding antipodean administrators that pastoral leases issued at Port Phillip preserved the rights of the Aborigines ‘to wander over them in search of sustenance … except over land actually cultivated or fenced in’, early in 1848 the Colonial Office nevertheless ordered the surviving Aborigines of Port Phillip onto small reserves where they could be trained in the ‘arts of Industry’, agriculture and civilization and in the rudiments of Christianity. As in 1840-1, when the Colonial Office itself licensed the

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taking of hostages, the rhetoric of protective isolation penned in London now authorised the original occupiers of Port Phillip to be ‘disappeared’ to make way for colonists.

Port Phillip colonists, however, were loath to set aside even such minor tracts of land as the Colonial Office suggested lest they be ‘ousted of portions of their runs’. Instead, the men who sat on the NSW Select Committee on the Aborigines and the Protectorate of 1849 called, with La Trobe’s support, for the Protectorate to be decommissioned and for the ‘philanthropic motives of Her Majesty’s Government’, and the funds that had been spent on the Port Phillip Protectorate, to be redirected to ‘promote the interests of religion and education among the white population in the interior … the improvement of whose condition would, doubtless, tend to the benefit of the Aborigines’. 105

By the end of the 1840s, notions of nation and race had begun to cohere into the inseparable ideological conglomerate that was to propel Britain’s imperial adventure. As Linda Colley and Catherine Hall argue, regional and ethnic interests and prejudices dissolved as the idea of ‘Britain’ was born out of colonialism in the second trimester of the nineteenth century. Between the 1840s and the 1880s the ‘British Race’ was fashioned by bourgeois ideologues as innately compelled by the combined forces of biology and history to dominate 'the lesser races' of mankind. 106 Colonial commerce and racial science were inextricably bound together in an ideological dyad that normalised a biologically-determined correlation between those possessed of an innate will to dominate and those antithetical subjects innately suited to colonization. So inherent was the will to power of Britons that colonies and peoples were swept together, as Seeley put it in 1883, as if ‘in a fit of absence of mind’ 107 Colonialism simply constituted a racial imperative.

While Prichardians at the Ethnological Society of London continued to gesture towards benevolent colonial stewardship, the substantive result of their promiscuous commissioning of ethnological 'facts' was the production, through multifarious acts of

ideologically saturated 'translation', of subjects aptly fitted for the kind of legislative operations that accumulated into ‘the colonial project’. In the case of the Aborigines of Port Phillip, what Bernard Cohn calls the 'investigative modalities' of ethnology and anthropology - the application of the interrogative gaze, the measuring caliper and the statistical register that reduces the subject to object-specimen - produced colonised natives predisposed to extinction who required remediative interventions. Ethnology, whether sympathetic or antipathetic towards its subjects, was, as Nicholas Thomas observed, a crucial agent in the construction of representations that became 'legislative'.

Despite its humanitarian lineage, ethnology was also instrumental in producing a subtle offset in the imperial frame of reference, such that the agents of colonialism became no longer the vector of Aboriginal decline - to be castigated by ethical men and women as they had been in 1836 - but rather the passive observers and recorders of a natural and inevitable process of decay whereby 'extinction' insinuated itself as a quality of, a signifier of, the Aboriginal body. Ethnology produced a figure that predicted its own dispossession and replacement by colonists. From the 1840s metropolitan theory caught up with and, to pick up Stanley's phrase, acquitted antipodean practice of any responsibility for Aboriginal decline.

For the rest of the century modified versions of the extinction trope pervaded European and settler projections of Aboriginality. In the 1840s and 1850s, as polygenists and monogenists debated whether mankind represented one species or many, it was to speculative theories about the sterility of Australian 'hybrids' - and their inevitable decline - that they turned. In following decades, Darwinists constructed evolutionary hierarchies which depicted the Australians as an atavistic race, anterior to modern Europeans, relegated by the imperatives of biology to the evolutionary scrap heap. In the 1880s they were legislated out of existence when those of mixed descent were declared 'non-Aboriginal'. Each projection, vitiated by the anticipation of extinguishment, normalised colonization and Aboriginal dispossession.

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A Modern Legacy

The legacy of that projection continues to infect relations between indigenous people and settlers in Australia. Arguably the most comprehensive analysis of the legacy of racism in Australia, The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody of 1989, humanitarian in intent, unwittingly reproduced the spectre of the abject, 'dying Aboriginal' as its principal motif. At the time of the Royal Commission, Aborigines constituted approximately 1.5 percent of the Australian population and accounted for twenty-one percent of all the deaths in custody. Of the 99 Aboriginal deaths in prisons or police cells investigated by the Commission, 34% were declared suicides, another 40% were attributed to 'natural causes' - the results of ill-health exacerbated by custody. Even where the culpability of custodial officers was indicated, the Commission largely refrained from recommending the laying of charges, thus displacing individual culpability for acts of 'racism' onto the vagaries of 'nation' and history. The Commission argued forcefully that the causes of Aboriginal suicide and self-harming were embedded in the historical and contemporaneous political relations of the nation, but as each death was chronicled, what emerged was a population whose individual subjects were 'destined to be alienated and psychologically incomplete ... doomed from the outset'.

110 Through the Commission's intense scrutiny of individual Aboriginal pathologies, 'self-destructive behaviour' was highlighted and 'made intelligible'.

111 Once again the ailing and failing Aboriginal body licensed state remediations.

In the following section I discuss two narratives through which the Aboriginal body acquired a propensity to extinction and invited remedial discipline and governance. In chapter two I trace the legislative implications of anthropological speculations on Aboriginal infanticide. In chapter three I follow the progress of Paul Strzelecki’s observation about Australian ‘hybrid’ sterility as it turned from mere remark into permissive scientific ‘fact’. Each of these discourses crucially relocated the animating cause of Aboriginal decline from settler behaviour to Aboriginal biology and culture and, as they meandered through the pages of European and American anthropology, contributed substantially to the global construction of the science of race.
CHAPTER TWO
Colonising the Body: Infanticide and Governance

For a decade before the Protectorate was officially decommissioned late in 1849, it impotently presided over the decimation of the Aborigines of Port Phillip. As the Colonial Office prevaricated between enthusiasm for British expansionism and half-hearted attempts to protect the native subjects of the Crown from colonists, the Protectorate was deliberately starved of resources, and its dedicated officers were obstructed, ridiculed and maligned by settlers and administrators alike.¹ At Port Phillip, Superintendent La Trobe led the charge against the Protectorate, railing against the inability of its officers to control their wards and to impose Protestant moral habits upon them.

Throughout the 1840s, as La Trobe pressed Assistant Protector William Thomas to banish the Kulin clans from the vicinity of the township of Melbourne, they continued to gather, as they always had, at sites on the lower reaches of the Yarra River. Here they conducted the business of life – arranged marriages, mourned their many dead, settled disputes, and carried out sustaining rites and oblations. But now too, with their traditional food sources denied them and debilitated by introduced diseases, starvation loomed and they also came for rations and to exchange their labour and trade goods, like pelts and lyre bird feathers, for food or alcohol or cash. La Trobe regarded the Melbourne gathering sites of the Kulin which were visited nightly by men from the town in search of women, as nothing other than a 'leaven' to those 'excesses in immorality' amongst settlers that so offended his Moravian sensibilities.² Despite his active interest in the conversion of the Aborigines to Christianity, La Trobe’s preoccupation with maintaining public order meant that he was more concerned to banish them from the vicinity of the town than with protecting them from the impending extinction wrought upon them by Robinson's 'white

²Charles La Trobe, ‘Report of the Port Phillip Committee of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge etc.’, and Sub-enclosure 1, Stanley to Gipps, 27 July 1843; Despatch No.119 in
He was determined also that they be taught to work for their rations like the labouring classes on poor relief in Britain. Soon after his assumption of the position of Superintendent of the District of Port Phillip in September 1839, La Trobe broke with his predecessor’s largess when he refused to issue bread to a party of forty Daung wurrung who trekked from James Dredge’s protectorate station on the Goulburn River. Dredge warned them against undertaking the journey in the hope of tasting "white loaf", but to no avail. Weeks later they returned, and Dredge recorded that "when I reminded them of my advice they hung down their heads abashed and said "plenty gammon that one Gobernor no give it - plenty hungry blackfellow".  

By the early 1840s settlers who cared to, knew that the Aborigines were starving. Observant colonists had also begun to notice the absence of infants and newborns amongst the Aborigines. Some identified it as an effect of the colonial occupation, of malnutrition, of disease and particularly of the venereal infections which spread uncontrollably through their ranks and rendered the women barren. Others, however, intent on casting the Aborigines as savages in relation to whom the idea of natural and territorial rights was inoperable, charged that the Aborigines customarily committed infanticide upon the bulk of their offspring and now exercised that savagery with particular malevolence on children engendered by white men.

While many colonists, including those in closest contact with the Aborigines, initially regarded the reports with scepticism, the weight of popular opinion lent momentum to the allegations so that what began as hearsay soon graduated into colonising fact. Such claims possessed an inherent attraction to settlers and to metropolitan advocates of colonialism. If the Aborigines killed off their own children and thus became extinct by their own hand so that the continent became empty, albeit retrospectively, the lingering moral disquiet that attached to the colonisation of occupied

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4 Dredge Notebook pp.100-1 in Brough Smyth Papers, SLV MS 8781.Box 1176/6b: Transcribed into Thomas Notebook in Smyth Papers.
lands must abate. Allegations of infanticide thus contributed materially to the restoration of the wavering moral foundation on which the colony was erected. For those of a more humanitarian bent, the allegations of infanticide invited the expansion of missionary ventures, philanthropic gestures and a general extension of governance over the Aborigines.

By 1860, when the new Central Board Appointed to Watch over the Interests of the Aborigines of Victoria was directed to focus its efforts on rounding up the orphaned and neglected children of the Aborigines, particularly those of mixed descent, and relocate them at a central training institution, ethnological discourse and humanitarian sentiment jointly argued that the seizure of Aboriginal children from their kin was an act of mercy without which innocent infants would suffer unspeakable agonies and the race would become extinct. As Adam Kuper and Uday Mehta have argued, the idea of the primitive and the allied concept of the savage, were colonising inventions that undid liberalism’s commitment to the universality of human rights. In colonial Victoria, the popular canard that the Aborigines wantonly killed their own children stood as the crucial arbiter of this rearrangement of moral sensibilities.

In this chapter I trace the consolidation and reification of the often contradictory discourse about Australian infanticide as it progressed from antipodean hearsay to ethnological fact to legislative foundation. I argue that the belief that the Australians habitually killed off their children rested almost entirely on the unfettered circulation of rumour, which, being often enough repeated, acquired the appearance, and the utility, of fact. Less often, such allegations rested upon deliberate fabrication, employed to cover up acts of settler violence. By the end of the 1850s infanticide was a mandatory part of any Australian ethnology.

The task here is not to prove that infanticide was never practiced – in the circumstances that befell the Aborigines when Europeans invaded their lands there can be little doubt that infanticides would have sometimes occurred. The task here is to disassemble and render transparent the processes and motives which persuaded colonists

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that infanticide was so rife that it justified, as an act of philanthropy, the separation of the surviving children from their parents and their incarceration in state operated training institutions. Moreover, as infanticide emerged in the 1860s as an essential sign of primitivity and evolutionary backwardness, it became implicated in the developing science of race and invited the subordination of its practitioners to the ‘higher races’.

A detailed analysis of colonial memoirs and metropolitan ethnologies from the 1830s to the 1880s indicates that the claim that the Aborigines customarily killed off their own offspring was a convenient colonial invention. It turned historical relations of cause and effect upside down and lent moral sanction to the abduction of Aboriginal children by individuals and by government agents, done with the deliberate intention of severing the rising generation from all connection with their culture and kin.

Here I evaluate allegations about Aboriginal infanticide made by Malthus, by William Buckley and John Helder Wedge, by missionaries to NSW, by the Port Phillip Protectors, by the eminent nineteenth century anthropologist A.W. Howitt and his American and British patrons, and by a range of modern day advocates of a theory which, as noted in the introduction, still animates fierce debate in Australia. By cross-examining the foundational sources at length, and tracing their reiteration through nineteenth and twentieth century anthropological texts, I reveal the extent to which this consequential cultural fallacy was constructed from fearful rumour, misunderstanding and willfully false testimony. Its continuing subterranean presence in modern understanding of Aboriginal culture indicates the power of racialist ideas to produce anthropological ‘facts’ that still reinforce global political economies of race.

**Discipline and Death**

In 1839, when William Thomas arrived in Melbourne to take up his duties as Protector of the Woi wurrung (Yarra) and Boon wurrung (Western Port) clans upon whose countries the new township of Melbourne had been established four years previously, he estimated that the population of these two Kulin clans numbered perhaps three hundred. By 1843 Thomas calculated that only about 230 still survived. By November 1848 the two clans together numbered only eighty souls. In the winters of 1848 and 1849 another 21
perished from influenza, including both of the two babies born that year.\(^7\) Between 1839 and 1849, only twelve infants were born to the Woi wurrung people and six to the Boon wurrung people. ‘Of those children born’, Thomas reported, ‘most died before the first month’ or had died by the time their mothers returned to the camp after a week or two’s absence.\(^8\) By 1858 Thomas reckoned that only thirty-one survived, and one child alone.

The distress of the surviving Kulin as they watched their kin die was poignantly recorded by Port Phillip magistrate William Hull who, sometime in 1842, came upon the Boon wurrung elder Derimut and 'a procession of twenty or thirty blacks walking the boundaries of this town … bewailing the occupation of this place by the white man.' Hull recounted how Derimut told him in a 'plaintive manner' ”You see, Mr. Hull, … all this mine, all along here Derimut's once; no matter now, me soon tumble down.”’. To Hull’s question as to whether his children would not live on after him, Derimut

flew into a passion immediately, Why me have lubra? Why me have picanninny? You have all this place, no good have children, no good have lubra, me tumble down and die very soon now.\(^9\)

Two years later William Thomas also recorded the abject despair of the Kulin as they faced the spectre of their own extinction. In January 1844, when the Kulin were joined at their encampment on the Merri Creek by affiliated clans from the less settled districts to the north-west—numbering 675 in all—Thomas remarked upon the sadness with which the Kulin looked upon the large number of children amongst the visiting clans and mourned their own childlessness.\(^10\) When the clans gathered again later in 1844, to beg for rations, to barter implements and artifacts, and to trade their labour in odd jobs and sexual services so that they could survive, Thomas warned them that they must obey La Trobe’s instruction to break up their camp or the police would remove them. This was the last great gathering of the Kulin at Merri Creek, and, in echo of the raid of 1840, it was marked by police attempts to arrest two Boon wurrung men on charges of internecine

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\(^7\) William Thomas Papers, Mitchell Library, ML MS 214 Add. 90, William Thomas to G.A. Robinson, “Quarterly Report, 1 March to 31 May 1848”; Thomas to Robinson “Report,1 July to 31 December 1848” (dated 1 January 1850).


murder. In June, 1846, when the Kulin gathered again, true to his word, La Trobe ordered Thomas to wreck and burn the camps of the Boon wurrung and Woi wurrung near Melbourne. They were, Thomas reported, 'maniacal' with grief and anger.

As Thomas knew, they were driven to gather near Melbourne in such large numbers by malnutrition and in the hope that La Trobe would relent in his refusal to issue them with rations. In the winter of 1844 Thomas lamented: ‘I do not think that of the five tribes who visit Melbourne that there is in the whole five districts enough to feed one tribe’. It must have been around this time, that Thomas sat down with Kurburra, a Woi wurrung elder and renowned healer then camped on the upper Yarra, and together they drew a map of the surrounding mountains which belonged, each separately, to a 'willum' of the Woi wurrung. Against all but three of the forty-one named peaks Kurburra delivered the chilling eulogy: 'all gone dead'.

Aware that Aborigines were dying from disease and starvation, under instruction from Gipps, La Trobe persisted in his determination to refuse them rations unless they laboured for them at William Thomas’s Protectorate station at Narre Narre Warren – or at least attended Divine Service there. Thomas continued to argue that the clans would never quit the immediate vicinity of Melbourne, nor settle at the station until he was ‘allowed to issue rations to all indiscriminately’ (or, he advised, until they were arrested under the colony’s vagrancy laws). He regarded La Trobe’s stance as ‘uncivilised’ and argued that ‘the evil of giving rations gratuitously’ would be ‘counterbalanced by having the rising generation to mold under proper guidance for civil and Christian society’. But La Trobe was unmoved.

La Trobe was convinced that if the natives could be confined to Thomas’s station at Narre Narre Warren, some thirty miles from the town, a prophylactic zone could be maintained between the largely male populace of Melbourne and the Aboriginal women.

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11 Ibid. 104-5.
13 Quoted in Ellender and Christiansen, People of the Merri Merri p.100.
14 William Thomas notebook in Robert Brough Smyth Papers, SLV MS 8781 Box 1176/7b Items 25-35.
16 Thomas Quarterly Reports to Robinson, March 1841, July 1842 with La Trobe cover note: Dixson Library Microfilm CY 3713 Add 77-79 “Papers Mainly Relating to Australian Aborigines”.

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It was a naïve belief. As Thomas reported, '[t]he contamination that got upon that station from the men on the different farms was very great'. The Kulin regarded it now as a malign place, of sickness and forced labour, and they refused to settle at the station, nor leave their children with Thomas. In frustration, La Trobe forced Thomas to abandon the station leaving his two clans without a safe haven, and even the occasional distribution of rations that had taken place there ceased, not to be resumed until 1853.

In La Trobe’s hands liberal philanthropy transmogrified into a disciplinary regime designed to force the natives to comply with the colonists’ behavioural, moral and spatial codes even at the cost of their lives. As Assistant Protector Sievewright noted with acerbity, without rations, the people in his protectoral district would soon ‘cease to be either objects of solicitude … to this Department, of fear to the Squatter, or Philanthropy to Her Majesty’ Government.

Starving and debilitated, the surviving Boon wurrung, Woi wurrung and other affiliated clans continued to gather on the outskirts of the town. On rare occasions, Thomas was able to persuade La Trobe that he could turn away clans approaching the town by issuing rations. In 1850 he persuaded La Trobe to set aside two small parcels of land on the outer perimeter of the sprawling settlement at Mordialloc and at Warrandyte and vouched that if rations were distributed to his own people there, they would not return to the town precinct, ‘and then…the others would not come’ either. As the Assistant Protector rightly observed, Aboriginal custom ensured that the other clan of the Kulin federation would not enter Woi wurrung territory without invitation. These gratuitous distributions of rations were rare concessions made to preserve social order, however, and not to save the Aborigines from starvation.

Despite Thomas’s efforts to secure rations and reserves, the clans had no intention of being penned into these small scraps of their own country. With their ranks sorely diminished, those who survived continued to pursue the traditional and obligatory traverses of country, gleaning what they could from the land and now melding customary

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19 Quoted in Arkley, The Hated Protector p.7.
21 Ibid.
imperatives with the demands and opportunities of the new economy. Long before white labourers deserted the squatting runs for the gold diggings, Aboriginal labour was in demand. As early as 1841, as many as fifteen found regular work on the Yering run on the upper Yarra held by the Ryrie brothers and later by the Swiss vigneron and pastoralist, Paul de Castella. They cut bark, washed sheep, gathered potatoes and enjoyed beef soup prepared by the women. They were paid off in rations of flour and sugar, and tomahawks. Others found work at Yan Yean to the north of the town. As many as fifty Daung wurrung men, women and children regularly visited McKenzie’s run on the upper Goulburn. They worked ‘quickly but not steadily’ and he paid them in farm produce and blankets, items of clothing and the occasional tomahawk, knife, and pipe and tobacco. Others were employed as stockkeepers, shearers and reapers at Wappan station near Alexandra held by John and Anne Bon and by Mr. Aitken who reported that in that district they were ‘paid, in most instances, at the same rate as the white man’. As William Thomas would later note, in the absence of regular supplies from the government, the ‘Boonoorong’ and ‘Wavoorong’ people secured 'ample means of living, as farm labourers; as such they are apt and ready, and welcome at all times at the farms on the River Plenty'. It was, he said, only 'when straitened, that they fall back on the depot (which is seldom)'. Aitken also observed that the improved recompense of the 1850s brought about a recovery of Aboriginal fertility, and he noted ‘a greater number of young children in the Upper Goulburn tribe than has been known for years’. His observation emphasised the degree to which the oft-remarked barrenness of Aboriginal women was due to debilitation caused by disease and starvation and not, as colonial folklore and imperial ethnology increasingly held, to a peculiarity of Aboriginal reproductive biology or indiscriminate infanticide.

Commissioners for Crown Lands also reported from Mount Macedon that Aborigines found 'ready employment and ample recompense in rations and clothing', and from the Wimmera that 'from the scarcity of European labourers ... the able-bodied

23 ibid. Circular Replies of McKenzie, p.50, Aitken, p.35.
amongst the Aborigines' were in demand 'at shepherding and otherwise'. Even the disdainful La Trobe, who believed that the failure of these 'savages' to conform to the habits of civilization and Christianity must result in 'a gradual extinction of race', conceded that numbers of them were employed for wages for periods 'of steady occupation' and could be found 'conforming for a time to the regular habits of the Europeans in that class of life', serving 'faithfully as a shepherd, or bullock driver, for months together, at a time ... when other labor was not to be secured'.

For the Aboriginal people itinerant work on sheep runs was integrated in ways not comprehended by settlers into the customary obligations of kin and country; but they were well aware that they were frequently exploited by employers who too often plied them with alcohol in lieu of wages or rations. While Thomas bemoaned the fact that he was unable to enforce the agreements they made with their employers, the Aborigines themselves employed some leverage. Referring to one employer who had cheated them they told Thomas, ‘When next summer come no black fellow work for him’.

**Philanthropy, Infanticide and the ‘Rescue’ of Children**

From the earliest days of the settlement in 1835, while the Kulin were hunted off their traditional lands and left to starve, those who hoped to civilise the Aborigines argued that the best means to achieve that end was through the separation of Aboriginal children from their kin. A year before the protectors arrived at Port Phillip early in 1839, missionary George Langhorne attempted to expel the local people from the township, in part 'to keep them away from the vices and immorality of the town' but more so to keep them 'as much as possible from disturbing their children' whom he provided with rations at his mission school at what is now the site of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens. It was his intention that

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children should be obtained … at a very early age, say three and five years, not from tribes in the immediate vicinity alone but from those more distant, and that these should be taught to lose sight altogether of their native habits and language and trained to some useful occupation or trade.\footnote{30}

Langhorne’s plan was frustrated in January 1838 when ‘all our boys were removed by their parents ... [to assist] in the annual custom of burning the grass to catch the young kangaroo’. When the Protectors arrived from Sydney early the following year he advised them that they would need to apply force to keep the children at their own stations as it was impossible to do so ‘by any measure of persuasion alone’.\footnote{31} William Thomas did attempt to persuade the clans to leave their children with him at Narre Narre Warren, but what he called his ‘ineffectual efforts’ were ‘to no purpose’.\footnote{32} He balked, however, at the suggestion that he use force to retain them, regarding ‘the proposed coercive system which contemplates the forcible removal of children from their parents - herding them together in workhouse fashion in the towns’ - as ‘monstrous’.\footnote{33} As Thomas well knew, many colonists cared not a fig for the survival of the Aborigines, much less for their rights, and simply wanted them removed from sight so that they could be relieved of the moral disturbance of their presence, and of the practical demands entailed in finding them rations. Others, however, humanitarians amongst them, considered the institutionalization of Aboriginal children as the only way to save them from premature death.

Around 1844 Thomas McCombie, editor of the \textit{Port Phillip Gazette} and a Melbourne town councillor, summed up contending points of view amongst colonists at Port Phillip ‘about the treatment which the aborigines ought to receive’. ‘Some’, he wrote,

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wish a system of rigid coercion, and even urge that unless the children are taken from their parents at a very early age, there is not the least chance of their imbibing the element of civilisation, ‘habits of industry’. This class advocates ... that the children ought to be separated at an early age from their parents, and placed out as apprentices to tradesmen in the town ... The other party hold that the aborigines have peculiar claims upon the Govt., and, therefore, that their whim ought, in some degree, to be studied, and their lives and liberties protected.\footnote{34}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[31] William Thomas Papers, DL Add. 90, Paper No.39/2575, Langhorne to anon. 31 January 1839; Paper No. 38/2166, Langhorne to anon, 3 March 1838.  
\item[34] Thomas McCombie, \textit{Adventures of a Colonist; or Godfrey Arabin the Settler, with an Essay on the Aborigines of Australia} (London: 1844-5?), pp.267-9. Biographical details in Ian A. Hughes 'Surname Index to 'History of Victoria' by Thomas McCombie, 1858'. (Melbourne, 1980)
\end{footnotes}
As McCombie indicated, some colonists still held true to the philanthropic motives of Glenelg, Buxton and the Evangelicals of the 1830s, but like La Trobe, many now held that the Aborigines must be forced to embrace the habits and disciplines of Christianity and industrial capitalism, and foreswear the priorities and imperatives of their own world view. Since the adults resolutely refused to conform, the hope of these practical men now rested upon the incarceration of their children.

In 1845 a new element sprang up in the debate over the morality of detaining the children of the Aborigines in state institutions. In that year despatches sent from NSW to the Colonial Office claimed, not for the first time, that ‘half-caste’ children were considered repugnant by their maternal kin and were routinely destroyed immediately after birth. According to the patriarchal logic of the Colonial Office, these innocents were the children of white men and it was morally, and paternally, bound to rescue them. As Edna Aizenberg has remarked in connection with another site of colonization, such projections perform a ‘crucial transposition’ of the colonised subject from ‘black victim vitiated by white colonization to virginal white victim menaced by black ... rites’. With the salvation of the heirs of white men uppermost in his mind, Colonial Secretary Lord Stanley called upon Gipps to ‘institute some Establishment which would provide the means of withdrawing the half-caste children from the dangers to which they appear to be subject and of endeavouring to civilize and educate them’.

The accusation that the Aborigines habitually committed infanticide, regardless of a child’s progenitor, was not new. In 1798 David Collins described the effects on the Aborigines of the Sydney region of the smallpox epidemic that swept them away in 1789, leaving the survivor Colbee no option but to perform a merciful act of infanticide upon his infected and motherless infant. In the hands of Thomas Malthus, Colbee’s despair resurfaced as evidence that the Australians employed infanticide as the prevailing and customary means of regulating their population. Malthus concluded that Aboriginal women lived in a such a state of ‘unremitting drudgery’, that they were ‘absolutely

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35 Massie, Commissioner of Crown Lands, McLeay River, Enclosure No.4 in Gipps to Stanley; Despatch No. 41 23 February, 1845 in HRA Series I, Vol XXIV, p.263.
37 Stanley to Gipps, 31 August 1845, Despatch No.103, HRA Series I Vol. XXIV, p.500.
incapable’ and indeed unwilling to care for more than one infant at a time and ‘[I]f another child be born before the one above it can shift for itself, and follow its mother on foot, one of the two must almost necessarily perish for want of care’.  

Malthus’ transposition of an act of mercy in despairing times into an act of habitual savagery served as a template for many subsequent inversions of colonial cause and effect which displaced the agency of Aboriginal decline from the coloniser to the colonised.

Speculation about infanticide was particularly active, both in NSW and in London, around the time that Batman’s party arrived at Port Phillip. As Lionel Rose has argued, the introduction in 1834 of Britain’s new Poor Law produced an increase in prosecutions for infanticide as families were forced to take drastic measures to keep out of the dreaded workhouse. In the same year, NSW colonist John Dunmore Lang informed Evangelical leader Thomas Buxton that the alarming decline in Aboriginal numbers was attributable to ‘the prevalence of infanticide, ... intemperance ... and from European diseases’.  

Two years later missionary William Watson’s graphic testimony on the subject was widely circulated in Britain and in NSW through the medium of the Commons Select Committee on the Aborigines of 1835-7. The Assistant Protectors, appointed in the wake of that enquiry, thus arrived in the colony well-seasoned with expectations about the evils with which they would have to grapple.

Also in 1836, John Helder Wedge’s narrative of his journey of exploration at Port Phillip was published by the Royal Geographical Society of London. On the authority of William Buckley, an escaped convict who had lived for 32 years amongst the Wautha wurrung of the Bellarine Peninsula, Wedge affirmed that the Aborigines of that district practised not only infanticide but cannibalism as well. In 1841, Prichard and Darwin, representing the old guard and the new at the British Association for the Advancement of Science, sought opinion from colonists the world over through the *Queries to Travellers*, as to whether ‘natives’ committed infanticide. In doing so they transformed what had begun as antipodean fear and execration of the natives into the stuff of the new science of

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ethnology and sent colonists in search of the practice. On being informed of the interest of the BAAS in the question by his South Australian counterpart, Moorhouse, Chief Protector Robinson ordered his lieutenants to seek out information on the subject. Thus by the mid 1840s the discourse that associated Aborigines with the habitual murder of their own infants had attained credence at the Colonial Office, at the ethnological academies in the imperial metropolis and in the Australian colonies.

In the latter part of this chapter I will evaluate the veracity of some of these influential early reports. As I noted in the introduction, these foundational texts buttress a discourse that still provokes heated debate in 21st century Australia and thus warrant close consideration. Here it is suffice to say that by the mid 1840s the belief that the Australian Aborigines wantonly killed-off their own offspring and particularly those of mixed descent, had lodged in the imperial and colonial imagination, and Stanley’s directive to Gipps to rescue the innocents added further to the leaven that raised the discourse about infanticide from antipodean hearsay into imperial substance.

At Port Phillip, charges of infanticide were common fare. Indeed, settlers went so far as to defend themselves against Gipps’ accusation that the vast majority of clashes between white and black at Port Phillip were the result of white men abducting and abusing Aboriginal women and girls, by claiming that it was the colonists who were the salvation of female children ‘who would otherwise have fallen victim to the tomahawk of the unfeeling savage’. In a colony stained by the widely publicised rapes, murders and sundry violence perpetrated upon the Aborigines by convict, emancipist and free frontiersmen alike, charges of infanticide leveled against the Aborigines called forth the defence that it was the innate savagery of the Aborigines and not the delinquencies of colonists that had led to the decimation of the clans.

Late in 1845, the Legislative Council of NSW established a Select Committee to enquire into the ‘condition of the Aborigines and the best means of promoting their welfare’. Despite its advertised brief, the Committee was part of a concerted campaign to undermine the Protectorate and to lay the blame for the continuous bloody skirmishes between settlers and Aborigines at the feet of the latter. In this antipodean propaganda war, stories about beastly acts of cannibalism and infanticide were employed with

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40 Port Phillip Gazette, 4 March 1840, 7 March 1840. Quoted in Arkley, The Hated Protector p.47.
deliberation to effect a rearrangement of metropolitan sympathies and the Committee challenged its first witness, the Aboriginal man, Mahroot, with the charge of infanticide. Mahroot was the only surviving adult man of the Cook River clan which had once numbered some 400 people. He lived now with fifty survivors of other clans of the Sydney hinterland, and their last seven children. The one boy and six girls were all of mixed descent. Amongst the Select Commissioners was John Dunmore Lang, the same as had assured Buxton a decade earlier that the Aborigines of NSW were habituated to infanticide. Now Dr. Lang interrogated Mahroot as to the cause of the gender imbalance amongst the children:

‘Why are there so many girls and so few boys?’
(no answer)
‘Were there not as many half-and-half boys as girls born?’
‘Yes’
‘What has become of them …? …Were the boys killed?… Are they not knocked in the head?’
‘No, no’.
‘Do they kill them?’
‘No’
‘Did you never see a pickaninny killed?’
‘No’.

Undeterred by Mahroot’s vehement denials that his people killed off their male children, and his assertion that the women had fewer children after they became addicted to the white man’s alcohol, Lang pursued the issue with the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, John Bede Polding. With humanitarian intent, but echoing Malthus, Polding testified that the Aborigines committed infanticide because of ‘a deep sorrow prevailing in consequence of a rapid decay and destruction talking place amongst them’ which led them to destroy their children ‘when the child is not likely to prove useful, or becomes burdensome’. They were acutely conscious of the injustice occasioned by the invasion, so much so that they no longer had a ‘desire to have their children to survive them’. Questioned as to whether he had arrived at this conclusion ‘from conversation with them’, Polding admitted that he could not speak their language sufficiently well to enter into such an intimate interchange, and that his opinion was reached first through the perusal of missionary reports from Moreton Bay and then through ‘making myself a

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42 ibid., Q.40-43, p.2.
black, putting myself in that position’. Ironically, Commissioner Dr Nicholson dismissed Polding’s attempted empathy, observing scathingly that it was ‘assuming too much in supposing that they could have such feelings’. Polding’s humanitarian gesture thus only lent further weight to a discourse that derogated the Aborigines.

Taking the lead from the BAAS’s Queries for Travellers, the NSW Select Committee of 1845 also included a question about infanticide in its circular to settlers. Colonists at Port Phillip had been primed by recent reports of infanticide and cannibalism amongst the Daung wurrung of the Goulburn River in the Port Phillip Herald in 1843 and in the Geelong Advertiser in 1844 and 1845, the latter authored by the former Assistant Protector Dredge. Yet, despite the widespread circulation of reports that male infants of mixed descent (and, some said, older boys approaching puberty) were habitually destroyed, the general tenor of responses to the Select Committee’s circular indicated that while rumour was rife, relatively few respondents accepted the hearsay without hesitation. Many of the 35 respondents noted the paucity of children amongst the people but only 8 held that infanticide was definitely associated with their scarcity. Of the remainder, almost all reported that they had heard rumours that many were deliberately destroyed, but many disbelieved the reports and a few strongly challenged the allegation. James Crummer, at Newcastle, for example, reported that ‘infanticide has not been directly discovered; reports of such a practice, chiefly on the half-caste males, are in circulation, but positive proofs are wanting to establish this charge’. Others reported that it had once been practised but had now ceased. Some who reported that half-castes were generally destroyed by their mothers, also contradictorily reported the presence of numbers of children of mixed descent in their district.

That the inclusion of a question on infanticide in a circular emanating from the colony’s legislature, and beyond that, from the luminaries of the British Association, actively elevated the discourse on infanticide from the realm of rumour to the vicinity of fact, is suggested by the response of colonial Magistrate Francis Murphy. Initially

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43 Ibid. Q. 8-12. p.6.
44 Port Phillip Herald, 7 March 1843, p.2. The Aborigines, No.2. in The Geelong Advertiser, 23 September 1844. That the article signed ‘D.E.’ is by Dredge is confirmed by quotes in Dredge’s 1845 pamphlet and by William Thomas’s notebook in Brough Smyth Papers.
Murphy reported: ‘Infanticide it is said is practised by the aborigines in this district, but we have no positive information on this head; but we believe it exists amongst them’. In an addendum he reported that he had made further enquiries as a result of receiving the circular, and ‘it has now been ascertained since the above was penned, that the black women frequently destroy their offspring, particularly half-castes.” Murphy’s response suggests that the act of enquiry itself had given solid form to what had hitherto been nothing more than rumour.

The Select Committee of 1845 was prematurely terminated before it could deliver the final blow to the Protectorate. That impotent organ of metropolitan philanthropy was given a further stay by the return of Grey to the Colonial Office, and his reprise of the theme of the ‘mutual rights’ of the Aborigines of NSW - as subjects of the Crown, but not, it will be remembered, as landowners. Grey repeated Stanley’s directive that schools be established in the colony so that Aboriginal adults and children alike could be taught the arts and disciplines of industry and the ‘elements of religion’, and by such methods be persuaded to voluntarily settle and advance towards civilisation as landless labourers. La Trobe, however, curtly observed that ‘schemes devised from a distance’ failed to take account of ‘the form assumed by its Aboriginal races’. If the employment of ‘coercive measures’ was ‘not consistent with the spirit of the age’, he was adamant now that it was only through enforcing the separation of Aboriginal children from their elders that these ‘savages’ could be saved and the benefices and disciplines of civilisation be imposed. He instanced the failure of the Baptist mission school set up near the Kulin gathering place at Merri Creek in 1846 in response to Stanley’s directive, where clashes had occurred when police had been called to prevent parents removing their children. He insisted that only ‘vigorous coercion’ and ‘an actual and total separation’ of the children from ‘the influence of the habits and example of their tribe’ would lead to their civilization, Christianization and preservation.

In 1849 the NSW Legislative Council launched a final attack on the protectorate. The men who moved to wind it up in September 1849 entertained no sentimentality towards the Aborigines and cared not at all for the preservation of their ‘mutual rights’.

46 ibid., Replies to Circular, p.35.
47 Grey to Fitzroy, 11 February 1848, appended to “Report on the Aborigines and the Protectorate, 1849”.
Single-mindedly, with the eradication of Aboriginal life-ways in mind and not philanthropy, they set out to break up the clans by separating the generations and incarcerating the children of the Aborigines in institutions where they could be drilled into habits of work, religion and submission, as La Trobe advocated. Replies to circulars issued by the 1849 committee revealed that while some settlers baulked at such proposals as 'unjustifiably cruel' and designed to 'deprive the parents of the highest source of interest they enjoy in this life', most discounted such moral queasiness. Once again some took the opportunity to condemn the Aborigines as savages by raising again the spectre of infanticide. 

It was a refrain that served both to reinforce the purported savagery of the people and to justify the state’s plan to seize their children. One correspondent, an old enemy of the Aborigines, told of a woman who had murdered a female child with a yam stick; another reported that 'mothers generally destroy their offspring if born before the youngest child is able to walk'; another remarked that 'the fact that infants are frequently devoured by their parents is notorious'.

Alexander Irvine from the western district of Port Phillip spoke for many when he remarked that:

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\text{[t]he removal of their children, as soon as they are weaned, may appear a harsh proposition, and it would be so to mothers or fathers with keen feelings, but these the blacks do not possess. In most cases, they would be induced to give up their children for a few figs of tobacco, ... These educated children would require to be kept away till all the old ones had become extinct.}
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In a brief report, the Select Committee of 1849 recommended the final abandonment of the Protectorate and the application of 'compulsory measures' to effect 'the total separation' of Aboriginal children from their kin and culture. More than any other factor, unsubstantiated claims that the Aborigines willfully killed their own children sealed their fate and enabled colonists bent on eradicating the Aboriginal presence, to position themselves as the rescuers of Aboriginal innocents.

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50 ibid. Replies to Circular, Darlot, p.15, Wilson, p.26, Macnight, p.35. Arkley, The Hated Protector p.126-9. See also G.A. Robinson’s journal, 15 May 1841 in which he records that Police Magistrate Blair believed that the Aborigines roasted and ate infants as an annual sacrifice. Robinson comments: “this is all fudge and ridiculous … Mr. Blair has no communication with the natives and only knows what he has been told”. Ian D Clark, ed., The Port Phillip Journals of George Augustus Robinson, 8 March - 7 April 1842 and 18 March - 29 April 1843, vol. No 34, Monash Publications in Geography (Melbourne: Department of Geography, Monash University, 1988), p.202.
But before the few surviving children amongst the Port Phillip clans could be rounded up, the district was thrown into the chaotic interruption of the rush for gold. When it emerged, separated from NSW and with a new royal title, Victoria was a colony flush with capital, peopled with enfranchised artisans, and determined to profess itself as a modern, civilised and philanthropic outpost of the empire, superior in every way to NSW. A rash of new institutions and civil trappings sprang into life: a new parliament, law courts, a university, a museum and a pair of competing philosophical institutes that matured into *The Royal Society of Victoria* in 1860. The spiritual care of the Aborigines now rested with the Anglicans and Wesleyans who established mission stations at Buntingdale near Geelong and another at Yelta on the Murray in 1854, employing Moravian missionaries, who came to the colony under La Trobe’s patronage in 1850.53

In 1856 when the Anglican missionary committee held its first congress under the chairmanship of G.W. Rusden, it recommended ‘that, in order that the aborigines may receive Christian instruction, a central establishment for the reception of the native children from all the tribes in the colony should be formed’ where ‘the young ...may become estranged from their own customs’. In tone, its call for the incarceration of Aboriginal children differed from the harsh determination of the men of 1849 who had foreclosed on the Protectorate. Members of the Anglican congress, concerned for the sensibilities of the Aborigines and for their own reputations as philanthropists in about equal measure, initially ‘express[ed] doubts whether it would be just to resort to the means’ proposed, but their reluctance to institutionalise the children of the Aborigines dissolved when Rusden impressed upon them that without intervention, ‘half-caste’ male children would be ‘invariably destroyed by the aborigines’.54

Two years later a Select Committee chaired by Thomas McCombie again enquired into the condition of the colony’s Aborigines (1858-9), and in doing so it reissued the *Queries Respecting the Human Race*, first sent abroad from the BAAS in 1841. To the British Association’s general query as to whether the natives of the colony

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52 ibid. p.1.
practised infanticide, the Victorian Committee now addended the question ‘Would they have any objections to give up [their children] to be nursed and educated by whites?’

Almost all correspondents affirmed that infanticide was practised and, echoing Malthus, attributed it to ‘want of affection arising from the depraved state of the mother’, or ‘owing to the mother considering it too much trouble to rear them’, or to the children being the product of ‘prostitution’. Some maintained that all children were killed, some that only 'half-castes', were despatched, some that it was only boys, others only girls.

Rusden’s submission on the question of what should be done to save the people from extinction was both powerful and contradictory. His reply to the specific query on infanticide contained the admission that ‘many of them are too affectionate to think of it for a moment in the case of their own children’, that it was committed only as an act of last resort when faced with starvation, and even then ‘the blacks allege that it was uncommon’. Yet he also presented the committee with a memorial from the Anglican Assembly which emphasised, as its trump card, ‘that half-caste male children, borne by aboriginal women, are usually destroyed’ and begged that ‘in order to prevent their destruction, the removal of half-caste children to the central establishment might be specially encouraged’. Rusden drew the Aborigines themselves into his humanitarian consensus when he proffered that ‘feeling the pangs of want and hunger [they] would readily give up their children, when young, to be nursed and educated by the whites’. If they did not consent however, he told the Select Committee, the children should be taken by force.

In Rusden’s hands, colonial anxieties and projections about the savagery of the Aborigines reissued as humanitarian justification for the ‘rescue’ and institutionalisation of Aboriginal children. Unsubstantiated allegations of infanticide based on rumour alone and repeated so often that their veracity was no longer challenged, dissolved the lingering

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56 “Report of the Select Committee on the Aborigines, 1859”, Replies to Circulars, Rusden, Q18, p51. Anglican Mission Committee submission to the same Select Committee, also under Rusden’s name, p. 43.
moral unease that attached to the incarceration of Aboriginal children, and invited the extension of coercive governance over the Aborigines. Tales of infanticide relocated the cause of Aboriginal decline from an effect of colonisation to an effect of Aboriginal savagery, and carried along the groundswell of opinion that, by the end of the 1850s, held the Aborigines to be both inhumane and barely human.

The Protectors: experts and yes-men.
The Protectors of Aborigines were as much implicated in the transmission of allegations of infanticide as settlers less closely associated with the colony’s Aboriginal population. In evaluating the veracity of the popular beliefs about infanticide, the evidence of the Protectors is of particular interest. Held up to ridicule by La Trobe and the mass of colonists due to their failure to restrain and subdue the Aborigines, the Protectors were at pains to claim authority as interpreters of Aboriginal culture; but they were also under pressure to provide facts that would confirm settler prejudices about Aborigines. From his own experience, Chief Protector Robinson was acutely aware of ‘[t]he difficulty and uncertainty of persons getting correct information from the natives' and in his own communications with them astutely resorted to ‘confronting several natives’ on any question. Even then he often found they had ‘mistook my question'. Despite that, Robinson pressed his lieutenants to provide him with anecdotal confirmation that the Aborigines were habitual infanticides, to forward to the British Association. In doing so, he countermanded his earlier caution to them against premature conclusions and ‘hallucinations’ when it came to the interpretation of Aboriginal ways.\(^{57}\)

Unlike Protector Sievewright, who took Robinson’s caution to heart and withheld judgement on Aboriginal custom until he had obtained ‘a sufficient knowledge of their language to ensure such assumptions to be correct information and not mere opinion’, and who observed that the Barabool people amused themselves by concocting fables about cannibalism in order to frighten gullible white colonists, former assistant Protector Dredge undertook his own survey of Aboriginal savageries by issuing his own

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ethnological circular in 1843. 58 Dredge's circular enquired of correspondents whether infanticide was included in the natives’ 'heathen customs' and whether they 'eat human flesh'? 59 A lay missionary, Dredge was equipped with a fine Methodist sensitivity to sin and debauchery and eagerly sought out depravities amongst his former wards. Fearful and disdainful of the Daung wurrung people, he had resigned his commission less than a year after becoming their Protector. He was convinced that they practised infanticide and cannibalism – although he could himself produce no first hand anecdotes in evidence - and the replies to his circular confirmed the suspicion. Amongst these savages who had fallen from the sight of God in the post-diluvian diaspora, he wrote in a series of articles in the Geelong Advertiser, custom 'extracts from the hands of young and tender mothers - by long established and heartless usage - the life of her little first-born innocent, should it prove to be of her own sex'. 60 Like Polding, Dredge projected a European devaluation of females when he argued that it was female babies who were most commonly sacrificed. More often, however, that prejudice was more directly announced by settlers claims that male infants of mixed descent were most at risk from Aboriginal men cognisant, and resentful, of the racial superiority of the half-white changelings.

From his Protectorate station on the Loddon, E.S.Parker responded to Robinson’s importunate enquiries in his quarterly report of January 1845 with the intelligence that the number of ‘half-castes’ in the north-western districts of Port Phillip was on the increase and that amongst the Goulburn River clans, accused of practicing infanticide by their enemies, it had now ceased. ‘Hitherto’, he wrote, ‘they have been charged, and I fear with justice, with the destruction of these illicit offspring. But a better feeling now seems to be spreading … and these children are regarded, I think … even with more affection than the pure natives’. ‘Formerly every half-caste infant was destroyed’ he reported, but his entreaties had convinced them ‘of the wickedness of the practice’ so that no case had occurred in the previous two years.

58 Sievewright’s correspondence to Chief Protector Robinson reprinted at Sievewright's instigation in Geelong Advertiser Supplement, 1 February 1845; see esp. Sievewright to Robinson, 1 December 1840, 21 December 1840. Arkley, The Hated Protector p.109-10.
59 Dredge's Queries in William Thomas notebook in Robert Brough Smyth Papers, State Library of Victoria, MS 8781; Box 1176/6b, p34-8.
60 The Aborigines, No.2. in The Geelong Advertiser, 23 September 1844.
Parker’s words inhabit a negative territory in which observation of the apparent *cessation* of the practice reissues as proof of its original occurrence. By his own admission he had observed no acts of infanticide. He did not hesitate however to repeat the opinion of his own clans that their traditional enemies to the west habitually killed their own children. In doing so Parker unwittingly acknowledged that accusations of infanticide were reserved by Aborigines for their traditional enemies, for ‘wild blacks’ beyond the pale. In the same report he recycled a ‘well ascertained instance … lately made known to me, in which an infant was killed and eaten by its mother and her other children’. The tale had come to him from settlers to the south whom he knew to have recently ‘slaughtered’ parties of Aborigines and who had good reason to impugn the humanity of their victims.  

Robinson’s own testimony to the Select Committee of 1845 is of particular interest. Like Parker, he combined a measured acknowledgement of the *cessation* of infanticide, with a keen sense of how the rising hubbub about a practice that had ceased might yet be utilised to shore up the brief of his department. While he attributed Aboriginal decline to the effects of introduced disease, violence, deliberate poisoning by settlers and starvation, he maintained that infanticide existed, ‘to a limited extent’. 'Half-caste children have been invariably its victims', he asserted but, he added, 'of late, some tribes have spared this portion of their offspring'. There were now 'twenty or thirty' ‘half-castes’, including nine children, living 'after the manner of the aborigines' in Port Phillip, and considerably more in the outer districts along the Murray, Murrumbidgee and into Gippsland. Some were married and having children of their own, he noted (seemingly unaware that the presence of adults of mixed descent suggested that the practice had long-since ceased if it had ever existed). The counterpoints in his testimony were intended to display his command of Aboriginal ethnology yet tend, in sum, to suggest that his acquaintance with infanticide was at best second-hand. Prudently however, Robinson argued that:

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61 Parker to Robinson, Quarterly Report, January, 1845; reprinted in “Report of the Select Committee on the Aborigines, 1859”, p.51. Also Parker’s Replies to Circular, Questions, 2,11, and 17 in the same Select Committee Report.
it would be exceedingly desirable could this fine race [of people of mixed descent] be removed to an asylum for protection and instruction, especially as there is reason to fear that these children are frequently murdered.\textsuperscript{62} 

In support of his belief that popular opinion about infanticide had substance, Robinson repeated intelligence he had acquired from ‘Mr. Murray (the Member for Murray) wherein eight children, whose proximate ages averaged from three to five years, were killed’. And, he concluded, completing a self-referent circle of reasoning, ‘the tribes generally in the Port Phillip District are known to be guilty of infanticide, especially on this portion of their own offspring.’\textsuperscript{63} 

As the Chief Protector, Robinson’s submission necessarily carried substantial weight. Traced to its source, however, the substance of his argument evaporates. More than twenty years later, in 1867, one T.A. Murray of Sydney, NSW, wrote to James Hunt, president of the Anthropological Society of London and his letter was printed in that society's journal of 1868. It was Murray, who, as a magistrate on the Murrumbidgee in 1839 had investigated the murder of eleven boys of mixed descent. The boys, said Murray, had gone into the bush with tribal elders for the rites of puberty and had not returned:

A stockman gave me information, on oath, to the effect that he had come across their bodies burning in a bough-yard ... that there were eleven fires burning, and one body in each ... I did all in my power to prosecute the case to the utmost, but could procure no evidence inculpating any particular individuals. The case thus broke down; but the blacks, hearing of the investigation which was taking place, fled to the mountains, and did not return to that part of the country for fully two years.\textsuperscript{64} 

Stockmen who were involved in the murder of Aborigines in 1839, only months after seven of the Myall Creek defendants were executed in Sydney at Gipps’ insistence, had every reason to cover their traces and swear their innocence on oath, and colonial magistrates, settlers themselves, knew where their loyalties lay. The year 1839 saw an upsurge of bloody massacres, rather than a decrease. The story had undergone some modification between 1839, 1845 and 1867, but it is still recognizable as the source of Robinson's infanticide brief. Murray indeed admitted in his letter to Hunt that he could

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid.  
not verify the tales of infanticide from his own knowledge, but nevertheless offered it as a better explanation for the 'paucity of half-caste men in the colony' than an alternative explanation circulating in anthropological academies that held that contact with white men mysteriously rendered Aboriginal women barren. Despite the authority of his position therefore, Robinson’s confirmation that the people habitually sacrificed their own children rested on highly questionable evidence and on reticulated hearsay.

Foster Fyans, Commissioner for Crown Lands in the south-west of the Port Phillip District, also accounted for the declining Aboriginal population with reference to infanticide and cannibalism. As one of the few colonists who claimed to have witnessed an infanticide at first-hand, his evidence deserves a closer look. 'The children are often murdered (killed and eaten) in satisfaction for revenge against their tribe', he told the Select Commission of 1845. 

Infanticide was 'common practice', he asserted, and in 1854 he related how years earlier, in 1838

I saw a native in a rage take a child giving it many blows, and eventually catching it by the leg, and battering its head against a gum-tree. This was on the opposite range of the river. On my arrival at the spot (which took some considerable time, on account of the river winding so much), when I reached the tree I found evident marks that the child had been killed, and taken from the place.

When he had told the same tale to the NSW Select Committee of 1845 however, he made no claim to have seen the murder. Then he related, in passive voice, only that

in 1838 a child was killed close to my hut, on the opposite side of the Marrabool River, by a native man taking the child by the legs and dashing the head against a gum tree; I saw the tree with the hair and contents of the skull on it, only a few hours after the occurrence.

Crucially, in the original (1845) version, Fyans made no claim to have seen the killing at first hand, which is unlikely to be mere oversight given the nature of the alleged event. As with the accounts submitted by Parker and Robinson, Fyans’ tale is of an event that is not witnessed, but happens just beyond the purview of the narrator.

In contrast to the nuanced apprehensions and hearsay reports provided by Robinson and his assistants, and Fyans’ doubtful rendition, the medical officer at


67 “Report on the Condition of the Aborigines, 1845”, Replies to Circular, Foster Fyans, p.44.
Sievewright’s Mount Rouse protectorate station stated simply: ‘I have never known an instance of it’.  

William Thomas: things unseen
William Thomas’s struggle to understand why the Aborigines in his care seemed destined to extinguish before his eyes serves to further illustrate how tales about infanticide rooted in colonial animosity, hearsay and imaginative excitation, inflated into ethnological fact. In his first six years (to 1845) amongst the Boon wurrung and Woi wurrung people of the Yarra and Western Port districts, Thomas counted only five births and of those, he testified to the 1845 Select Committee, most were born ‘literally rotten’ with the signs of venereal disease upon them to mothers suffering from malnutrition, and seldom survived beyond the first month of life. One alone of the five infants had survived into early childhood. There seemed little scope here for infanticide, unless it be the sort of merciful despatch that Colbee delivered to an already dying child.

Despite the close observation that had produced such a census, he ‘feared’, with a measured caution, that there was amongst them an ‘indifference to prolonging their race, on the ground as they state, “of having no country they can call their own”, hence should there be a birth the infant is artfully put out of the way’. In pursuit of his suspicions, and without regard to Robinson’s caution, he had questioned one ‘chief’ as to whether they killed their children and the man had confirmed, to Thomas’s satisfaction, that he ‘has no power to stop it’. Thomas recorded the man’s words: ‘the blacks say “no country, no good have it pickanineys”’. Remarkably similar words were later attributed, as noted above, to Boon wurrung elder Derimut by the eccentric colonial Magistrate William Hull, but Derimut’s words lent themselves to the possibility that in the extremities brought about by the invasion, Aboriginal men had refrained from taking wives and had otherwise thereby deliberately curtailed conceptions.

While Thomas’s testimony indicates his continuing suspicion that infanticide was committed, his own census data provides very few potential victims for the purported ‘evil’. Primed, as he and his colleagues were, by the ostensible account of infanticide presented to Buxton’s Select Committee out of the journal of missionary William

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68 ibid. Replies to Circular, John Watton, Surgeon, p.58.
Watson, (to which I will shortly return) it was perhaps inevitable that he would be drawn into the vortex of circulating rumour peddled by anxious colonists. In search of certainty perhaps, he corresponded with his one-time colleague James Dredge on the issue in 1843, and because Dredge was a firm believer in the allegations, Thomas too was drawn further in. Against such persistent noise of rumour, unwitnessed events assumed a spectral presence.

By 1858, when Thomas aired his suspicion that his wards committed infanticide before Thomas McCombie’s Select Committee on the Aborigines, the elderly Guardian of Aborigines was ill and his reconnaissance somewhat compromised. For twenty years he had taken ‘a regular register of every birth and death’ amongst his two clans which revealed that twenty-one children had been born; but when questioned by McCombie’s committee he remembered, as previously noted, only ‘six or eight’ births and lamented that only one child survived, ‘a fine girl five years of age’. ‘I do not say they have not had children, but they have been made away with’, he ventured, implying that infanticide was surreptitiously practiced. Though he had observed often enough that infants simply fade away in the first month of life, his engagement with adherents of the infanticide discourse like Hull and Dredge, and its sheer popular momentum, made him suspicious of things unseen when women returned from the rare birthings with no infant.

Other observers, however, put the lie to Thomas’s dire accounting. Hubert De Castella, upon whose lease on the Coranderrk Creek Kulin survivors camped and worked into the 1860s, noted the presence of children amongst them, and another counted three female children on the upper Yarra in 1858. In 1861 Mary Green, whose husband John took over many of Thomas’s duties when the former was appointed Inspector of Aborigines in 1861, conducted lessons for six Woi wurrung children at Yering. Perhaps because the protectors were actively involved in supplying Aboriginal child

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69 Ibid. Replies to Circular, William Thomas, Q4, 17, p55-6.
70 “Report of the Select Committee on the Aborigines, 1859”, evidence of W. Thomas, Q.11, Q47, Q48, pp. 1, 3. Compare Thomas’ ‘return’ in Nightingale, Sanitary Statistics in which he calculated 8 births since 1850, 8 between 1845 and 1850 and 5, 1939-45.
servants to settlers who promised to civilise and Christianise them, the parents of these children deliberately hid their children from Thomas.\textsuperscript{74} Parker, for example, had brokered a number of ‘adoptions’ of children who became servants, and Thomas himself told the committee of 1858 that he had tried to take custody of that sole surviving girl, ‘but the mother would not give her up’.\textsuperscript{75} Whatever the reason, Thomas’s fear that the Kulin killed their infants, ‘and that to an almost universal extent’, was overwrought.

Thomas’s influential testimony, however, left an impression on McCombie who sought his opinion as to whether ‘the children could be got away from their parents and preserved’ if they were taken young: did he think they would ‘give them up?’ Thomas replied that unless they were removed ‘a very far distance to a central school’ their parents would retrieve them, and, it was implied, they would continue to be under threat.\textsuperscript{76} Once Thomas had regarded the proposal to incarcerate the children of the Aborigines in training institutions as uncivilised, but he had watched his clans die out and now argued that the only way to save them was through the removal of surviving children to a central establishment from which their ‘degraded parents’ would be unable to retrieve them and where ‘their native tongue [would be] discouraged to its utter extinction’. Aware, as were other correspondents, that the people would not willingly part with their surviving children, he advised ‘a simultaneous move by the authorities in all the distant tribes, to endeavour by purchase, persuasion, and preparatory kind treatment, to get the permission of the tribe to take care of their children’.\textsuperscript{77}

Despite witnessing at close hand the dogged and courageous struggle of his own depleted clans to survive and the distress the paucity of children brought them, Thomas generalised, perhaps under the combined weight of popular opinion and his own weariness, about the degradation of Aboriginal parents and argued that while his plan might appear as ‘emanating from a breast void of feeling’, that ‘humanity for the offspring should guide the philanthropist’ in this endeavour.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{74} “Report of the Select Committee on the Aborigines, 1859”, evidence of Hull, p.11; Chase, p.13; Parker, p18.\textsuperscript{75} ibid. evidence of W. Thomas, Q.49, p.3.\textsuperscript{76} ibid.\textsuperscript{77} ibid. Replies to Circular, W. Thomas, Q.13, p40, paragraphs 3, 8.\textsuperscript{78} ibid. paragraphs 5,6.
By 1858, the momentum of popular prejudice was such that even colonists well acquainted with the ordinary, familiar humanity of the Aborigines, had come to believe that they were unfit to care for their few extant children, that they wantonly killed them off and that the institutionalisation of their surviving children was imperative to save the race from extinction. By definition now the Australians were infanticides and a lack of substantiated evidence did not gainsay that fact.

Still, the commissioners knew that a policy of coercion would not wash with the Colonial Office or advance the civil reputation of the new colony. In a report tabled in March 1859, McCombie’s committee resisted, or rather ignored, popular pressure to force the people onto reserves and to isolate their children. With his eye firmly fixed on the home readership of his enquiry’s comprehensive ethnographic survey, McCombie recommended instead the establishment of small reserves where the Aborigines could be persuaded, in line with Colonial Office philanthropy, to voluntarily adopt the civilising disciplines of agricultural production, be educated and made Christian. It was a stratagem that paid off for McCombie when he was asked to address the prestigious British Association on the subject of the Aborigines when he returned to London a year later. 79

With the Colonial Office placated, the niceties of liberal sentiment were rapidly dispensed with, however. Despite the establishment of a network of ‘Honorary Correspondents’ who distributed rations and fed the new Central Board with intelligence about the Aborigines, Treasury parsimony restricted expenditure on medical aid and ensured that rations, when distributed, were insufficient to prevent malnutrition. As each year its Treasury vote was pared down, the Board was forced to prioritise its budget. Initially it suggested that ‘able and healthy blacks should be encouraged to provide … for their own and the wants of their families’ – effectively recognising no instrumental distinction between the Aborigines and the working class colonists. Under pressure to clear the often debilitated and morally incriminating remnants of the colony’s indigenous people from the landscape, however, it soon called for power to confine the people to

79 McCombie’s address to BAAS is noted, but not reproduced, in Report of the 29th Meeting of the BAAS held at Aberdeen, 1859, (London 1860) p.186.
reserves and for absolute authority over ‘the disposal of orphan and deserted children’. Yet with limited funds, its first priority remained the establishment of an asylum for “black and ‘half-caste’ children”. The latter in particular it claimed by the logic of paternal right. All through the 1860s the Board’s Inspector of Aborigines, John Green, pressed them, bribed them and finally compelled them, sometimes with the help of police, to offer up their children to the central asylum established at Coranderrk in 1863. An account of the operation of the asylum and Green’s campaign is provided in chapter five.

The rights of the Aborigines over their own children had been fatally undermined in the 1840s and 1850s by the unbounded circulation of unsubstantiated rumours that they were so lacking in the natural human affections that they routinely killed off their own children, some of whom were also the heirs of white men. As rumour assumed the substance of fact, and as infanticide came to define the savagery of the Aborigines, the concern of colonial liberals for the ‘mutual rights’ of these subjects of the Crown transformed into a philanthropic crusade to ‘rescue’ innocent children from imminent death. By the time that Darwin unwrapped his revolutionary account of the mechanics of evolution in October 1859, and as the notion of the savage elided into that of the primitive, infanticide was an essential signifier in a posse of discourses that placed the Australians beyond the protective range of liberalism’s umbrella of universal rights. For colonists with a will to dispose of the Aborigines, and for imperialists puffed up by Darwin’s new proof of their own evolutionary preeminence, evocations of infanticides unseen gave a moral sanction to acts of dispossession. As I have argued, humanitarians were equally complicit in constructing a discourse that licensed their own schemes of ‘rescue’.

Infanticide: a closer look at some foundational texts.

I return now to look closely at two of the foundational texts that underwrote the transformation of colonial rumours of infanticide into ethnological fact. When the

Protectors arrived at Port Phillip in 1839, the belief that their wards were practitioners of infanticide had already taken root in the anxious colonial imagination. Already, two authoritative texts on the subject were in circulation. The first was the testimony of William Buckley who had lived for thirty-two years amongst the Watha wurrung people of the Bellarine Peninsula after escaping from a short-lived convict establishment at Sorrento in 1803. In August 1835 he guided John Batman’s colleague John Helder Wedge through Watha wurrung territory and Wedge recorded Buckley’s responses to his many anxious questions about the Aborigines. A year later Wedge’s narrative of that expedition appeared in the journal of the Royal Geographic Society.  

Amongst those who still argue that the abduction of the ‘stolen generations’ by Australian governments constituted an act of rescue from likely death at the hands of their kin, Buckley’s testament remains the foundational text, even when it is reached through a series of mediations. As noted in the introduction, as recently as 1999, Counsel for the Commonwealth Government defended the ‘rescue’ of Aboriginal children when Peter Gunner and Lorna Cubillo sued for compensation in the Australian Federal Court in Darwin. Gunner, argued Counsel and a series of former police and welfare officers, had been taken from his mother in the 1950s because she had attempted to kill him. Significantly, Mr. Justice O’Loughlin was unconvinced by the allegation. Nevertheless such charges continue to be vigorously defended by commentators like Keith Windschuttle and a former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Peter Howson. These commentators, and the few anthropologists who ventured into this controversial debate in the 1970s and early 1980s, such as Woodrow Denham (1974) and Gillian Cowlishaw (1978, 1981), relied heavily on the work of Australia’s first eminent anthropologist, A.W. Howitt; but Howitt, in turn, relied substantially on Buckley’s exposition.
Another historian who repeated the allegation that infanticide impacted substantially on population decline in the Western District of Port Phillip was Jan Critchett (1988). She drew upon the conclusion of the eminent anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt that infanticide 'does seem to have been practiced occasionally almost all over Australia'. But unlike Critchett, the Berndts were at pains to emphasise that the practice was 'rare', and they too rested the claim on Howitt’s work. Thus Critchett and the Berndts also indirectly rely on Buckley’s narrative.

A close reading of Howitt’s published texts, and his unpublished papers and correspondence, indicates indeed that Howitt’s own Aboriginal informants denied that they practised infanticide. On the contrary, in the late 1870s they assured him that ‘they never knew an instance of parents killing their children, but only of leaving behind new-born infants.’ Howitt failed to ascertain the import of their qualification and concluded that the child left behind was left to die. 'The Kurnai’, he concluded, ‘undoubtedly, were guilty of infanticide.’ But other conclusions were available, and Howitt, like Robinson, was aware that misinterpretation was common between white and black. Perhaps other kin, grandmothers, for example, cared for the child. The Berndts entertained that possibility, and they used Howitt’s Gunai testimony to lend weight to their conclusion that infanticide was rare and exceptional rather than customary and prevalent throughout Australia.

When Howitt later sought more information on the subject from his network of correspondents, the returns were heavily infected again with things unseen, with recycled phantasms of fictive savages fit only for annihilation or incarceration. Dr McKinlay, for example, 'inferred from the remarkable gap that appeared in the ages of children' amongst the Kaura of the Adelaide region, that in 'hard summers the new-born children were all eaten'. Dr MacKenzie also inferred that since he had not seen any ‘half-caste’ infants they

88 Lorimer Fison and A. W. Howitt, Kamilaroi and Kurnai : Group-Marriage and Relationship, and Marriage by Elopement, Drawn Chiefly from the Usage of the Australian Aborigines : Also the Kurnai Tribe, Their Customs in Peace and War (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1880) p.190. Emphasis in original.
89 Ibid. p.190.
must all have been killed.\textsuperscript{90} On such conjectures rested the moral claims of settler colonialism over the land and over Aboriginal children and the Board’s certitude that there could be no place for such primitives in the modern world.

In contrast, Howitt’s notes of a conversation he had with William Barak in 1881 record that Barak ‘could not remember any case of deserting infants or of killing them’. What Barak did relate, however, was ‘one case of a man near Berwick/Dandenong who eat [sic] a child. This man was a Bunjil.’\textsuperscript{91} Like Howitt’s settler informants, Barak’s account reflects both a xenophobic fear of people beyond the perimeter - for those to the east were not of Barak’s own Woi wurrung clan – and signals a profound difference between Aboriginal and European world-views that must have led to innumerable misunderstandings. Barak’s statement that the man was a Bunjil lifts the story beyond the secular realm and into the numinous – although to draw a line between one realm and the other is to interpose European meaning. ‘Bunjil’, as Barak told Howitt, denoted both a powerful living man and a ‘spirit’ figure, who, for the Australians were sometimes as terrifying, retributive, unpredictable and savage as the ‘gods’ of any other culture. Significantly, Howitt himself made no claim to have witnessed any infanticides, nor implied that women within his ken had despatched their newborns.

Like later commentators, Howitt’s interpretation relied heavily on Buckley’s evidence. Directly or indirectly, therefore, Buckley’s testimony is as influential in the ongoing debate about Aboriginal infanticide at the opening of the twenty-first century as it was in the late 1830s when the Protectors arrived at Port Phillip.

The second foundational description of Aboriginal infanticides in circulation in 1839 was that of NSW missionary William Watson who, as noted in chapter one, established his camp at Wellington Valley, NSW, in 1832. That Watson’s descriptions were read by the Assistant Protectors cannot be doubted. Both texts therefore warrant a detailed evaluation.

\textsuperscript{90} A. W. Howitt, \textit{The Native Tribes of South-East Australia} (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1996[1904]) p.749. Original correspondence in \textit{Howitt Papers}, Museum of Victoria, Item XM703, a four page hand written transcript of replies to his circular question: ‘Infanticide; how and when practised, and the reasons assigned for it?’

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Howitt Papers}, State Library of Victoria, MS 9356, Box 1053/2b. Howitt’s notes of interview with Barak, 1881, p.22, and p.20.
Buckley’s evidence interrogated.

When John Helder Wedge set out from Batman’s landfall at Indented Head on the Bellarine Peninsula to explore the plains to the west on the 18th August 1835, he took William Buckley and two young Sydney Aborigines, Joan Joan and Diabering, as guides. The expedition with Wedge took place within weeks of Buckley's 'coming in' on 12th July 1835 to the rudimentary outpost of 'civilisation' represented by Batman's camp. Wedge's fearful preconceptions are apparent from a list of subject headings in his fieldbook which ascended in standard form from the more scandalising behaviours common to savages - 'polygamy, infanticide, canabals [sic], Wives, after death of husband taken by the brother of the deceased' to the more prosaic elements of life, 'mode of burial, habits - general ... food, huts'. The list signals the likely course of his interrogations of Buckley, and indeed, Buckley confirmed that the people of the hinterland were both cannibals and infanticides, adding weight to the Port Phillip Association’s argument that only a European presence could deliver the sort of 'remediation' required to convert the Aborigines to Christian civilization. As Wedge put it,

I learnt from Buckley that they were cannibals; his statement on this head was confirmed by the two youths … who accompanied me on several excursions I made into the interior … 'Disgusting as is this practice … a still more horrible one, if possible prevails: that of the Mothers destroying many of their infants at their birth. The cause by which they appear to be thus influenced is, the custom the women have of nursing their children till they are three or four years old; to get rid therefore of the trouble and inconvenience of finding sustenance for two; should a second be born before the eldest is weaned, they destroy the youngest immediately after it is born; although this explanation was given me by Buckley, and I have no doubt this is in most instances the case, yet some women perpetrate the murder of their infants from mere wantonness; and as it would seem to us (and which is found even in the brute creation) a total absence of maternal feeling. One woman in particular the Wife of Nullamboin I think, was pointed out to me who had destroyed ten of her children, one of whom she killed a few days previous to my arrival at the Port.

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93 John Helder Wedge, Journey to examine the country west of Indented Head. p67. For references to pre-1835 texts concerning infanticide amongst Tasmanian Aborigines see H. Ling Roth The Aborigines of Tasmania 2nd Ed.(1899 ) pp162-3.
94 John Helder Wedge, Journey to examine the country west of Indented Head. Fieldbook H1572. SLV MS 9305 Box 23/3(a). This is an early draft of what was to become Mr. Wedge's Narrative of an Excursion amongst the Natives of Port Phillip. On p.28 of this draft, 'remediation' is crossed out and replaced by the word 'religion'.
95 Wedge. Narrative of an Excursion... (n.p.)
Anxious for his own safety in the territory of cannibals, Wedge records how he purposely affected 'a confidence devoid of fear' in his 'deportment' towards Aborigines met on the journey, designed to impress them with the latent power he possessed and to convince them 'of the sincerity of our intentions'. But the fear of being lunched upon pervaded his mind and his anxiety can have done nothing to allay the fears of his young guides who, being perhaps equally anxious to deter him from trespassing into the country of 'wild blacks', readily confirmed his fears about cannibalism. For the fear of aliens beyond the perimeter of one’s own country was a fear shared by colonists and ‘natives’ alike.

Putting aside the formulaic resemblance of Wedge’s narration to the Malthusian template, the reliability of Buckley's testimony must be open to question. Birthing was not solely women's work, but it is unlikely that Buckley would have acquired knowledge of its intimacies. In some of the few available accounts of Aboriginal birth rites, women were accoucheed by female attendants, a competent 'doctor', sometimes male, by their husband, or any permutation of these. But men without conjugal or professional connection had no place in the birth chamber. Mitchell, for example, reported a year later, in 1836, that his young male guides were nonplussed when they came across 'a very small bower of twigs, only large enough to contain a child: the floor was hollowed out, and filled with dry leaves and feathers; and the ground around had been cut smooth, several boughs having been also bent over, so as to be fixed in the ground at both ends. The whole seemed connected to some mystic ceremony of the aborigines'. The male guides 'could not explain' the construction. His female guides however readily identified it as 'a bower for the reception of a new-born child'.

Buckley's own testimony indicates that he had no children in all the years he was amongst the Watha wurrung, and that he had briefly had a ‘wife’ but had forfeited her to another man. The likelihood is that, as befitted Aboriginal etiquette, a woman was temporarily bestowed upon him when first he was 'recognised' by the people but that his

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ignorance of their ways would have rapidly made him a social oddity. His wifeless state suggests that Buckley attained only subordinate status amongst them, or remained a perpetual alien on the fringe, barred from initiation into the realms of knowledge and authority attained as men and women progressed through the ranks towards seniority. Not having fathered children in his years amongst the Aborigines, Buckley would not have been present at any births. His relation of the habitual despatch of children must at best be at one remove from the purported event, and indeed, he made no claim to be a first-hand witness. Like other reports of infanticide, those told to Wedge by Buckley were carried out behind a veil of secrecy that the narrator of the event was unable to penetrate.

His precise enumeration of the infanticides of Nullamboin's wife also suggests a degree of creative license. It is unlikely that events which, if they happened at all, would have occurred at irregular intervals across the span of two decades, would have been so precisely remembered by anyone beyond the most closely-connected kin. Other structural aspects of the account also cast doubt on its veracity and suggest that it may have been formed in response to leading questions posed by Wedge. According to Wedge, Buckley informed him that Nullaboin's wife had killed a child 'a few days previous to my arrival at the Port'. The deployment of this narrative device of belatedness, of 'just-missedness', or of imminence, is one that frequently characterised colonial renditions of bizarre alien practices: the white man who is not eaten, the murdered infant who is rescued in the nick of time, the savagery that is known to have occurred but is not actually witnessed.

When Buckley had first 'come in' it had taken some ten or twelve days to recover his English language skills. Buckley's ability to transmit the subtleties of the world-view in which he had been enmeshed for over thirty years, to translate the fluid boundaries between cautionary tales of alien enemies and ancestors and the secular actualities of Aboriginal life must be in doubt. In later years, James Bonwick noted that Buckley was even in his early days a man 'so dull and reserved that it was impossible to get any connected or reliable information from him'. That Buckley should concur about the

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savageries of Aborigines beyond the margins indicates not his transmission of the actuality of Aboriginal practices but his identification with and his enmeshment in an Aboriginal world-view. Even as he rejoined his white confreres, he remained culturally fixed as an Aborigine, as Wedge unintentionally confirmed when on Sunday 23 August, 1835, five days into the excursion, he recorded that his party '[f]ell in with two families of natives who were very friendly.' 'One of them, Nullaboin, with whom Buckley had lived, had never seen a white man before', remarked Wedge ingenuously. On meeting with this party, Wedge recorded, Buckley had acted as translator and the whole party of eleven natives had sat around the fire in polite conversation, but after Wedge had retired, he overheard a dialogue of a different sort. In his tent, Wedge was disturbed as they 'kept up a conversation a great part of the night amongst themselves and with Buckley', and it must have been the latter who informed Wedge later that 'they were anxious to know where I [Buckley] had been and were curious to know why I was walking about the country.'

Was Buckley admonished by Nullaboin for leading Wedge into their country? Had Nullaboin orchestrated this meeting with the white man - was he doing his own ethnological investigation?

We need not assume the conscious or malign assembly of misinformation on Buckley's part, nor a deliberate delivering up of Aboriginal culture to European prejudgment in exchange for the pardon for which Wedge interceded. Instead, the likely cause of this construction of savagery is the coincidence of European and Aboriginal cultural and psychic projections of the fearfully exotic onto 'wild blacks' - even if the coincidence of the projected forms is uncanny and perhaps involves cultural contamination or linguistic reticulations. Gananath Obeyesekere's speculation that the language of gesture and pantomime through which sailors, scientific officers and colonists enquired after cannibalism was mimetically played back to them by islanders in apparent confirmation of the initial suggestion, is of interest here.

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100 Wedge. Journey to examine the country west of Indented Head, p57
In addition, the standard juxtaposition of cannibalism, of which Wedge himself might have feared becoming the victim, against infanticide, arguably effects a diversion of terror and the psychological restoration of colonising power as the anxious object of consumption resumes his preferred place as deliverer. As Clifford Geertz sardonically observed, 'Every man has a right to create his own savage for his own purposes'. It is fear perhaps that accounts for the disjuncture between Wedge's observations of Aboriginal women at Indented Head as not prone to making 'advances or levity of conduct', and his disparagement of them as heartless destroyers of their own offspring.

While the sheer number of infants that Nullaboin's wife was accused of killing suggests an element of exaggeration, perhaps by Buckley, perhaps by Wedge, is it possible to dislodge or reframe this 'fact'? Aside from the improbability that Buckley would have kept such a close record of these events, it is possible that a different sort of tragedy was unfolding before his eyes. Sealers and whalers had been active along the coast of Bass Strait for some decades by the time that Batman's party disembarked. Batman's first contact was with a large party of women and children who 'as I understood from the interpreters were afraid I should take them by force and ill use them as some of their tribe had been already.' They were evidently well acquainted with the ways of white men. An epidemic of smallpox is known to have swept through the region around 1830 as had an earlier epidemic around 1789; other exotic diseases, venereal disease amongst them, may have already begun to take their toll on Aboriginal populations and on their reproductive capacities by 1835. Buckley's purported account of infanticide perhaps therefore records his observation of the catastrophic population collapse that had begun before Wedge's arrival and was to continue into the 1870s.

**Watson’s account.**

The publication in London by the Royal Geographic Society in 1836 of Wedge’s narrative of his exploration of Port Phillip, coincided with Buxton’s enquiries into the

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condition of Aborigines in British colonies. When Dandison Coates, Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, tabled missionary Watson’s depiction of the rescue of an infant from the clutches of its debauched mother, just weeks after the establishment of the mission in 1832, it contained enough grim detail to excite the passions of any evangelical zealot. But a closer reading of Watson’s text than Coates had evidently made, unearthed three separate diary entries in which Watson attributes the death of the child in question not to its mother but to its white father, the convict stockkeeper Kelley. Because this is a text of such significance, it is necessary to reproduce substantial portions of it here.

Watson’s prejudices are evident at the outset.

Watson's presentation of the event is as follows:

6th Dec, 1832: At this station I saw Rachael, the ... [wife] to Bobby, king of Wellington, who expects every hour to be delivered; she was in the hut, attended by a black female and an old man, whom they named the doctor. She was here a short time ago, and I warned her not to kill the child when it should be born: she promised that she would not. The man at the hut [Kelley] informs me that several blacks (whether male or female I cannot say) persuaded her to go into the bush, that the child might be destroyed as soon as it made its appearance; that she refused ... He said they threatened to spear her if she would not, and so they prevailed.

8th Dec 1832: Two black [women] came over from Kelley’s ... this morning; but not before I had heard that Rachael had murdered her child ... They acknowledged that the child had been murdered, and they said that too by Kelley. I have been told to-day, what I fear is too true, that Kelley pays to king Bobby a certain portion of handkerchiefs, &c. for the loan of Rachael, and this child was his. The [women] say it was narrang (little) white narrang black. My soul is completely horrified at this conduct, and alas! it is very common.

Five days later, on the 13th December 1832, Watson recorded that he reprimanded Kelley for his conduct towards Rachael, and was told, by Kelley, that ’the child had been still-born’. Undeterred, Watson records that, nevertheless, 'I gave him to understand that I firmly believed what I had heard.' In February 1833, Watson again recorded his opinion that it was the convict stockkeeper Kelley, and not Rachael or her kin, who had killed the child: 'this person ... whom I mentioned ... as having too much reason to believe that he had murdered a child which a native female, who was living with him, had borne to him'.

Four months later, the Watsons intervened in an Aboriginal ceremony to prevent what they took to be an orgy of savagery and infanticide. On the 27th April 1833, the following lengthy entry appears in the diary:

I now learned from Mrs W[atson] that the elder [woman] had denied to her (two days before) that she was pregnant. So our suspicions now were of a different nature from what I at first had entertained. When we had come near to the place, we perceived, by the light of the fire, a white infant laid very near to it, and apparently struggling in the agonies of death but not crying. The elder [woman] was sitting with her back to it, and the younger [woman] was digging a hole in the ground ... Mrs W. asked her if she killed the child with the staff. She said, no, with her foot. Mrs W took the babe, and wrapped it in a blanket ... The babe felt the warmth and feebly cried; on which the cruel mother seemed surprised, and looking round, said, ”You give it me now; you have it in morning ... Having brought it home, Mrs W ... began to wash the babe, it was found to be literally covered with dirt, and its back much burnt.”

What can we make of these reports? Coates, who spoke for missionary enterprise, presented the diary to the Select Committee as evidence that the Aborigines habitually murdered children of mixed descent, and thus urgently required the intercession of evangelists. But neither the Aborigines, nor Kelley, nor Watson made that accusation in relation to the first incident. The women accused Kelley of having murdered the child, which Watson accepted, and Kelley countered that it had been stillborn. Throughout the diary Watson condemned the behaviour of 'stockkeepers' and lamented the effects of venereal disease on the Aborigines who visit his station: many, including the newborn, were covered with weeping sores, and the disease had brought about severe and generalised physical debilitation and cultural breakdown. When Rachael returned to the station in March 1834, some fifteen months later, 'She had an infant (half-caste) with her; it was literally covered with that most loathsome of all diseases.'

This infant, therefore, had not been 'despatched', but stillbirths and neo-natal death rates soared under such conditions.

Despite the conclusion recorded in Watson’s own hand in December 1832 as to the cause of the death of Rachael’s first child, the Watsons set off for the women's camp late that night in April 1833 expecting to find infanticide and interpreted what they saw in that light. In both London and Wellington Valley missionaries, and philanthropists, responded to preconceived notions of savagery against which God commanded them to

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105 ibid.
labour. If savages required redemption, the providential and evangelical empire required savages.

**Alternative explanations.**

It is possible, from the colonial record, to reinterpret what the Watsons saw in Wellington Valley, to sift out a different version of Aboriginal cultural practice. In response to the questionnaire circulated by Darwin and Prichard in 1841 and reissued by the Victorian Select Committee on the Aborigines in 1858, William Thomas observed in regard to ceremonies connected with the birth of a child that in the case of the child of a chief:

> there is a grand corroboree; the infant is rubbed over with emu oil or fat, afterwards a thin rubbing of (wheerup) red ochre. The infant is held carefully in the palm of the right hand, and exposed to the tribe while corroborying. Those of less note seldom do more than rub all over the child with charcoal dust.

What the Watsons saw was perhaps not the attempted murder of the child but the enactment of customary post-natal rites.

A second description of the birthing practices of the Aborigines of Victoria appeared in London in 1870 in the Reverend J.G. Wood's *The Natural History of Man: Being an Account of the Manners and Customs of the Uncivilized Races of Men*. Wood recorded the words of an unidentified colonial commentator which, though arrogantly dismissive of the Aborigines, nevertheless describes birthing practices in unusual detail:

> While upon the subject of the Australian aborigines, I must not omit to describe the very original *modus operandi* of the indigenous *sage femme*.
> The unhappy loobra retired with her wise woman into some lone secluded dell, abounding with light sea-sand. A fire was kindled, and the wretched miam-miam speedily constructed. Then came the slender repast, comprising a spare morsel of kangaroo or other meat, supplied with a sparing hand by her stoical coolie [husband], grilled, and graced with the tendrils of green opiate cow thistles ...
> The sable attendant soon entered upon her interesting duties. One of the first was, to light a second fire over a quantity of prepared sand, that had been carefully divested of all fibrous roots, pebbles, or coarser matter. The burning coals and fagots [sic] were removed from thence, upon some nice calculation as to the period of the unfortunate little nigger's arrival. When the miniature representative of his sable father beheld the light of day, a hole was scratched in the heated sand, and the wee russet-brown thing safely deposited therein, in a state of perfect nudity, and buried to the very chin, so effectually covered up as to render any objectionable movement ... utterly impossible …

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106 ibid.
[After two hours] … having acquired so much knowledge of earthly troubles, the well-baked juvenile was considered to be thoroughly done, and thereupon introduced to his delighted loobra mamma.108

Here, ironically cast amongst the scorn, is evidence that unsympathetic colonists may have mistaken Aboriginal birthing rites for instances of infanticide. Even then, Wood added to this account of birthing rites the by-then-standard rider that, as was 'the custom of many savage nations, the Australians too often destroy their children in their first infancy' - as if the momentum of imperialism’s own sustaining fantasies drowned out any other voice. Wood’s unattributed but authoritative opinion that the Australians wantonly committed infanticide was aired again in 1876 in Robert Brough Smyth’s The Aborigines of Victoria. Smyth, as already noted, was the Secretary of the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines from 1860-1875.

Conclusion
In 1998 Martin Nakata undertook a critical re-evaluation of the Torres Strait Islander genealogies assembled by A.C.Haddon in 1908. Haddon, like Huxley in the 1840s, charged the islanders with being customary infanticides and foeticides. Nakata's painstaking reconstruction of Haddon’s genealogies indicate that before missionaries arrived, many families had as many as six, seven, ten children and that the claims that they killed their infants 'to avoid the toil of having to provide food for them' were without foundation. Haddon, argues Nakata, arrived in the islands with a set of facts about savages based not on data but on 'a certain logic of a Western "commonsense" that served 'to maintain the distinction between "them" and "us"'. Nakata charged that Haddon 'knew what he was seeking and thus went about finding it', even though he could instance 'no sightings by anyone of any such incident'.109 It was a process undoubtedly informed by the conversion of rumour into ethnological truth in an earlier era in south-eastern Australia.

For colonists in search of moral vindication for a colonial project that had caused the near extermination of the Aboriginal population, and for metropolitan imperialists increasingly bent on expounding their own racial preeminence, the charge that the Australians were so debased that they killed off their own children willy nilly, out of mere slovenliness or because they found those engendered by white men repugnant, was a utilitarian device without equal. While the few Aborigines consulted on the question invariably insisted that infanticide was rare, circumstantial and interdicted rather than customary and prevalent, colonists and imperialists relentlessly used the weight of the charges to affect a series of critical historic inversions, dissolving the moral concerns of the 1830s into the imperial jingoism of the 1850s.

A critical examination of texts from Malthus, to Wedge's transmission of Buckley's testimony, through missionary accounts, to the struggle of the Protectors to meld their own experience with the rising tide of damning hearsay and ethnological authority, and beyond, reveals a continuous circulation of unsubstantiated, cross-referenced allegations based on anxiety-driven, utilitarian, fantasy. It reveals, too, how the compact between desire, power and knowledge constructed subjects devoid of morality, and hence devoid of territorial right and fit for the sort of legislative interventions that drove colonialism.

Through that 'confusion of tongues' that occurs still at the interface between cultures, and against which Robinson had warned, Aboriginal acts, motives, symbols, words were, as Clifford Geertz has observed, subjected to 'systematic misunderstanding [which] reduced traditional form to social farce'. From the mid-1840s infanticide tales, more than any others, enabled colonists to rationalise their desire to clear the Aborigines from the land by representing the abduction of their children, and the deliberate interruption of cultural connection, as an act of philanthropy and rescue. Infanticide narratives also relieved the community of white men of the collective embarrassments of those incommoding children of mixed descent who featured prominently - when children featured at all - amongst the remnants of the clans. Recast as the victims of black savage rites, the heirs of white men could be collectively rescued by agents of the state, thereby

110 Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures p9.
assuaging colonists’ uneasiness about individual paternities, before being recast as Aborigines and locked into the Protection Board’s children’s asylum.

Sexual encounters with invader-settlers, undertaken as a hedge against the starvation that became widespread as traditional Aboriginal economies collapsed, held the ever-present threat of venereal disease, of measles, and of other diseases productive of congenital deformities, stillbirths and neo-natal deaths. Under such catastrophic conditions, some women may have resorted to merciful infanticide. But there is also ample indication that Aboriginal society adjusted rapidly to integrate into kinship systems those few offspring of mixed-descent who did survive as the birth rate plummeted. It was after all, the presence of such children, rather than the lack of them, in south-eastern Australia in the nineteenth century, as later in the north of the continent, that led governments to lay claim over them, and confounds the belief that such babies were universally despatched.
CHAPTER THREE
Colonising the Body: A Species Apart

In the previous chapter I considered how antipodean discourses about Aboriginal infanticide salved settlers’ consciences by representing the impending extinction of the natives as a natural effect of Aboriginal savagery rather than an effect of colonialism. As confabulations of widespread infanticide moved from the realm of folklore to alleged ethnographic truth, the children of the Aborigines, and especially those who were the heirs of white men, were cast as innocents whose survival depended upon their removal from savage parents by agents of the patriarchal colonial state.

In this chapter I shift focus from colonial ethnography to the metropolitan centres of Europe’s empires, and to America, to consider how the particular anthropology of the Australians and the naturalisation of Aboriginal extinction underwrote the racial logic of global imperialism by representing the dominion of ‘superior races’ over ‘inferior races’ as a biological imperative. While Australian colonists defended themselves against the charge that they had brought the natives of New Holland to the verge of extinction with the counter-charge that it was they who rescued infants from the murderous and often cannibalistic hands of savages, European and American men of science were more occupied with an explanation of Aboriginal decline offered by the Polish refugee and humanitarian traveller, Count Paul Edmund Strzelecki, which suggested a biological incongruity between white and black.

In 1845, Strzelecki published his account, in London, of his journey on foot through NSW, into the unexplored wilds of the territory he named Gippsland, and onwards to Melbourne (and to Hobart) between December 1839 and May 1840.1 A humanitarian, he sympathetically recorded the ubiquitous presence amongst the Aborigines of NSW of pulmonary tuberculosis and venereal disease and lamented the already evident dearth of children amongst them. Yet when considering the causes of the dramatic decline in the Aboriginal population since the beginnings of colonisation, he proposed that it was not caused so much by early mortality but by their failure to produce
viable offspring once they were brought into contact with settlers. It seemed, he wrote, ‘that the power of continuing or procreating the species appears to have been curtailed’.

He had observed, he wrote, that whenever there was a union between an aboriginal female and a European male ... the native female is found to lose the power of conception on a renewal of intercourse with the male of her own race, retaining only that of procreating with the white man … Hundreds of instances of this extraordinary fact are on record in the writer's memoranda, all tending to prove that the sterility of the female being relative only to one, and not to another male, - and recurring invariably, under the same circumstances, amongst the Hurons, Seminoles, Red Indians, Yakies (Sinaloa), Mendoza Indians, Araucos, South Sea Islanders and natives of New Zealand, New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, - is not accidental, but follows laws as cogent, though as mysterious, as the rest of those connected with generation.

The effect of this mysterious law of physiology, wrote Strzelecki, was such ‘that a charter for colonisation granted to one race becomes virtually the decree for the extinction of the other’.

That Strzelecki’s hypothesis owed some part of its origins to antipodean prejudice is suggested by the publication a year after Strzelecki’s tome, of a similar observation in a work of anthropology by Honore Jacquinot, second in command on Dumont D’Urville's Astrolabe which docked at Hobart late in 1839 just months before Strzelecki’s arrival. Like Strzelecki, Jacquinot observed that metis between Australians and Europeans were ‘rarely seen’. Unlike Strzelecki, who was a humanitarian whose concern was with the plight of the Australians, Jacquinot concluded that the rarity of metis between two races living in proximity ‘surely proves incontestably the difference of species’.

As ‘Strzelecki’s law’ inflated in anthropological circles from his initial speculation about the inability of Aboriginal women to reproduce ‘black’ children subsequent to birthing an infant of mixed descent, to a generalised claim of reproductive incompetence in association with white men, it seemed to demonstrate the relevance to

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3 Ibid. p.346-7.
4 Ibid. p. 348.
5 Honore Jacquinot, Considerations Generales Sur L'anthropologie (Voyage Au Pole Sud) Zoologie, vol. ii. (1846), p.109; cited in Josiah Clark Nott, George R. Gliddon, and Samuel George Morton, Types of Mankind, or, Ethnological Researches, Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Cranias of Races, and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History Illustrated by
the global imperial order of Buffon’s rule that organisms that could not produce fertile offspring when crossed ought to be considered distinct species. Over the following three decades it was seized upon by European and American anthropologists to support claims that the naturally dominant white race was without moral obligation to lesser men and that racial mixing was an abomination that would vitiate the white race. It became a crucial ‘fact’ in imbuing a set of deadly projections and anxieties about other ‘types of mankind’ with all the gravitas of science. It is this Australian connection in the mid-century marriage between scientific racism and imperialism, and between biology and anthropology, that I explore in this chapter.

While race came to stand as the principal bio-sign of colonial power by the middle years of the nineteenth century, human sexual desire regularly transgressed boundaries delineated by racial codes. It was, after all, the ubiquitous presence of hybrid bodies in every colonial locale, including Australia, that aroused moral panic and caused colonial legislators and anthropologists to repeatedly rehearse a law that posited an impermeable barrier between the races - as if utterance and repetition alone could make the racial categories of colonialism as discrete in practice as they were in theory. By the sheer power of wishful repetition, and despite authoritative rebuttals, Strzelecki’s law was instrumental in banishing the Australians to the edge of extinction, to the edge of evolutionary time and to the edge of humanity. Its trajectory through the annals of European and American anthropology and biology, serves as an example of just 'how much political and cultural energy went into defining dichotomies and distinctions' of race in the imperial domain even as those boundaries collapsed.

It was Strzelecki’s theory and population data from Port Phillip that provided the key evidence that led the American craniologist, Samuel Morton, to publicly assert differences of species amongst the races of men in the 1840s; in the 1860s Strzelecki’s...
hypothesis underwrote Thomas Huxley’s placement of the Australians on the very threshold between man and ape where they marked one end of an implied continuum along which other lesser races were positioned. It was a theory that caused Darwin to take note when he read Strzelecki’s text in 1845 and still occupied his thoughts when he considered the ‘descent of man’ in the 1870s. Its passage through European and American anthropology shadowed the slippage of the Australians from a people who could be uplifted by discipline and training into respectable, civil artisans (or citizens even, in a democratically-minded colony) to a people deemed to be so biologically obsolete that colonists were absolved of moral obligation to attempt even their preservation and whose extinction became naturalised.

As Strzelecki’s theory circled back to the antipodes, transformed from local rumour to imperial fact, it became legislatively effective. Robert Brough Smyth, head of the powerful Victorian Mines Department, amateur ethnologist and secretary and plenipotentiary to the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines from 1860 to 1875, remained a convinced Prichardian who regarded his wards as salvageable and civilizable. But the creeping impact of the new social evolutionist ideas reinforced popular colonial prejudices against the colony’s Aborigines. Increasingly, Smyth found his ‘experiment’ in transforming the Aborigines into independent yeomen farmers, labourers and Christian citizens at odds with the new racial sensibility and with popular feeling that they deserved no special consideration. It meant too, that Kulin resistance to the Board’s transformative projects, which caused Brough Smyth no end of frustration, came to be read by the social evolutionists who succeeded him at the Board as confirmation of Aboriginal bio-racial incapacity. For Brough Smyth’s successors, the natural destiny of the Aborigines was deemed to be extinction.

**Races and the Limits of Species.**

Evolution was not a new concept in the 1840s. Lamarck had proposed as early as 1809 that species 'transmuted' from one form to another. By the 1820s palaeontologists such as Mantell and Buckland, the anatomist Geoffroy Sainte-Hilaire, the geologist Lyell and the physiologist William Lawrence had all shaken biblical certainty and undermined its chronologies by revealing both new appearances and extinctions in the 'Chain of Being'.
By the 1840s the power of the clerics to hold the new sciences in check was waning and was further undermined, perhaps fatally, by the anonymous publication in 1844 of the first of many editions of Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. The controversy in which that work was immediately mired, argue Desmond and Moore, 'galvanised' the scientific community into the defence of science over biblical prescription, although Darwin, quietly hatching his explanation of the mechanics of evolution, was loathe to offend.  

*Vestiges* severed the direct connection between god and man, proclaiming that mankind was not the first but the last created member of a sequence that providence had set in motion and then left to run, such that 'one species should give birth to another, until the second highest gave birth to man'.  

Between man and god now stood the biological machinery of evolution.

The paradigm shift from biblical creationism to evolution that Chamber’s work proclaimed, dovetailed with Grey’s endorsement from the Colonial Office in 1846 of the assertively imperial racial economies of Thomas Arnold. Progress, be it biological or economic and imperial demanded that the forces that generated it be freed of unnatural constraints. Herbert Spencer soon made plain this connection between biology and progress when he argued that the 'predatory instincts' that ensured the survival of the fittest (a term which he anticipated in 1851 but did not coin until 1864) 'subserved civilization by clearing the earth of inferior races of men'.  

The struggle to survive, he argued after Lamarck, stimulated physiological advances which were inherited by subsequent generations. To illustrate the point, he noted Richard Owen’s recent demonstration before the Zoological Society (1851) of a 30% differential between the large skull capacity of the average 'Englishman' and the diminutive capacity of that of the average 'Australian' savage.  

The English, argued Spencer, had been stimulated to advance through the pressure of population; the latter had been left behind in the evolutionary struggle and extinction was their lot. Progress, in Spencer's view, was

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9 Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p.41.


biologically determined, and the extinction of those who fell behind was determined by forces which were not to be held back by the moral qualms of ‘maudlin philanthropists’. Social dynamics took ‘no account of incidental suffering’ [and] exterminate[s] such sections of mankind as stand in their way’, so that

Just as the savage has taken the place of lower creatures, so must he, if he have remained too long a savage, give place to his superior. Evidently, therefore, from the very beginning, the conquest of one people over another has been, in the main, the conquest of ...the more adapted over the less adapted.  

Paralleling these pre-Darwinian explorations of the biological dimensions and the moral significance of the evolution of the human species, was a related contest between monogenists and polygenists: between those, like Prichard, who held to the Biblical orthodoxy that mankind represented one species which had adapted to environmental differences as it spread across the globe, and those, like the American slavery advocate Josiah Nott, who encapsulated the racial anxieties of the South when he denounced Wilberforce’s ‘ill-judged and hasty act of emancipation’ of 1833, asserted that the races had been separately created and that the 'amalgamation' of white and black would lead to degeneration and ‘race suicide’. For both evolutionists and polygenists, extinction acted as a crucial index of biological and moral fitness and served as a philosophically tidy polarity that reinforced Europeans as the preeminent race and imperialism as a biological imperative.

Into this maelstrom, Strzelecki’s *Physical Description of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, with its startling new intelligence regarding the infertility of the native Australians and their impending demise, lobbed with immediate effect. Charles Darwin, to whom Strzelecki sent an inscribed copy straight off the press, pronounced himself in general 'greatly disappointed' in it, but he took particular note of the 'mysterious law', underscoring it and noting on the back flyleaf 'Sterility of one race of mankind with another'. Other eminent ethnologists also took note of Strzelecki’s

theory. When Prichard mused publicly, in his Presidential Address to the Ethnological Society of London in June 1847, upon the connection between hybrid sterility and the vexing question of whether mankind represented one species or a multiplicity of separately created races, it was the implications of Strzelecki's theory that reverberated in his mind.\(^{15}\)

At Port Phillip, Strzelecki's theory also became a subject of immediate interest upon publication, and its implications were as apparent to those who took an interest in Aboriginal welfare as they were to Darwin and Prichard. Chief Protector Robinson immediately instructed his lieutenants to investigate the veracity or otherwise of Strzelecki's theory.\(^{16}\) William Dredge, who had briefly served as Assistant Protector to the Daung wurrung people in 1839-40, immediately recognised that the publication of Strzelecki’s work would reinforce the popular belief amongst settlers and 'authorities' that the Aborigines were not men but ‘an intermediate species'. It was he who most clearly articulated the brutal implications of Strzelecki’s theory. It was a belief, he said, pregnant with the most fearful consequences to the Aborigines. For if it could be satisfactorily shewn that the native blacks are anything but men, then they who may have been instruments of their extirpation, would be exonerated from the hideous stain of blood.\(^{17}\)

Assistant Protector Parker also pronounced his 'unqualified and indignant denial ... on a subject which I would not have noticed but for the imperative necessity for denying a statement so fraught with injurious consequences'.\(^{18}\)

If to Dredge and Parker the decline of the Aborigines stained the colony's moral reputation, there were many who looked to the passing of the Aborigines as a convenient inevitability, and to them Strzelecki's theory offered a cover for colonising brutalities. In positing that a mysterious law pertained to Aboriginal infertility, the theory shifted the motive force of the anticipated Aboriginal extinction from settler immorality onto the

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\(^{16}\) Edward Stone Parker, *The Aborigines of Australia: a lecture, delivered in the Mechanics' Hall, Melbourne, before the John Knox Young Men's Association, on Wednesday, May 10, 1854*, (Melbourne: Hugh McColl, 1854), note, p.15. The lecture was also printed as a pamphlet in both London and Edinburgh.

\(^{17}\) James Dredge, *Brief Notices of the Aborigines of N.S.W. (Etc) ... With a Plan for Their Moral and Social Improvement* (Geelong: 1845) pp.10-11. (Rare Books Collection, State Library of Victoria)
intimate ineptitudes of the Aboriginal body. As Russell McGregor notes, speculations about the 'brute' status of the Australians had been popular amongst settlers for some time, but it was not a view shared by reputable men of science, who, until the late 1840s universally held to Prichard's credo that humanity was the product of one act of creation. Now colonial prejudice had returned to its point of origin, transformed by Strzelecki's prestige into scientific fact. As William Hull argued in 1846, 'Upon the authority of Count Strzelecki and others equally good, there is great reason to believe that the intercourse of the Aboriginal women with the white men, almost invariably produces sterility. Thus it would appear that some secret and mysterious operation is even in this respect promoting the annihilation of the race'. It was, he said, 'the design of Providence that the inferior races should pass away before the superior races'.

Not all colonists took Hull's part. William Westgarth, a representative of the Port Phillip District in the NSW Legislature, and the author of a substantial report on the condition of the Aborigines of Port Phillip prepared for the NSW Select Committee in 1845, dismissed the idea. Returning to Edinburgh, the location of Britain's most prestigious medical faculty, Westgarth published a general account of the colony which paid particular attention to the 'manners and condition of the Aboriginal natives' and included an appendix on the 'reputed sterility of Aboriginal Females'. Strzelecki's 'extraordinary physical law', he argued 'cannot be relied upon'. He cited opinions from Chief Protectors Robinson and Moorhouse, both of whom dismissed Strzelecki's theory, and offered known cases of Aboriginal women who had borne children to white men and then gone on to bear them to Aboriginal men.

But Westgarth's work had little effect on the controversy, which continued unabated. In 1848 *The Edinburgh Review* considered the current state of 'Ethnology, or

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the Science of Races’. It argued that no clear line had yet been established between one race and another, and tentatively agreed with Prichard that the uniformity of ‘the great laws of the vital functions’ confirmed the zoological unity of mankind. It noted, however, the disagreement amongst naturalists over the dimensions and degrees of the critical factor of hybrid infertility and posed the question of whether the infertility of hybrid offspring would be immediately apparent or result in progressive degeneration over a number of generations. In attenuating the time line required to disprove the new theory, it thereby disqualified any challenge to Strzelecki’s theory based on immediate evidence since only time would reveal the infertility of heirs not yet produced. Subtly dislodging Prichardian orthodoxy, it concluded that there were ‘many who maintain that the limits of hybridity are much wider than Dr Prichard supposes’.23 By 1848 even those whose natural sympathies lay with monogenism now had doubts.

The following year, 1849, British naval surgeon T.R. Heywood Thomson set himself to disprove Strzelecki’s claims once and for all when he visited NSW. Thomson regarded it as ‘utterly inconsistent with all the known facts connected with the human species’. The outcomes of his investigations were widely reported. He recorded how on informing some of the Wyong natives and others of Hunter River that this to-be-acquired sterility of their “gins” had been reported, they all regarded it with derision, assuring me they had known it to occur repeatedly in their own and other tribes for native women to bear children to their black husbands or companions, after having borne offspring to Europeans.24

Similar facts had been confirmed to surgeon Thomson by numbers of white informants in the colony. Thomson repeated the increasingly popular alternative belief that the scarcity of Aboriginal children could be accounted for by the habituation of the native women to infanticide. Near Melbourne, robbing graves, he found what he believed to be evidence

of infanticide in the form of ‘a perfect specimen of a baked child’ which he lodged in the Edinburgh Museum.  

Other commentators saw the utility of Strzelecki’s theory and were less eager to dispose of it. In Edinburgh in 1849 Dr. Alexander Harvey adopted Strzelecki’s mysterious law of nature to frame a theory that the exotic foetus in utero inoculated women in such a way that they would continue to produce hybrid offspring regardless of whether they subsequently conceived to black or white men. And in 1850, three eminent Edinburgh medical professors insisted that the veracity of Strzelecki’s law was ‘unquestionable’.

In 1854 a paper from W.A Miles, Commissioner of Police at Sydney and a Corresponding Member of the Ethnological Society of London, also asserting the veracity of Strzelecki’s observation, was read before that society.

**Strzelecki’s Law in America**

In America, the eminent craniologist Samuel Morton had privately reached the conclusion that ‘mankind’ consisted of a variety of separate species as early as 1839, following his comparative measurements of skull shapes and capacities for his *Crania Americana*; but he declined to say so publicly until 1846. As he was aware, American evidence made it only too plain that all the ‘races’ of men were interfertile, and thereby contradicted Buffon’s rule that speciation was defined by the limits of inter-fertility. In 1846, in a paper on hybridity in animals and its bearing on human hybridity, Morton challenged that zoological orthodoxy, arguing that 'the mere fact that the several races of mankind produce with each other, a more or less fertile progeny, constitutes, in itself, no proof of the unity of the human species'. He called upon ‘practical observers’ to provide material that might elucidate the problem.
From distant Port Phillip, Morton soon received returns collected for the NSW Select Committee on the Condition of the Aborigines of 1845, from one Dr Charles Nicholson, a representative of Port Phillip in the NSW Legislative Council. Nicholson’s figures consisted of returns from each district and contained significant duplications and errors so that Morton grossly overestimated the number of ‘natives’ (calculating for example that 5000 remained in the district of Melbourne alone, whereas La Trobe had estimated that no more than 1300 survived in the whole of Port Phillip in 1843) and concluded in a publication of 1851 that there was a 'singular paucity of half-caste or mulatto children in New Holland'.

Morton, by then the president of the prestigious Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, attributed the dearth to the effects of infanticide and syphilis, but predominantly to 'the difference of race, the disparity of primordial organization'. 'Perhaps', he argued, 'no two human races are more remote from each other than the European and Australian; and where such extremes are blended, reason and analogy lead us to expect only a limited fertility.' Invoking Strzelecki's hypothesis, he called again on physiologists and observers in general to take 'a more careful and extended notice of these remarkable phenomena'. Morton's presentation indicates something of the eagerness with which Strzelecki's law was seized upon by those who sought to establish a biological hierarchy for the races of mankind.

Debate about the origin of the 'races' of mankind became particularly virulent in the United States in the decades preceding the Civil War, and racialists went to considerable pains to construct theories that countered the clear evidence that the races were readily inter-fertile. In 1854 Josiah Nott and George Gliddon collaborated with Samuel Morton in the production of Types of Mankind which argued that the races of mankind had been separately created and that the physical characteristics of each race were fixed. Nott devoted considerable attention in the work to dismantling the orthodoxy that all the races of humanity were fertile together. Arguing that only ‘unlimited

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32 Morton, ibid.
prolificness’ between races would indicate species affiliation and common origin, Nott insisted that 'Mulatto women ... are bad breeders ... liable to abortions, and their children generally die young.'

Predicating his argument on the work of Alexander Harvey and Strzelecki, he qualified his earlier claim that racial ‘amalgamation’ always led to racial degeneration and now argued instead that there were 'degrees of hybridity', so that the extent of the progressive degeneration and the infertility of progeny depended on the proximity of the parent races. Closely aligned races might produce prolific progeny whilst those progeny of widely disparate parents, such as the 'Teutonic' and the 'Negro' would be degenerate and increasingly infertile. Nott concluded that

> the genus *homo* includes many primitive species ... The species of men are all *proximate* ...; nevertheless some are perfectly prolific; while others are imperfectly so - possessing a tendency to become extinct when their hybrids are bred together.

Invoking Strzelecki, Jacquinot, and Charles Nicholson's census returns, Nott insisted 'that this law of infertility holds ... with the crosses of the Europeans and the Hottentot and Australian'.

Three years later Nott and Gliddon again collaborated to produce *Indigenous Races of the Earth*. Ridiculing Prichard’s vacillation over the definition of 'species' and his evident doubt about the unity of mankind in the last years of his life - such that 'he dropped one hypothesis after another, until his last volumes closes with a complete abandonment of the *unity* of Genesis itself', they again called up Strzelecki’s observation to prove that not all men were equal. In Nott’s virulent words:

> in Australia, a native female of the aboriginal stock ceases, after cohabitation with an English colonist, to procreate upon reunion with a male autochthon of her own race … even [with] a convict population of athletic and unscrupulous English males.

Nott and Gliddon's polemic was summarily dismissed in 1858 by the widely read German anthropologist Dr. Theodore Waitz as a work containing 'shameless exaggerations ... advanced in the interests of slave-holders and slave-dealers, and accepted only in

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36 Ibid. p. 397.
37 Ibid. p.398.
38 Josiah Clark Nott et al., *Indigenous Races of the Earth : or, New Chapters of Ethnological Enquiry : Including Monographs on Special Departments of Philology, Iconography, Cranioscopy, Palaeontology,*
America’ Waitz was in no doubt that political, economic and ideological utility rather than ‘science’ animated the work and he warned, with chilling prescience, and in words that echoed those of Assistant Protector Dredge a decade earlier, of the implications of such ideas:

If there be various species of mankind there must be a natural aristocracy among them, a dominant white species as opposed to the lower races who by their origin are destined to serve the nobility of mankind, and may be tamed, trained, and used like domestic animals, or may … be fattened or used for physiological or other experiments without any compunction. … Wherever the lower races prove useless for the service of the white man, they must be abandoned to their savage state, it being their fate and natural destination. All wars of extermination, whenever the lower species are in the way of the white man, are then not only excusable, but fully justifiable, since a physical existence only is destroyed, which, without any capacity for a higher mental development, may be doomed to extinction in order to afford space to higher organisms.

To such or similar conclusions, the theory of specific differences among mankind leads us. 39

Waitz went on to both defend the importance of fecundity as a test of species and to specifically reject Strzelecki’s observations about the fertility of Aboriginal women as, quite simply ‘wrong’. 40 At the Ethnological Society of London, Robert Dunn also raged against the continuing circulation of Strzelecki’s theory. 41 When Dr. Karl Scherzer, surgeon aboard the Austrian government’s scientific expeditionary frigate Novara, also dismissed the idea as ‘a complete delusion’ after taking anthropometric measurements at Sydney in November 1858 of children ‘whose features and complexion were obviously the result of white parentage on one side’, it might have been expected that the weight of evidence would put the theory to rest, but it was not to be. 42 The alleged reproductive incompetence of the Australians had become such a pivotal ‘truth’ in the armoury of racialists that it continued to circulate, and in circulating, its scientific authority accumulated.

By 1858, international interest in the causes of what seemed to be the impending extinction of the Aborigines of Victoria roused the Victorian parliamentarian Thomas

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40 Ibid. pp.26, 176.
McCombie to call for a Select Committee to enquire into the condition of the Aborigines. His interest was finally stirred not so much by compassion, as by the receipt of a copy of the British Association’s *Queries Respecting the Human Race* with its questions about ‘races likely to become extinct’.\(^43\) Responses to the circular sent out by McCombie’s committee in 1858 revealed that Strzelecki’s observation, originating twenty years earlier in colonial conjecture, had acquired so much authority through constant reiteration that it now had the power to determine what observers saw. Amongst the replies to the circulars were a number that accounted for the declining Aboriginal population by invoking the authority of Strzelecki’s law. The eccentric William Hull reiterated that ‘intercourse with white men produces sterility’. Another noted that ‘no instance has been seen among the natives of this tribe where the mother of a half-caste child has afterwards had a black one’. A third reported that ‘it is generally believed that a woman having borne a child by a white man will not have children afterwards by one of her own race’.\(^44\) That these replies so closely echoed Strzelecki’s own phraseology suggests that colonists intent on imbuing their contributions with an authoritative aura matched their own observation of Aboriginal decline to its formula, or, as in the case of Hull, deliberately signal their command of cosmopolitan science through its reiteration. Here, then, was the end result of a process by which speculation and ‘hallucination’ reissued as fact as they circulated across the imperial domain.

**Eugenics**

In the same year, there appeared a work by Dr. Paul Broca, Secretary General of the Société D'Anthropologie De Paris, entitled *On the Phenomena of Hybridity in the Genus Homo*. Translated into English in 1864 by the newly formed ‘ultra-racist, pro-slavery' Anthropological Society of London, it raised Strzelecki’s theory to new heights as an

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\(^44\) “Report of the Select Committee on the Aborigines, 1859”, Replies to Circular, Division II: Hull, p48 Q12, Lewis p.67, Q70, Waller p.83, Q33.
Broca set out to qualify de Gobineau's thesis 'that the crossing of races always produces ... physical and moral degeneration'. Like Nott and Gliddon in the USA, Broca argued that while crossings between races of similar ranking would advance human development, those between biologically disparate races would produce only degenerate and sterile offspring. It was, he argued, 'sufficient to prove that certain cross-breeds are inferior to the parent races, as regards longevity, vigour, health, and intelligence, to render it very probable that the two races are not of the same species'.

Broca's hundred-page essay, which brought Nott and Gliddon's racist polemic to the academic citadel of European anthropology, focused substantially upon Strzelecki's law and on the reduced fertility of the Australians. He concluded, with due scientific prevarication, that Strzelecki's law was both 'too general' and yet 'well founded'. The weight of evidence he said, indicated a graduated scale of hybrid fertility. Some 'mongrels' were 'eugenesic' - well born - others less so, and their fertility and vigour would decline with each generation. If the Australians were not of a different species to the Europeans - an assertion he made and then resiled from - they were 'nearest to the brutal condition', an 'inferior race' occupying a niche so low in the human hierarchy that reproduction between European men and Australian women would give 'an idea [of] what crossing between the two most disparate branches of the human family may produce'. '[I]f it be true, as everything tends to establish, that the union of the Whites and the Australian women is but little prolific, we may suppose that Mulattoes sprung from such disparate unions, must enter the category of inferior cross-breeds', and would produce only 'defective progeny'.

Broca rejected the charge that such unions were either 'perfectly sterile' or that the death of mixed race children could be attributed to infanticide. 'One thing appears to me certain', he wrote, 'that the number of young Mulattoes who die at an early age, or who are not viable, must be relatively considerable, and this may perhaps have given rise to

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the accusation of infanticide, which I have already refuted'. He argued that the offspring themselves were not so much sterile as 'non eugenics' and thus tended to die at an early age. Broca called on 'travellers, and especially on physicians resident in Australia’, to gather more evidence on the subject, but he was already convinced that the available evidence from Australia was 'so numerous and so authentic as to constitute … at least a strong presumption in favour of the doctrine of polygenists'.

By the 1860s human speciation was an issue as divisive amongst ethnologists as Darwin’s new theories were, and the fertility of the Australians, and Strzelecki's theory about it, stood at the heart of the matter. With the Civil War raging in America, anxiety about the perceived moral and physiological effects of 'miscegenation' reached the point of obsession in America and in Europe and Strzelecki’s law continued to be deeply implicated in these disputes. As Strzelecki’s star rose, so the Australians sank in the ranks of humanity. At the Ethnological Society of London, President John Crawfurd denounced Broca in 1864 as 'a discreet supporter' of the doctrine 'that mankind is comprised of species like the genera of the lower animals', who 'fancies he has discovered in the cross between the native Australian and European a hybrid destitute of fecundity and incapable of continuation', but he made no challenge to Broca's ranking of the Australians as the most primitive of humans. In Broca's defence at the rival Anthropological Society of London, where debate raged over the effects of 'miscegenation', the Reverend Frederick Farrar, Master at Harrow (and later the Dean of Canterbury) reiterated that since both Jacquinot and Strzelecki had observed the rarity of 'half-castes', it was 'premature to assert that the union of all varieties of the human race produces an offspring continuously fertile'. It was not only that such unions produced infertile offspring but the offspring that were produced were morally degenerate and would infect the white race. It was, he argued emphatically, 'known that the intermarriage of hybrids leads to rapid extinction', to "abrutissement" and produced an 'inferior and less

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48 Ibid. pp45-7, 58-9, 45 passim.
49 Ibid. pp.54-9
50 Ibid. pp.59-60.
numerous set of half-castes' who were 'short-lived and ... unprolific'. In addition it produced degradation, criminality and impoverishment.  

At the same gathering Alfred Wallace injected a note of caution into the discussion, recalling that he had been informed of 'two instances of Australian women having had children by white men and afterwards by men of their own tribe', which 'contradicted the assertion of Count Strzelecki'. He observed that questions concerned with hybrid fertility in humans 'could not be satisfactorily solved, because it was impossible to make the requisite experiments on men'. Anthropological Society President James Hunt rounded off the discussion with the conciliatory suggestion that '[w]hen talking of people so different as the European and Australians, they might properly be called different species, without attaching to the term the signification that they had a different origin'. The Australians were by then so firmly established in the discourses of metropolitan anthropology as the antithesis of all that was modern, productive, expansive and European that George Robinson’s plea that Strzelecki’s observations be accorded no more weight than those of any other 'cursory traveller' were politely disregarded. More enthusiasm was shown for Augustus Oldfield, a West Australian old hand, who informed the members of the Ethnological Society that twenty years of observation had convinced him of the veracity of 'that physical law first detected by Count Strzelecki'. He had 'invariably found that where a half-caste child appeared in any family, no child of pure blood, younger than it, was ever to be seen'. This was a science in which the observing eye itself was constrained by the imperatives of the imperial project. It naturalised racial hierarchies, and produced subjects who entreated their own colonisation.

By the mid 1860s, the long-running contest between monogenism and polygenism, and the related question of where the boundaries between the ‘species’ of mankind might be drawn, had been sidelined in the clamour over Darwin and Wallace’s new theory on the origin of species. The new theory occasioned a paradigm shift that

54 ibid.
foregrounded a new set of questions, processes and time frames that by-passed the earlier debate. Darwin’s thesis produced a new school of social evolutionists, Edward Burnett Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan, John Ferguson McLennan, and the controversial Thomas Huxley, who applied Darwin's new theory to the evolution of mankind. Under their influence, debate about the relationship of one variety of mankind to another gradually shifted from a focus on contemporaneous differences between peoples to the identification of developmental differences that had, so the new thinking proposed, evolved across time. Debate about whether the Australians were human or not now transformed into a consideration about what this most primitive of peoples could demonstrate about the prehistory of Europeans.

Questions connected with the fertility of hybrids in general however, remained of acute importance to Darwin's theory of the origin of species and a matter of considerable tension between Darwin and his chief publicist Huxley. In 1862 and 1863 it was Darwin's inability to demonstrate the sterility of 'recently formed varieties' when recrossed with parent stock - in short, to demonstrate the point at which the modification produced by selective breeding produced a new species - that was 'the great hiatus in argument', and the last hurdle to Huxley's full acceptance of the theory. In 1863, Huxley still regarded Darwin's thesis as 'provisional' much to the latter’s disappointment.

It was Huxley, nevertheless, who took up the question of the origin of mankind, arguing, against the venerable Richard Owen (who held that the brain of man was fundamentally structurally different from that of the apes, and thus one could not have evolved from the other) that 'man and the apes ... have come from one stock', each having emerged 'by the gradual modification' of that same primitive stock, and that the Australians, whom he had observed at a distance as surgeon aboard HMS Rattlesnake which surveyed the NSW coast from 1845-49, sat in closest adjacency on the

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evolutionary continuum to the ‘man-like apes’. During his years in NSW Huxley had imbied the local prejudice against the Aborigines and now had little sympathy for a people who, he remarked, would soon be ‘“improved” off the Australian continent altogether’.

As to whether the ‘races’ of mankind constituted separate species, Huxley publicly dismissed the question in the absence of any proof that they were not fully inter-fertile, but as he prepared his Royal Institution lectures ‘On Ethnology’ in the summer of 1867 he still mused on the implications of the failure of the Australians to amalgamate with the people of New Guinea, and on the assertion 'that an Australian woman who had once had children by a white man would never again have one by a black man'. He still pondered whether the Australians were 'really a distinct … species from any other kind of men?'

For his part, Darwin resisted being drawn into the controversy about human origins. In 1864 he dismissed the idea that the races of mankind were differentiated by physiology, observing in a letter to Wallace that 'the struggle between the races of man depends entirely on intellectual and moral qualities', and not on biology. As with Huxley, however, the implications of Strzelecki’s theory lingered in Darwin’s mind. Only in 1871 did he finally dispose of it when he concluded, in The Descent of Man, that infanticide, rather than reproductive incompetence in connection with Europeans, accounted for the paucity of children amongst the Australians. ‘It has been asserted’, he observed, ‘that the native women of Australia … rarely produce children to European

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59 Ibid. pp.145, 147. Huxley to Darwin, 13 January 1862, in Burkhardt and Smith, The Correspondence of Charles Darwin
men; the evidence, however, on this head has now been shown to be almost valueless. The half-castes are killed by the pure blacks.’

Yet the sort of arguments that had circulated around the theory had insinuated their way into his thinking, and he still reserved a place in his formulations for the possibility that an incipient species demarcation might eventually be affected between the ‘sub-species’ of humanity through a gradual decline in inter-racial fertility. ‘Even a slight degree of sterility between any two forms when crossed, or in their offspring’, he argued, ‘is generally considered as a decisive test of their specific distinctiveness and their continued persistence without blending within the same area is usually accepted as sufficient evidence … of some degree of mutual sterility’. It was a position that converged with Huxley’s placement of the Australians on the very threshold between man and ape.

Despite Darwin’s authoritative dismissal of Strzelecki’s theory, it was still occasionally the subject of scientific interest into the 1870s and 1880s. When Broca’s acolyte Paul Topinard enquired of the French consuls in Sydney and Melbourne in the early 1870s whether there were any *metis* in the colonies he was informed that they were numerous and ‘vigorous and intelligent’, were frequently employed as ‘boundary riders’, and appeared to be fertile with both black or white. The consuls expressed some astonishment that their fertility could still be at issue. Notwithstanding, in 1880 the French craniometrist, photographer and ethnologist Cauvin commented yet again on 'l'etrange assertion' of Count Strzelecki when he measured crania at the Museum of Sydney and visited Aboriginal missions at Gundagai and at Maloga on the Murray River to photograph and measure live specimens. A year later *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* – published by the newly amalgamated ethnological and anthropological societies of London presided over by

64 Ibid. p.214.
67 C. Cauvin, "Deuxième Rapport à M. Le Ministre De L'instruction Publique Sur Les Aborigènes De L'Australie.," 1880, pp.495-7; (original source of this item unclear; this excerpt is in State Library of Victoria’s ‘Ethnological Pamphlets’ Collection, Series 1, Vol. 3.).
Huxley - noted that missionary George Taplin's memoir on the ‘Ngarrindjeri’ people of South Australia offered 'fresh evidence ... for the denial of the exploded but lingering statement that if a woman has a half-caste child she never has another of her own race.'

It was a theory that lingered because, as Farrar had noted in 1864, if Strzelecki's law had been verified 'it would be a most important fact', tending to prove that a zoological chasm existed between the types of mankind, naturalising the domination of the imperial races, and acquitting them of any moral censure when the colonised were rendered extinct.

Indeed, even as the specific claims of Strzelecki’s theory were finally put aside by anthropology, it spawned new progeny. In the 1870s, as I will argue in chapter six, both the French and British anthropological academies intensified their scrutiny of the relative fecundity of human ‘crosses’, and in doing so, anthropology once again lent its authority to a colonial project that aspired to render extinct the Aborigines of Victoria.

**Conclusion**

As Strzelecki’s theory wended its way through the annals of imperial anthropology, it demonstrated how a colonial conjecture could reissue as a salient fact in the enabling discourses of race that impelled the imperial will to power. As Russell McGregor has observed, when it came to surveillance and the attendant administrative operations that accompanied it, ‘the ambiguities were as important as the affirmations, the equivocations as significant as the definitive declarations’. Through the course of the debates about its merits, Australian Aborigines had become reified as the archetype of primitive, savage humanity: as that race most distant in any given attribute from civilised Europeans. That the Australians were biologically unfitted to survive contact with superior races was a 'fact' that lodged in the anthropological and imperial imagination, absolving settlers of responsibility for their extirpation and affirming the superiority of the white race.

Ironically, the same factors which, in the European mind, rendered the Australians as the most expendable race in the evolutionary struggle, also cast them as particularly enticing objects of anthropological scrutiny. It made the management of the remaining population, and the question of what to do with the growing number of ‘hybrids’ who,

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despite the efforts of anthropologists, could not be conjured away, a matter of some urgency for a nation that increasingly envisioned itself as a bastion of whiteness.

In the late 1830s when Strzelecki proposed his thesis, the Colonial Office and the local administrators of NSW still subscribed to the racial beliefs of Wilberforce’s abolitionists and Evangelicals who held that all mankind could become, like Europeans, civil, mercantile and Christian. Over the next two decades, the divide that separated the civilised from the savage was to be reinscribed from a factor of political economy to a factor of human biology - of race. The extinction of ‘inferior races’ now served as a leitmotiv that announced biological ineptitude and zoological distance from the imperial Europeans. By the 1860s the Australians had fallen from would-be citizens to be ranked by all and sundry as the world’s most primitive humans, perhaps not human at all, and bound by Providence and by nature for extinguishment. Strzelecki’s law was instrumental in relegating them to the far side of the line that divided man from ‘not-man’. Their passing might be lamented with due propriety by colonial and imperial philanthropists but they would hardly be missed by the many who imagined imperial domination as an unstoppable imperative of European evolution and biology and who coveted the broad lands of the ‘empty’ continent. Strzelecki’s theory offered an idea pregnant with imperial vainglory and implication and it was seized upon and potentised by repetition by so many influential men of science, that despite being roundly and repeatedly debunked, it came to occupy a privileged place in the ideologically-driven science that naturalised Europe’s racial and imperial prerogative. The idea that the Australian continent was occupied by self-extinguishing natives was a powerful colonial fantasy.

When Robert Brough Smyth and the members of the Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of the Aborigines of Victoria began their ‘experiment’ in civilising the Kulin and transforming them into independent farmers in the early 1860s, it was done amidst a cacophony of imperial noise that already pronounced them as members of the most primitive race of mankind and anticipated their extinction.
CHAPTER FOUR

Citizens, Rebels and Ambiguous Identities in the Ethno-Zoo

Given the widespread frontier violence and the overarching ‘logic of elimination’ that has so generally characterised this settler nation’s attempted erasure of any Aboriginal presence, it is difficult to imagine a time when the Aborigines were not categorically excluded from the nation and when the nation was not yet conceived of as exclusively ‘white’. Patrick Wolfe, for example, argues that Australia’s colonial history moves seamlessly from confrontation to ‘carceration’ to ethnocidal assimilation. Wolfe holds that philanthropic gesture and rhetoric obscures, but does not interrupt, ‘the underlying continuity’ of that process.1 But if one focuses on the particularity rather than the grand sweep of history, then counterpoints, resistances, tensions, contradictions and ambiguities become apparent; and sometimes these reveal other histories and the presence of other possibilities within the historic matrix. While Adam Kuper has argued, similarly, that ‘race and citizenship’ were always mutually exclusive categories representing ‘the contrasting components of every imperialism and every nationalism’, a close analysis suggests that they became so as a result of particular historic formations.2 In Australia, whiteness was not always a necessary ingredient of citizenship, nor was Aboriginality an inevitable reason for exclusion from the national corpus. As Anna Haebich recently argued, well into the nineteenth century there were fleeting antithetical disruptions to the Australian metanarrative that momentarily spoke of the possibility of Aboriginal inclusion in the national fabric in a way that did not forecast the negation of Aboriginal identity through assimilation.3 As in other parts of the globe, here too there were what

Anthony W. Marx has identified as ‘extended “moments” of relative indeterminacy’ before states encoded new racial orders. In the USA these moments extended into the post-abolition era. While these moments were not characterised by racial harmonies, they were cross-roads at which a ‘repertoire of possible racial configurations’ presented.  

Bain Attwood too has argued that by the late 1850s, Victoria’s Aborigines ‘no longer represented a threat to the colonists’ economic interests and they could be either ignored or included in colonial society’, and that the humanitarian resurgence that characterised the immediate post-gold rush era was ‘not peculiarly or narrowly racial’. Well into the 1860s, missionaries and secular humanitarians like Board for the Protection of Aborigines secretary Robert Brough Smyth set out not simply to ‘smooth the dying pillow’ of a doomed race, but to reconstitute the Aborigines ‘in their own image’ by imposing European modes of time, space and bodily discipline upon them. Brough Smyth was regularly frustrated with the Aborigines’ refusal to conform to developing middle-class notions of respectability, but he insisted that their failures in no way spoke of a biologically-ordained incapacity. As Attwood recognised, the idea of ‘race’ was still a formative category in the 1860s, and like the notion of class, ‘was undergoing a process of re-definition’ so that settlers’ understanding of the Aborigines shuttled between the two concepts.

Diane Barwick similarly argued that in the early 1860s at least, ‘[t]here was no conscious principle of racial segregation.’ At that stage, she argued, the Board ‘had neither the imagination nor the funds to invent a policy of apartheid’. Even as it called for legislation to enable it to confine the Aborigines of the colony on reserves ‘for their better management and control’, the Board was hamstrung by continuing philanthropic concerns about the rights of the Aborigines amongst public commentators and from within its own ranks. In addition, the spread of its administrative net was limited by economic considerations. Nor had it yet invented the policy of deliberately breeding out Aboriginal ‘blood’. That policy, as I will argue in a later chapter, was concocted by a

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later incarnation of the Board. In the 1860s, as Barwick saw it, the Board ‘envisaged that Aborigines could and would be trained to protect themselves from Europeans and would take their place as self-supporting labourers in colonial society’. ⁸ They would be members of the working class, but respectable members of it. As the Board noted in its annual report of 1869, it was determined to rescue Aborigines from becoming ‘contaminated ... by contact with the lowest class of whites’. ⁹ In its first report, issued in 1861, the Board went so far as to express its hope that the boy Thomas Bungalene, captured as an infant in 1847 by white raiding parties in search of the mysterious ‘white woman of Gippsland’ and fostered by various officials of the Protectorate and Guardian ever since, might yet ‘become a good citizen’. ¹⁰ The Board, noted Barwick, was also aware that Aboriginal integration would best be ‘achieved on a community rather than individual basis’. ¹¹ In mid-century the new ‘citizen’ had not yet become the isolated and perfectly mobile individual production unit of a later capitalism.

Similarly, Andrew Markus argued that despite the rash of bloody clashes between Chinese and European or colonial diggers on the Victorian gold-fields in the mid 1850s, ‘the distinction between the “superior” and “inferior” race was not drawn with a rigorous degree of precision’ and significant numbers of diggers could be found who advocated doctrines of racial equality. Nor yet, he notes, had ‘community standards...impose[d] an iron-clad taboo on sexual relations between Chinese men and European women’. While anti-Chinese feeling rose to a crescendo in the late 1850s, the idea of the nation as an exclusively ‘white’ entity had not yet taken hold. ¹²

By the beginning of the century’s last quarter however, the new ‘science’ of race with its location of power in imperial bio-logics had wedded race and citizenship into such an inseparable coupling that across the imperial world, race had become the final

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¹² Andrew Markus, Fear and Hatred : Purifying Australia and California, 1850-1901 (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1979)pp.18, 34.
arbiter of citizenship. As already noted, the anthropology of the Australians was central to this global paradigm shift.

In this chapter, therefore, I return again to the locale of colonial central Victoria and to the post-invasion history of the Kulin peoples to demonstrate how this creeping racial sensibility imposed itself upon their lives in the 1860s and 1870s. Here I follow their history from 1859 when the Kulin elders took up the government’s promise to set aside land for them on condition that they ceased ‘wandering’ and covenanted to ‘live like white men’, to the mid-1870s by which time the Board had effectively reduced them to captives and bondsmen, and recast them on the new racial and evolutionary grid-map as atavist primitives necessarily bound for imminent extinction. In the global force-field of high-Victorian imperialism, a circularity of effect ensured that events in distant outposts impacted on metropolitan thought as much as revolutions in metropolitan thought impacted on events in distant colonies.

But what is remarkable about the history of race in colonial Victoria is that into the 1870s, despite the deafening cacophony of voices on the international stage and amongst local ethnologists declaring the Australians to be the most primitive living specimen of humanity, the Board kept to its determination to convert the Aborigines into educated and independent farmer-citizens. That the project was finally abandoned was not so much due to the adoption of the new racial frame of reference but because the Kulin proved to be so independently minded that they confounded the Board’s efforts to turn them into biddable subjects. In this chapter, therefore, I consider how Kulin resistance to the Board’s attempts to remake them in the image of the respectable colonial settler – a project that sat in stark contradiction to the possibilities delineated for them by metropolitan science’s new racial grids and ideologies – came to confirm their projected incapacity. Increasingly, the racial templates expounded by European theorists exercised a hegemonic effect over the way Brough Smyth interpreted Aboriginal behaviour. Increasingly, I will argue, acts of self-determination and resistance to the Board’s ever-increased intrusions into their lives were interpreted as evidence of a racially determined inability to come to terms with, or even to survive in, the modern world of the invader, and as confirmation of their evolutionary belatedness. In this ideological minefield, with
its network of trip-wires linking imperialism to the new science of race, the powerful resistance of the Kulin came to confirm their inhumanity.

But even in this brief ‘moment’ before race emerged as the central category of prohibition from the colony’s public and when it was envisaged that the Kulin could be refashioned as respectable citizens, the noise issuing from the metropolitan academies already framed the Board’s project to some extent. From the time it was established in June 1860, the Board eagerly exploited its wards as specimens of primitive man even as it set itself the task of ‘proving to the world that the Aborigines of Australia are degraded rather by their habits, than in consequence of the want of mental capacity’. This was a civilising ‘experiment’ undertaken in the awareness that ‘all previous experiments of a similar kind have failed’. 13

At the hub of the Board’s experiment was its ‘tyrannical’, ‘overbearing’ and ‘hot tempered’ secretary Robert Brough Smyth, who ‘dominated the official corridors of scientific opinion’ in the colony and dreamt of being nominated to the Royal Society of London. 14 As secretary of the BPA he was bent on managing a population deemed to threaten the respectability of the colony – as much by their impending demise as in their disorderly survival – and in making the Aboriginal stations pay their way. In his vision, Coranderrk was to be a model training institution at which natives would be tutored into self-discipline and self-sufficiency. A committee man at the local Royal Society, he was well-versed in the racial theories emanating from the European academies, disagreed with them in the main, and remained a committed Prichardian who believed that the uncivilised subjects of the empire were simply people who had degenerated as they spread across the globe after the Flood and could be salvaged into civilised and civil subjects and, in this most modern of democracies, eventually into citizens. Brough Smyth’s struggle to bridge the chasm between the theories of the new science of race and his own experience of the Kulin as intelligent but frustratingly obdurate and independent men and women, encapsulated the terrain over which Aboriginal policy would meander for the next two decades and beyond. Between the developing imperatives of imperial

racial theory and the contingencies and pragmatics of colonial native policy lay a chasm in which the identity of the Australian was mired in ambivalence. This chapter therefore focuses on Coranderrk as a specific point at which metropolitan ideology came face to face with colonial actuality.

**From the Acheron to Coranderrk: diplomacy and determination.**

Within weeks of the tabling of the report of Thomas McCombie’s Select Committee on the Aborigines in the Victorian parliament early in February 1859, with its recommendation that small reserves of land be set aside for the exclusive use of the Aborigines, and its reprise of already anachronistic Colonial Office missives in defense of the rights of the original occupants of the soil, five Daung wurrung elders and two Woi wurrung interpreters (a combination which, as Barwick notes, recognised Daung wurrung priority in their own country but admitted their Woi wurrung kin)- Beaning, whom the Argus described as a 'chieftain', Simon Wonga, Munnarin, Murrin Murrin, Parngean, Baruppin, and Koo-gurrin\(^{15}\) - approached William Thomas and impressed upon him their determination to select land on the Acheron (Nak Krom) creek, a tributary of the Goulburn, that they might 'sit down on the land like white men.'\(^{16}\)

Some in the parliament, like Fawkner, believed that the Aborigines ‘should fall before the white man’ and had no need of land,\(^{17}\) but the majority of the respectable citizens of Melbourne believed, as did the editor of the Argus, that the reserved land would only be locked away briefly until the natives succumbed to ‘the process of extirpation to which they seem doomed’. They were, consequently, not averse to atoning in suitably parsimonious measure for earlier misdemeanors and ‘murders by wholesale’, committed, as the Argus accused, by settlers who had once ‘sought to exterminate a troublesome race’.\(^{18}\) So when William Thomas arranged for the clan leaders to speak with the Minister of Lands and Works, Charles Gavan Duffy, 'for the purpose of representing to him the necessity of granting to the tribe a piece of land fitted for

\(^{15}\) Names listed in *The Argus* 8 March 1859, p.5.


\(^{18}\) *Argus* 3 February 1859.
agricultural purposes' on which the surviving Kulin adults and 'some few children' might settle, land was granted with alacrity. The *Argus* reported the 'intelligent ... animated ... unembarrassed and quiet manner' of men who conducted 'themselves with an air of grave courtesy', and wondered what the Kulin leaders might have made of 'the displacing power that has made him an exile ... and a refugee in his own land'.

To the question put to them by Duffy: 'Would they cultivate?', the Kulin delegates replied that the land they coveted was of little use to white people, but abounded in game and while they would continue to 'look out food' in the traditional manner, 'some [would] always stop and turn up ground, and plant potatoes and corn'. Behind the question lay the dual imperatives, first that land that had lain dormant and waiting to be brought to fullness by white men ought not be lost again to 'savages', and second, the implication that such 'savages' could, by applying their labour to lands they had once merely roamed over, become indistinguishable from other members of the colony’s labouring class. Satisfied on both counts, Duffy approved Thomas's request that each adult be given 150 acres to be held in common, but rounded it down to 4500 acres.

On the following day the delegates returned to the Acheron with government surveyors to mark out what Thomas called 'their Goshen', their promised land, and almost immediately began the tasks of erecting huts, and clearing land for gardens. As many as ninety were soon gathered at what they saw as their own patrimony, but which the government surveyor described as 'a location for training the Aboriginals'. But local landowners who objected to the reserve allowed their cattle to trample the fences and the gardens and by May, 1860, the trustees appointed to defend Aboriginal interests conceded to local pressure and forced the people to move from their chosen site. In January 1861 the teacher Robert Hickson complained that his efforts to set up the station school were for naught since 'although there are a number of children on the station at

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19 *Argus* 8 March 1859, p.5.
21 *Argus* 9 March 1859, p.4.
22 Thomas to Commissioner of Lands and Survey, 20 July 1859; Australian Archives Victoria (AAV), B312, Box 1, item3. Thomas to Brough Smyth, 26 July 1860; AAV B312 Box 1 item 3, quoted in Massola, *Coranderrk*, p.7-8.
24 Letter sequence May 1859 to July 1860; AAV B312/1 Box 1 items 1, 2 & 3. 1th Report of the Board.
present, the majority of the young men and children have not returned since the removal of the station to some four miles higher up the Acheron River. Thomas rued ‘the disappointment of a body of intelligent and industrious Aborigines, who have congregated there, inured to civilized labour’ and castigated the Board for uprooting them from a ‘spot they cherished and which I assured them Government would most sacredly retain for them’: from a place he had ‘promised them ever should be theirs’. In its annual report to Parliament in 1861, the Board reported that “the blacks have almost ceased to frequent the new reserve’ and the few who had settled there ‘are dissatisfied and careless of its success.’ The settlement was declared a failure, and for many it confirmed a popular view that the Aborigines were beyond redemption, little better than brutes and unsuited for the modern world.

In July 1861, the Board appointed John Green as Inspector of Aborigines. A lay Presbyterian preacher, Green had formed an association with Woi wurrung people who had settled on the small reserve on the Yarra at Warrandyte gazetted by La Trobe in 1852 at Thomas’s urging. He had taken up the position of Inspector on condition that he be allowed to advance his ministry by concentrating his efforts on the round up of the colony’s destitute Aboriginal children. He accompanied the Woi wurrung when they moved, with high hopes, to the new station at the Acheron where he doubled as station manager. In March 1862, with the Acheron station deemed a failure and with the Board already forced by financial stresses to rationalise its project, Green was ordered to 'break up' the remains of the Acheron station, consign the welfare of the remaining residents to any local landholder who would resume the occasional distribution of rations, and seek out a suitable site on the Upper Yarra for the accommodation of 'orphan and neglected children and infirm Aborigines' only. The Board now focused its efforts on the rescue

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26 Thomas to Commissioner of Lands and Survey, 20 July 1859, Thomas to Brough Smyth, 26 June 1860, 8 October 1860; AAV B312 Box 1 item 3. Diane E. Barwick, "Rebellion at Coranderrk: Seminar Paper Presented to Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra" (1968) (Held at AIATSIS, Canberra), pp.4-5.
28 Thomas to Comm Lands and Survey, 20 July 1859; Thomas to Brough Smyth, 26 June 1859; AAV B312 Box 1 item 3.
29 BPA Minutes, 9 July 1861, Australian Archives Victoria, File B314 (6 microfilm reels).
30 BPA Minutes, 28 August 1861.
of children deemed to be in immediate danger from starvation, from abuse and
demoralisation by white men and from their parent’s alleged savage propensity to kill
them off. As in the past, ‘able and healthy blacks’ were now left ‘to provide ... for their
own and the wants of their families’. While the able bodied readily found employment,
dispossession from this last foothold in their own country brought deep disappointment to
a people for whom land held the most profound significance.  

In January 1863, however, after the Kulin threatened to embarrass the government
by assembling near Melbourne, a site was temporarily gazetted for a station where the
able-bodied Kulin might settle with their aged and infirm kin adjacent to the proposed
children’s asylum, on the broad flatlands where the ‘Corondara Creek’ flowed into the
upper Yarra River on the ‘Dalry’ run once held by Hubert de Castella. While the Board
claimed that Green had chosen the site, it was in fact a traditional gathering site for the
Woi wurrung, as De Castella had noted when he took up the run in 1854. It was, he
wrote, ‘the usual home of this remnant of the old Yarra tribe and the blacks lived there on
good terms with the stock-keeper and his masters’. Its choice as the site for yet another
attempt by the Kulin clans to carve out a home station in 1863 signified Aboriginal
continuity. That it was a place continuously occupied by the Kulin was also known to
Brough Smyth who a year previously had requested Green to have the ‘Goulburn and
Yarra Blacks show him a track’ through the mountains 'to the headwaters of the Goulburn
in a direct line from Yering', the pastoral claim from which the Aboriginal station was
soon to be excised. 'The track', said Smyth, 'would be of immense value to the miners'
who were rapidly invading the district.

It was along that track in January 1863, that Green and the surviving Kulin
crossed the mountain ridge from the country of the Daung wurrung to the country of the
Woi wurrung. While settler folklore later held that a Moses-like Green had led a hapless

34 De Castella and Thornton-Smith, Australian Squatters, pp. 72, 107, 186 n5.
35 That the site was continuously occupied is worthy of emphasis given the judgement of Justice Olney in
the Federal Court of Australia that ‘the tide of history has washed away’ the Native Title rights of the Yorta
Yorta people of the Murray Basin. (Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v The State of
36 BPA Minutes 4 November 1861.
and dislocated remnant across the mountain track,\textsuperscript{37} Kulin leader Simon Wonga’s own version, recorded by the Reverend Robert Hamilton in 1865, presented it as a more egalitarian procession wherein ‘Mr. Green and all the Yarra blacks and me went through the mountains. We had no bread for four or five days’.\textsuperscript{38} Perspicaciously, he retained enough of the biblical metaphor to stake a moral right of title to land that the Kulin hoped to retain in perpetuity.

The tension between these two version of Coranderrk’s foundation myth reflects an ongoing struggle that was to be played out at the new station of \textit{Coranderrk}. Across the ensuing twenty-five years, station residents struggled for self-determination with a Board and a series of superintendents bent on intruding a paternalistic and punitive governance into every aspect of their lives, and reducing them in the process to specimens whose moral and biological fitness for civilization would be subject to constant interrogation. Equally contested was the title to the land, which as they knew had been only \textit{temporarily} gazetted, which left open the possibility that they would be moved on again.\textsuperscript{39}

On the 24\textsuperscript{th} May 1863, 15 Kulin elders dramatically pressed their claims for permanent title to the land and their determination not to be moved again despite local settler opposition, by attending, uninvited, and in full ceremonial regalia, at the Queen’s Birthday Levee, the cardinal event on the colony’s social round. Forewarned of the intention of these long-exiled outcasts to enter the city to present Governor Sir Henry Barkly with a written address to the Queen expressing their loyalty as subjects and their determination to remain at Coranderrk in perpetuity, BPA Vice-chairman, Richard Heales, MLA, organised for this formal delegation of Kulin men to be admitted to the main hall of the Exhibition Building at the end of the day’s proceedings. Arranged in a semi-circle before the Governor and with all the dignitaries of the colony looking on, Simon Wonga delivered an address in Woi wurrung and presented Barkly with a decorated vellum inscribed in English and Woi wurrung which, translated by William Thomas, read in part:

\textsuperscript{37} Massola, \textit{Coranderrk}. p.13.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. p.13.
\textsuperscript{39} BPA Minutes 30 March 1863. \textit{Victorian Government Gazette} Tuesday, 30 June 1863, p.1453.
Blacks of the tribes of Wawoorong, Boonoorong, and Tara-Waragul send this to the great Mother Queen Victoria. ... Blackfellows now throw away all war-spears. No more fighting, but live like white men almost ... All blackfellows roundabout agree to this.  

Their attendance at the packed hall, and their address to the Governor, were the most remarkable aspects of a gala day’s events. The full text of the address, in Woi wurrung and in English translation, appeared in the Melbourne press on the following day. In appealing over the local authorities directly to Queen Victoria, Wonga reminded those present that he stood amongst them as the original owner of the country on which the city stood and as a British subject, and legally their equal. There can be little doubt that he intended it as a diplomatic assertion of sovereignty and the Argus rightly acknowledged this when it termed it, with no evident irony, ‘a peace offering’.  

Months later the Board reported that Queen Victoria had gratefully received their ‘intention to live peaceably for the future’ and expressed her interest in their ‘advancement and welfare’, but did not give royal imprimatur to their call for permanent title to Coranderrk. So the station remained under temporary gazettal until 1887, by which time the settlement and the Kulin nation had been dismembered by a government and a Board determined, by then, to bring on their extinction.  

**Coranderrk: self-determination and paternalism.**

When the Kulin and the Greens arrived at the new station on the Yarra early in 1863, in the same year that Huxley described the Australians as the nearest variety of humans to the ‘man-like apes’, they immediately set about constructing bark cottages and digging vegetable gardens - as they had at the Acheron four years earlier. Though some of the older Kulin preferred to live in the traditional mia-mias, within a year nine cottages were occupied and there were 67 Kulin gathered at the station. Brough Smyth reported that the two-roomed huts consisting of a bedroom and a common room ‘where they take

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40 *Argus* 27 May 1863, p.5. 3rd Report of the BPA, p.11. The Tara-Waragul willum (or Tarrawarra Warrabel) were the traditional owners of the country adjacent to de Castella’s northern outstation, originally held by the Ryrie brothers, on which the station was established. See frontispiece for map sketched by Kurrburra and William Thomas around 1845 in Brough Smyth Papers, State Library of Victoria MS 8781/1176/7(b) item 25-26.  
41 *Argus* 27 May 1863, p.5.  
their meals’ were ‘clean and orderly’, and that ‘the Aborigines have done a great deal of hard work on this station’. They had cleared, grubbed and fenced fifteen acres of land, planted potatoes and oats, tended the station’s small herd of cattle and had produced and sold a great number of possum-skin rugs. They supplemented the meagre rations supplied by the Board with fish and game from the reservation. The Kulin leaders, Wonga and Barak, noted Smyth, in deliberate challenge to those who dismissed the Aborigines as irredeemable savages, or like Broca, classified them within the human genus but as a species apart from the advanced races of Europe, ‘would compare favorably with the better class of other races’. Brough Smyth shared Green’s confidence that the station could be made self-sufficient within two years.

In these early years there was no contradiction between the existence of an ‘Aboriginal station’ and the rights of Aborigines as free citizens. At Brough Smyth’s behest, Green translated some phrases of the Kulin language. By chance, the words he collected recorded the thoughts of the Kulin on the advantages of ‘settling’. Mourning the vast diminution in their numbers since the coming of the whites, and especially the scarcity of children, one old man spoke in Woi wurrung of the improvement in their condition since they had settled at the station and begun to ‘live in our own houses’. ‘We are now happier’, he said, ‘and glad to see so many children about us.’ If his words suggest Green’s Presbyterian influence, they also highlight the fact that Coranderrk residents saw the station as their own place. In the early days they were free to come and go from the station in the daily round. As another Coranderrk speaker put it, ‘If any do not like Coranderrk, they can go away and come back by-and-by’.  

Green exercised a paternalistic authority over the station, yet he encouraged the residents to take a measure of responsibility for their own affairs, being acutely aware that if they did not concur with his plans they would simply walk away. Initially, station rules were determined not by the Board but by a ‘court of four magistrates’ consisting of ‘the four clan-heads at the station’ and attended by all adults, both men and women, and

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44 1st Report of the BPA, p5-6.
paternally presided over by Green.\textsuperscript{46} It allowed a negotiated balance between traditional and introduced social and political forms. Many of the men continued to return seasonally, sometimes with their families (if the court deemed their employer respectable), to the countries of their birth where they readily found work on pastoral properties as shearsers, stock keepers, fencers or domestic servants. In the summer of 1866, Dr Gibson, the visiting medical officer appointed by the BPA, reported that a number were away ‘on account of the shearing season, several having gone (under permission) to shear’\textsuperscript{47} The court also barred alcohol from the station, the elders being only too aware that ‘before the white people came to our country we were all very happy together; but when they came they gave us grog, and it made us mad … Then we became unhealthy, and began to die off … It is better to live here than to go about and drink’\textsuperscript{48}

Marriages at Coranderrk were celebrated in the Presbyterian mode with Green officiating, but they continued to be arranged according to the complex rules of Kulin kinship wherever such custom could be made compatible with Christian morality. Most agreed to do away with the practice of polygamy, though existing arrangements were allowed to continue.\textsuperscript{49} Customary restrictions on in-group marriage continued to be rigidly enforced by the Coranderrk court and breaches of Kulin morality were ‘very severely punished’. ‘It was one great conflict that we had at the station, to get the old people to consent to the marriage of some of the young people. They would count blood when we could not count it’, Green later recalled. In an effort to secure the loyalty of the people to the station, the court ruled that ‘none could get married to any of the young women until they had been two years on the station’. It also set fines for drunkenness, and ordered that for a third offence a young man ‘would forfeit all right to a wife from among the young women on the station’\textsuperscript{49}

According to Diane Barwick, who conducted interviews with Coranderrk descendants in the 1960’s, John and Mary Green were remembered as benevolently paternal and as allies who understood, sympathised with, and supported Coranderrk

\textsuperscript{47} 5th Report of the BPA, p.6.  
people in the early disputes with the BPA. While John worked along side the men, Mary tended the sick and taught the children. Green, argued Barwick, ‘was the only one of a succession of managers who took charge of [Coranderrk] ... who ever entrusted full responsibility for discipline to the residents ... treating the Kulin as “free and independent men and women” who would work well if well led but would not be driven.’

Green’s diaries however indicated that he was as determined as later superintendents to impose his will on the Kulin, and to ensure their conformity and subservience to the colonial order of things. When he presided over the Coranderrk court, for example, he regularly employed techniques of shaming to achieve desired ends. Before the Royal Commission of 1877 he described two incidents to illustrate his mode of controlling his charges. A rare incident of sexual misconduct occurred at the station early in 1866. Green insisted on the expulsion of the offender and ‘told all that were not going to stand to the right way that they would have to leave with him’. Faced with such a threat from Green, not surprisingly ‘all said that they were going to stand on the side of right’. In a second incident he shamed a young man into deferring to his will. The young man, newly arrived with a wife, desired to leave the station to look for work. The ‘general assembly’ of station residents initially granted permission but revoked it when Green stepped in and said

“You can go ... You are a smart young man, Jimmy, and you have a nice smart wife; here you have a capital home ... but whenever you go away over to the station there you will be standing up at the door, ‘Please ma’am a drop of cold tea, any cold meat.’ ‘Get away you dirty fellow.’ And now, Jimmy, are you a man there now?” Jimmy saw his position at once, and he said, “I will not go.” In many cases where you can touch their pride that way you can work upon them wonderfully.’

‘[A] man of tact’, he later observed, ‘will very easily ... get the aborigines to make rules for the maintenance of discipline. If they once pass a rule that such and such shall be their law, they will ... readily comply with it’.

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51 Ibid. p.67-9.
52 Green to 1877 Royal Commission, p.82.
53 Green to 1877 Royal Commission, p.86.
54 Green to 1877 Royal Commission, p.81.
His attitude towards his wards was paternal rather than egalitarian. Summing up his method, he observed that ‘if the aborigines are treated as free and independent men and women and at the same time remembering that they are but children in knowledge, any one with fair tact may lead them any way’. In doing so he reiterated his earlier opinion that ‘A man can lead them easily, but a hundred men could not drive them to do well.’ In the winter of 1865 he concluded his report to the Board with the opinion that Coranderrk would ‘become a very interesting, social and industrious community, if rightly managed.’

Green’s own description of his *modus operandi* thus indicates a more paternalistic and culturally hubristic condescension towards his ‘child-like’ wards than those later folk-memories allow, but it also indicates an intention on his part that they should eventually rise, under his careful guidance, to become a self-sufficient economic community *within* the modern colonial economy. If they were to be contained as a community centred on the station, it was, under Green’s superintendence, more to protect them from white abuse and exploitation than to quarantine the settler precincts from what later racial economies would regard as their corrupting presence; and it was a communality that the Kulin also desired and took for granted. Yet, as early as 1865, there were ominous signs that the attentions of even benign governance would lead inexorably to their being marked as inmates of a state institution, and would increasingly be treated as such. In that year the Board awarded a tender for the production of slops clothing to the prisons department, with the result that both clothing and bearer were henceforth clearly marked as property of the state.

As Inspector of Aborigines, Green regularly toured the colony in search of destitute Aborigines, particularly children, whom he could relocate to Coranderrk or to one of the five other Aboriginal stations and missions across the colony. Just who was at first admitted to, and later confined on, the stations had little to do with notions of biology and racial classification in the 1860s and everything to do with Board economies and with local practicalities, and, as Barwick points out, with Kulin protocols. The

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55 Green to 1877 Royal Commission, p.82.
57 4th Report of the BPA, p.21. Smyth to honorary correspondents, 28 April 1865; BPA Out Correspondence, Australian Archives Victoria, B335, Item 1.
Board’s motivations throughout the 1860s oscillated between the philanthropic and the despotic, between notions about rights and disciplining. But always, in the last resort, the Board’s actions were determined by the need for frugality. In this respectable colony, fixedness of abode was deemed to be an essential marker of respectability and Aborigines who were in the habit of ‘rambling about the colony’ were particularly targeted for containment by the Board, determined as it was, to ‘control their movements’; yet when their labour was required on pastoral runs they dropped below the Board’s line of sight. Race was unaccounted when reckoned against the colony’s demand for labour. The idea of race only became privileged against competing claims to land and against imposed moral and behavioural formations. Respectable, employed, pastoral workers only entered the accounts of the Board as ‘Aborigines’ if they became vagrants, impoverished or otherwise unrespectable. This conflation of ‘Aboriginal’ with characteristics that placed them beyond civility and thus worthy of segregation soon overrode the Kulin’s own vision of Coranderrk as homeland.

Significant numbers of Aborigines always eluded the attentions of the BPA. In 1863, Brough Smyth noted that ‘some aborigines’ known to be living in the most settled parts of central Victoria, were not included in the Board’s census of Aborigines. By 1873, three years after the Board had acquired powers to force the colony’s Aborigines onto its stations, less than 500 of the ‘more than 1600 natives in the colony’ were domiciled therein. Scarce funds ensured that the Board made no attempt to concentrate the remainder onto its stations. The Board’s Treasury vote thus effectively delimited racial classification in the colony. ‘Educated blacks in the employment of settlers’, for example, were liable also to be rendered effectively not Aboriginal by dint of being beyond the purview of government. Often, too, the elderly simply refused to be dislocated from the country of their birth despite impending starvation when the Board withheld rations in an attempt to herd them onto its stations.

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60 1st. Report of the BPA, p.11.
It was the Board’s hope well into the 1870s that the Aborigines on its stations might ‘cease to be a burden on the country’.\(^\text{61}\) To that end, in August 1868 Thomas McCombie called, without any apparent irony, for the government to add a clause to its new Land Act so that ‘small lots’ could be granted to ‘industrious aborigines desirous of becoming settlers’.\(^\text{62}\) A very few had already been granted land selections, though other applications were rejected for a variety of spurious reasons when there were local objections or rival claims from white settlers.\(^\text{63}\) Well into the 1870s therefore, the idea of ‘race’, with its implied exclusions from the settler public, remained a category mediated locally by utilitarian economic considerations and notions of respectability, and contained only incidentally by the biological categories of the new anthropology.

But the question of who was and was not admitted to an Aboriginal station - and who was thus captured by the category ‘Aborigine’- also reflected Aboriginal power to some degree. As Diane Barwick argued, following her intensive study of Kulin and Coranderrk lineages, admission to that community was substantially determined by Aboriginal protocol and not simply imposed by the Board. Until 1872 all of the adults and many of the children who took up residence at the station were Kulin or their kin by marriage.\(^\text{64}\) As it does today, Aboriginality implied both a belonging to, as well as an exclusion from, a community.

**Anthropology and the Science of Civilising: Coranderrk as ethnological zoo.**

While the Board intended that its wards should be at once protected from the worst abuses and exploitations dealt them by colonists and engaged as respectable yeomen and labourers in the new economy, and while it defended them against the growing clamour of anthropological voices keen to demote them to the lowest rank of humanity, it was not above exploiting the world-wide interest in them. In its first year of operations, when the Kulin were still settled at the Acheron station, the BPA called upon its local correspondents to collect native weapons, utensils and other artefacts for display at the

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\(^\text{63}\) Minutes of the BPA, AAV B 314: 4 December 1863, 8 February 1864, 10 October 1864, 15 August 1865, 8 September 1865, 18 June 1866. 4th Report of the BPA, p.10.
forthcoming Victorian and London Intercolonial Exhibitions. Despite William Thomas’s objections, it permitted the local Exhibition Commissioners to commission a series of photographs and casts of the heads of the Blacks at the station, a process that involved the encasement of the entire head in wet gypsum with only a straw for breath. Suffocatingly contained, the subjects were required to remain stationary until the paste dried, so that the completed casts captured ‘the forced positions of the closed eyes and lips, as well as the unpleasantness of the contraction of the drying gypsum’. 65

The Victorian Exhibition Commissioners, but not the BPA, also promoted the collection of Aboriginal skeletal remains for local and international display, and a number of skulls sent to the London Exhibition in 1862 were subsequently donated, with due colonial obsequiousness, to the craniologist J. Barnard Davis whose private collection had begun with the purchase, in 1848, of two skulls from Moorhouse, the South Australian Protector of Aborigines. The Australian skulls, observed Barnard Davis, indicated an ‘arrested development of the brain’. Richard Cull’s caution to Ethnological Society members in 1849 to be wary of drawing a connection between the size of the brain, and the ‘amount of talent’, had been lost without trace. 66

A year earlier (1861), Barnard Davis had contributed an article to the first volume of the Ethnological Society of London’s reinvigorated Transactions on the measurement of native bodies and skeletons as carried out by the Austrian Government’s expeditionary frigate, the Novara. As they circumnavigated the globe, the Novara’s Drs Scherzer and Schwarz took 78 separate measurements on two hundred individuals of different races using six different instruments and whilst at Sydney late in 1858, published a manual of their measuring system ‘for private circulation’ amongst ‘men of science’. 67 The race for Aboriginal remains was so intense that when they went into the hinterland west of

65 The process is described in Karl Vogt, Lectures on Man: His Place in Creation and in the History of the Earth, ed. Anthropological Society of London. (1864) p.78. Minutes of the BPA, 4 November 1861. Smyth to Thomas, 18 November 1861, AAV B335 Item 2.
Sydney hoping ‘to extend our collection of craniological specimens’ by procuring the skeleton of ‘Tom Weiry, one of the last of the chiefs’ who had died twelve years previously, they were disappointed to find that ‘some other exploring naturalist had been there and walked off with our contemplated anthropological prize’. In contradiction to those who argued that the Aborigines jealously killed off children of mixed descent, Scherzer remarked instead that they preserved children with ‘white parentage on one side’ because, ‘so low is their standard of morality, [they] rather consider it an honour for a black woman to bear a child to a white’. 68

The Ethnological Society’s Transactions of 1861 also contained a wealth of other intelligence on the celebrated Australians. W.E. Stanbridge, the BPA’s newly appointed honorary agent at the goldfields near Assistant Protector Parker’s old station at Franklinford, contributed a lengthy paper on the ‘Astronomy and Mythology of the Tribes in the Central Part of Victoria’, and R.H. Major wrote on ‘Native Australian Traditions’. As well, they featured in an exemplary capacity in an article by the Society’s president, John Crawfurd, who argued that ‘commixture’ between the races of man produced ‘intermediate progeny’, so that ‘the offspring of an Englishman and an Australian degrades the Englishman and somewhat improves the Australian’; and in Robert Dunn’s defense of Prichard and the unity of the human species. Both considered Strzelecki’s thesis again, the former to promote his proposition that even if all the races together produced fertile offspring, they ought nevertheless ‘be considered as distinct species’; the latter to attack Strzelecki’s thesis as utterly baseless and ‘inconsistent with all known facts connected with the history of the human races … [and with] the aboriginal females of Australia’. 69 Two years later Crawfurd amended his position, admitting that there was abundant evidence that the offspring of all ‘crosses’ were fertile and that ‘the crosses themselves … are wholly unconscious of the incapacity which the theory would ascribe to them’. Instead, he now argued, the dearth of children of mixed


descent amongst the Australians was because their mothers destroyed them at birth.\textsuperscript{70} By the early 1860s these paired alternatives delimited the explanatory field when it came to the extinguishing Australians. The denunciations of the humanitarians had been superseded by scientific explanations that absolved colonists and imperialists from responsibility.

From other quarters, interest in the Board’s wards was equally intense. In 1861 the Board received a circular from Florence Nightingale requesting information on ‘their treatment in hospitals and the education of the children’. William Thomas’s report to her, which highlighted the effects of alcohol and venereal disease upon the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung people, with its tables showing that deaths had outnumbered births by eight to one in his twenty years amongst them, and noting their fear of entering the Melbourne Hospital and their preference for traditional remedies, featured in lectures she delivered to the Society for the Promotion of Social Science in 1863 and 1864 and in submissions to government on the importance of statistical returns.\textsuperscript{71} I consider her report further in the following chapter.

While Nightingale’s interest in the Australians was broadly humanitarian, Thomas Huxley unapologetically linked his scientific investigations to Britain’s imperial destiny. In February 1860, just four months after the publication of Darwin’s new treatise, Huxley turned on those who ‘take fright at [the] logical consequences’ of Darwin’s thesis, that man was descended from the apes. It was, he insisted, demonstrable that the anatomical difference between man and the higher apes was less than that which divided the higher from the lower apes. In February 1862, before a capacity audience at the Royal Institution, Huxley compared casts of the newly-uncovered primitive Neanderthal and Engis skulls to modern Australian skulls and concluded that ‘the oldest known races of men differed comparatively but little in cranial conformation from those savage races

now living.’ In doing so, Huxley argued that the Australians were not only the most inferior zoological variety of contemporary mankind, but had been left behind as other men evolved so that they represented the living relics of primal man.

In *Man's Place in Nature* (1863) which, according to George Stocking, was the 'first published statement to the general public applying the Darwinian hypothesis systematically to man', Huxley concluded that 'in the important matter of cranial capacity, Men differ more widely from one another than they do from the Apes'. It was to the Australians that Huxley pointed as the ‘race’ adjacent to the apes in his series. Amongst the illustrations set before the public in *Man's Place in Nature* and in his public lectures were two that featured illustrations of cranial remains from Victoria’s ‘Western Port’: in one he arranged this Boon wurrung skull in a series adjacent to the crania of various apes; in the other it overlaid the newly unearthed Neanderthal specimen. To Huxley, the implication that the Australians must give way to the higher races was both apparent and welcome.

The theories of Darwin and Huxley were the subject of acute interest in Melbourne in the year the Kulin took up residence at Coranderrk. George Halford, at the University of Melbourne, critically reviewed *Man's Place in Nature* in the *Argus* and in the journal of the Medical Society of Victoria, arguing, after Huxley’s adversary Richard Owen, that there was a fundamental zoological divide between man and gorilla. Halford was ‘hailed as the new champion’ of the faithful against the ‘atheistic’ apostates, Melbourne surgeon Mr. William Thomson wrote Huxley. But Huxley was not without supporters in Melbourne, and while they would not ‘venture into print’, many had spoken to Thomson privately ‘and the affair has been keenly debated in conversational ways in society generally’.

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74 William Thomson to Huxley 26 November 1863, in Huxley Papers from the Imperial College, SLV M 888, reel 13, Vol. 27:33. Thomson later won international repute as an epidemiologist and early advocate of the the contagion principle of tuberculosis.
By 1863, then, the cranial capacity of Australians constituted a critical piece of evidence in the debate over the evolution of mankind and skulls, skeletons and other bodily remains of Australians were coveted by private collectors and public museum curators in the colonies and in Europe and America. Colonists readily fell upon any Aboriginal remains they could find to supply the trade. By the early 1860s Paris, London, Edinburgh, Leiden, Philadelphia, Frankfurt, Vienna and Melbourne and Sydney, amongst others, boasted significant collections of Australian skulls and skeletons, all duly numbered and labelled. In August, 1863, the BPA received a request from Dr Barker, a surgeon at the Melbourne Hospital, teaching fellow under Halford at the university, and committee man at the Victoria Medical Society, to remove Aboriginal skeletons from the cemetery located near the old Aboriginal station set aside in 1852 as a refuge for the surviving Boon wurrung at Mordialloc. The remains were sought for display in the university’s anatomy laboratory. While the BPA disclaimed any jurisdiction over the matter, it did not stop other similar requests coming before it.  

In 1864, the Board, with its contingent of humanitarians such as Dr. Thomas Embling, who had taken a keen interest in Aboriginal healing practices and who was aware of the grief that the desecration of the remains of their ancestors caused, called upon the trustees of the Melbourne cemetery to ‘make such arrangements as will prevent the desecration of the graves of the Aborigines’. Notwithstanding, in October 1864 the aging William Thomas wrote to the trustees of the Melbourne Cemetery informing them that he had been solicited by a 'scientific gentleman' who was preparing a paper on the Aborigines of Victoria seeking permission to exhume the remains of Derimut, the Boon wurrung elder who had died only the previous year. The remains, Thomas insisted, could be photographed and measured but must then be returned to the grave.  

Few colonists were as solicitous of Aboriginal sensibilities as Thomas and Embling however. In December 1864 C. D'Oyly H. Aplin, a subordinate to Brough Smyth at the Mines Department and a council member at the Royal Society of Victoria, sent Huxley three

75 BPA Minutes, 17 August 1863.
Aboriginal skulls from the Port Fairy district. For colonists who sought to make their reputation, the trade in Aboriginal remains brought ample return.

**The Social Evolutionists: infanticide and the roots of culture.**
In the mid 1860s the Darwinian revolution spawned a new trans-Atlantic school of ‘social evolutionists’ who transposed the new theories about zoological evolution to the realm of human culture. Taking up Huxley’s assertion that the Australians were not only the most degraded specimens of humanity but also the most primitive and least evolved, in 1865 J. F. McLennan also turned his sights on the Australians when he laid down an archaeology of human social and cultural development which outlined the stages that mankind traversed in its evolution from primitive to civilised. McLennan argued that the nuclear family of Victorian England, that bulwark of economic, social and sexual order and discipline, had evolved through a long series of cultural revolutions that began with the most primitive form of ‘exogamous’ marriage. Lending universal and organic warrant to an array of Victorian precepts, McLennan proposed that the first step along the developmental path towards modernity was ignited by customary infanticide of ‘all female children except the first-born’ amongst primitive warring tribes to whom sons alone were a source of strength. Having disposed of the bulk of their female children, primitive men were forced to capture brides from their enemies. ‘In this’, he conjectured,

> lies the only explanation which can be accepted of the origin of those systems of female infanticide still existing, the discovery of which from time to time, in out-of-the-way places so shocks our humanity ... What is now true in varying degrees of all the rudest races may be assumed to have been true of all the earliest groups.

McLennan concluded that since both female infanticide and ‘the practice of getting wives by capture ... prevails amongst the natives of Australia’, their kinship system must represent the most primitive form of human culture.

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78 Huxley Papers from the Imperial College, Vol. XVI/2 p.143.
80 Ibid. p.132-3.
81 Ibid. p. 57.
Sir John Lubbock, Darwin’s provincial neighbour, also declared the Australians 'even now only in an age of Stone', living specimens of races superceded elsewhere. The Australians had progressed, but only barely, from the unmitigated savagery of communal marriage relations, to a primitive culture regulated by the organisational demands entailed in the capture and allocation of wives from unrelated tribes. After that initial development the 'lower races' had become marooned in the evolutionary struggle, their manners, morals, habits and mode of life had ossified, and their intellect deteriorated. Many ideas were 'entirely beyond the mental range of the lower savages, whose extreme mental inferiority we have much difficulty in realising'. Lubbock, leaning more towards the imperial hubris of Spencer and Huxley than to the measured discretion of Darwin, regarded it as indubitable that the 'whole history of man shows how the stronger and progressive increase in numbers, and drive out the weaker and lower races'.

In this new orthodoxy, the Australians sat, immobilised, at the base of the evolutionary pyramid, and their 'curious ... marriage laws' were of central concern. Like savages everywhere they had 'no institutions of marriage; true love is almost unknown among them' and 'young men value a wife principally as a slave.' Here were men who brutally dragged the women they captured 'by the hair' to a thicket where they did with them what savages did. Without moral regulation, their behaviour was determined merely by the whims of instinct and sensuality. Here, truly, were women (curiously imbued, in Lubbock’s thesis, with sensitivities more akin to their European sisters than with those of their own husbands) in need of being saved by imperial interventions. In a note added to later editions of the work, composed after Lorimer Fison and Alfred Howitt had revealed just how complex Australian marriage regulations were, he acknowledged that the Australians indeed had 'stringent laws and apparently complex rules', but dismissed them as 'merely customs' and not the product of rational culture.

Where female infanticide had provided the ignition point that set culture running in McLennan’s thesis, for Lubbock, marriage by capture broke down the original stability.

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83 Lubbock, *Origin* pp. 104, 69, 72, 112.

84 Ibid. p.539.
of the communal marriage system and ignited the evolutionary 'progress of ideas' that led inevitably and naturally to the sanctification of the Victorian patriarchal order in which 'blood' constituted the principal connective bond. Social progress followed this course: 'first, that a child is related to his tribe generally; secondly, to his mother and not to his father; thirdly, to his father, and not his mother; lastly, and lastly only, that he is related to both. ....[a]s we descend in the scale of civilisation, the family diminishes, and the tribe increases, in importance.'

At around the same time (1870), the American ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan published the first results from a circular he had sent, under government auspice, to missionaries around the world seeking out duplications of the Iroquois ‘classificatory’ kinship system which he had first studied in 1848. That system, he argued, preserved the trace of human relations from a time before the mechanics of conception, and the ties of ‘blood’ so privileged by Europeans, were understood. From the south seas, missionary Lorimer Fison supplied Morgan with details of a kinship system which placed the Australians ‘several strata below barbarism into savagery, and … nearer to the primitive condition of man' than any group previously identified. Here was a living kinship system merely one step above the primal consanguine form, in which 'groups of brothers ... shared their wives in common, and groups of sisters ... shared their husbands in common'. The Australian system, argued Fison before the Royal Society of Victoria in 1872, revealed ‘that shadowy host who bring up the rear in the onward march, whereof we now are leading the van’. As the new anthropology of the 1860s, with its teleological theories of human progress, biological determinism and imperial destiny finally broke with Prichardian ethnology and its evangelical and humanitarian roots, the Australians were transformed from a people who could be redeemed and raised up, to mere specimens whose primitive ways captured and fixed Europe’s distant past and valorised its triumphant present on the world stage. Finally, Britain could mobilise the most modern theories of social science to dispose of the ‘hypocrisy’ that had held the biologically-driven imperialism of the higher

87 Ibid. p.50.
races in check and embrace the natural destiny of ‘Greater Britain’. For Thomas Huxley, the real worth of the American Civil War was that it would free the lesser races to demonstrate their innate inferiority to the higher races and would thus free ‘the Caucasian conscience … [from] reproach for ever more.’ Craniologist J. Barnard Davis also remarked on the wrongness of an unnatural and restraining philanthropy. The Australians, he said, were 'by nature, utterly devoid of the power to receive that which is designated "civilization" by Europeans’, and when it was 'thrust upon them by the high hand of philanthropy' it led to their inevitable destruction. For this generation of anthropologists, anatomists and social evolutionists, the idea of ‘race’ gave free licence to imperialism.

Colonial Contraries
How remarkable then that in the face of such an onslaught from the metropolitan scientific academy and its local apostles, the Victoria BPA and its agents in the field should continue throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s to defend the civil potential of its wards and to press on with its own ‘experiments’ in civilising natives. Against slurs on their moral character and accusations that they were base savages and barely human, addicted to prostitution and drunkenness Green, ever paternal, argued that they displayed ‘as keen feelings … as any of their more favored brethren’ and only required to be ‘taught and persuaded daily’ to become models of respectability.

And daily they were so persuaded to conform to habits fitting modern and respectable subjects of a civil colony. In the middle of 1864 the Board issued a set of rules for the daily operation of the station and the school. They were to be placed in the schoolroom for all to see. Like the moral reformers in Britain who sought to transform both the working classes and the profligate aristocracy into replicas of themselves, the Protestant missionary-superintendents of the Board’s stations regarded a well-ordered daily routine as a hedge as much against sinfulness as savagery. To the Protestant

91 Davis, Thesaurus Craniorum p.265.
92 John Green to Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1877, p.81.
missionaries and lay-preachers employed by the Board, ever vigilant against moral infringement, and for whom the imposition of a prophylactic barrier between the degraded and godless colonists and their own flock of Aboriginal Christian converts was of prime importance, ‘race’ was, on the whole, immaterial.

The day at Coranderrk began early in preparation for the 8.00 am ‘muster’ to which all were called by the ringing of the station bell. Outside the Greens’ cottage they assembled for ‘inspection by the Master and Matron’, whose duty it was ‘to see that their persons are clean and their dresses clean and orderly’. Twice weekly, on Tuesdays and Saturdays, they gathered again to receive rations - one and a half pounds of sugar, three ounces of tea, five pounds of flour, one fig of tobacco and ‘a little meat occasionally’ for working men and less for women and children. Under John Green’s brand of practical Christianity, all were expected to attend the school-house for morning and evening prayers, daily. On Sunday a full ‘Divine service’ was conducted twice in the Presbyterian mode. For redeemed savages, if not for their immigrant brothers and sisters, the disciplines of Christian conformity were a necessary marker of civil arrival.

The Board’s rules prescribed that school-aged children of both sexes, whether domiciled in the enclosed children’s asylum within the village or with their parents, and women, attended school from 10.00 am until half-past eleven and from half-past one until 3.00 pm. each weekday. Men attended from 6.00 to 8.00 in the evening. Men and youths above school age were required to devote at least four days per week to station labour, be it the production of ‘handicrafts’, including rugs, for which there was a ready market in Melbourne, to the construction of station buildings, huts and fences, or the cultivation of crops or animal husbandry. It was the urgent hope of the Board that through the sale of produce and through the production of food, the station would soon be self-sufficient. Like familiarity with the doctrines and habits of Christianity, economic self-reliance and disciplined routines of work were essential markers of civility and respectability. Budgetary restraints, however, ensured that the rations supplied by the Board needed to be supplemented by hunting or fishing, and one day of each week the men on the station –but not the women- were freed from the constraints of the new order by practical

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93 BPA Minutes, 8 February 1864, 23 May 1864, 26 July 1864. 4th Report of the BPA, p5-6.
economics and they went into the mountains.\footnote{Smyth’s report of his visit to Coranderrk, April, 1864, 4th Report of the BPA, p5-6.} The older men, in any case, continued to take to the mountains as they chose.

While the able-bodied men worked in the fields and constructed huts and farm buildings when they were not away shearing, the women were directed to remain cloistered and ‘properly employed in their huts at home’ in a manner fitting the gendered moral geography appropriate to a bourgeois vision of respectability.\footnote{\textit{5th. Report of the BPA}, p.4. Catherine Hall, \textit{White, Male and Middle-Class : Explorations in Feminism and History} (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p.91.} These private realms were to be subjected to continuous scrutiny to ensure that behaviour remained morally unblemished. To that end the master and matron were directed to conduct daily inspections of all of the huts, and generally ‘to inculcate habits of order and cleanliness, as likely to lead to good conduct and morality’.\footnote{Smyth in 4th Report of the BPA , p.5-6.} That the Board’s attempt to cloister the Kulin women failed is evident from stories later told of women and girls who gathered on the river bank away from the prying eye of their overseers, and in still extant memories of river-side births.\footnote{Personal communication.}

Ironically, the exercise in moral training was sorely undermined when the newly appointed teacher, Miss Rea, was accused of conduct that ‘seriously involved her character’ in May 1866. The nature of her misdemeanour remained unspecified in the Board’s records but it coincided with the public airing of allegations of sexual abuse at another state asylum, the Prince’s Bridge Industrial School, and the Board acted quickly to protect its reputation. Unable to deny the charges, Miss Rea was discharged.\footnote{“Report of the Board of Enquiry into Mr. Connor, Superintendent of the Prince’s Bridge Industrial School”, Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, 1866, Vol. 1. Paper No..13. pp. 327 ff. May, 1866.  BPA Minutes, 22 May 1866.} Such behaviour not only disarticulated the notional conjunction between white femininity and respectability, it also offended traditional Kulin sensibilities and the Christian morality of the Coranderrk converts. Her dismissal, as with that of an earlier school master, who was sacked ‘because the blacks would not work with him’, indicated the power of the Kulin to impose their collective will upon operations at their station.\footnote{BPA Minutes, 2 June 1865.}
Paradise Lost

For the first few years relations between the Kulin and Green were fraternal but in the middle years of the 1860s they soured due largely to the incompetence of the Board. Accustomed since the 1840s to receiving wages for their work on pastoral stations, the Kulin had willingly worked on their own ‘Goshen’ for rations alone in the belief that the station would rapidly become a self-sufficient, perhaps even a profitable, venture. It was a vision that the Kulin shared with the Board. Regularly, however, in the early years, the supplies of clothing and blankets, as well as food rations, arrived long after the onset of winter, coinciding as it did with the exhaustion of the Board’s Treasury vote. By January 1865, the growth of the population at Coranderrk to 67 men, women and children had outstripped the Board’s ability to supply rations. Not for the first time, Green sent urgent notice that if stores were not sent at once, ‘the Blacks would probably leave’. In response to the disquiet, the Board instructed Green to impose stricter economies, to cut down on the ‘exorbitant’ medical expenses at the station which, it complained, were charged ‘at the same rates as are usually charged for attendance on whites’ and repeated earlier calls for power to prevent them leaving the station.\textsuperscript{101} As the Board’s agent, Green was caught between the Board and the residents and became the target of some of their disquiet. More than once he was forced to purchase supplies for the station out of his own pocket only to be reprimanded by the Board for doing so without authorisation.\textsuperscript{102}

Antagonism between the Kulin and Green came to a head in the summer of 1866-7. In preparation for the Melbourne Intercolonial Exhibition of 1866 and the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867, the Board set about collecting both traditional Aboriginal artefacts and items that would demonstrate the success of the Board’s civilising project, such as ‘drawings on paper’, needlework, and station produce.\textsuperscript{103} As in 1861 the production of head casts, eleven in all, ‘caused alarm’ at the station where discontent was already brewing. Green was reprimanded for permitting their production without permission from the Board. ‘It is probable’, Brough Smyth observed, ‘that the presence of strangers having such objects in view may seriously alarm the Aborigines’. Perhaps to

\textsuperscript{101} BPA Minutes, 30 January 1865, 13 April 1865.
\textsuperscript{102} BPA Minutes 22 May 1865. Green to Royal Commission, 1877, p.82.
diffuse the tension, Green suggested that the Aborigines be allowed to visit the exhibition free of charge, but the application was declined by the Board.\(^{104}\)

Had they gone to the exhibition they might have been just as disturbed to see their portraits, taken by photographer and Coranderrk neighbour, Karl Walter, (for whom they had posed each in Sunday best), arranged in a photo-montage which objectified them as ethnological specimens differentiated by caste so as to emphasise the decreasing quantum of Aboriginal ‘blood’ in each generation, as ‘full bloods’ became ‘half-castes’ then ‘quadroons’ and ‘octoos’, and then, it might be supposed, became indistinguishable from ‘settlers’. If it provoked a romantic whimsey about the passing of ‘authentic’ Aborigines in some who saw it, it also fuelled the developing antagonism to the Coranderrk residents from settlers near Healesville who coveted the land locked up in the station reserve and challenged the right of those of mixed descent to remain on the station. They were especially antagonised by the addition of 2,500 acres to the original 2,300 in July 1866.\(^{105}\)

The Coranderrk Kulin were further disturbed early in 1867 when a proposal by the ‘speculator’ Mr. Wills to take Aboriginal cricketers on a tour of England prompted Brough Smyth to enquire of the Attorney General as to ‘what powers were possessed by the government to control the movements of the Aborigines’ on its stations.\(^{106}\) It became apparent to their leaders that their freedoms could no longer be taken for granted.

Resentment was further compounded in the winter of 1867 when five deaths resulted from a ‘severe epidemic which ... completely prostrated the station’.\(^{107}\) In March Dr Gibson had warned that the ‘clothing of the boys, consisting of two shirts reaching to about the knees’ was inadequate for the winter season, and suggested ‘the necessity of giving them trousers before the cold commences’ and boots, but the usual inadequate clothing arrived late, well into the winter. For the first time ‘tubercular disease’ was reported amongst the station people.\(^{108}\) Severe illness at the station raised the spectre that the sick and dying might be taken away to the Melbourne Hospital adding to the burden that illness and death brought. Aborigines who were admitted to that institution rarely

\(^{104}\) BPA Minutes, 18 January 1867.
\(^{105}\) 6\(^{th}\) Report of the BPA, p.41.
\(^{106}\) BPA Minutes, 12 February 1867.
emerged again. Not only death but the claims of science, local and international, spirited them away. Duly labelled amongst the bones in J. Barnard Davis’s collection in London was skull No.671, that of ‘a young man [of 25, who had] died of phthisis in the Melbourne Hospital; hence he is believed to have been of a tribe near Melbourne’.109 The local university medical faculty, whose Fellows mostly doubled as hospital surgeons, had unfettered claim on the bodies of the destitute for its dissection tables.110

With the death rate rising at Coranderrk, Gibson recommended that the station dogs be shot as, in his opinion, they were a source of the fever. Green shot the dogs forthwith. When the Kulin complained to the Board it undermined Green, insisted that it was ‘not right to destroy the dogs without the consent of the Blacks’. Green’s relations with the Kulin deteriorated further when the Board ordered in July (1867) that his ‘rules for the guidance of the Blacks at Coranderrk [were] not in the opinion of the Board likely to act beneficially’. While there is little doubt that the Board referred to Green’s ‘court’ - which had been brought to public notice in the Board’s annual report of 1866 – and regarded his rule there as too permissive, the Kulin may well have taken the injunction that Green was not to ‘enforce any regulation without the consent of the Board’ as a further reprimand over the eradication of the dogs.111

When the Italian anthropologist Enrico Giglioli, who travelled extensively in Melanesia and the Pacific, visited the station late in May 1867, he observed none of these tensions. Escorted around the station and kept at arms length from the residents, he observed a well-managed institution where ‘these poor Australians’ lived in ‘apparent contentment’, where the young ‘lived in a good house ... the men were employed in clearing the land, in fencing, and generally in agricultural and pastoral work [and] the women did housework and made baskets’, and were taught to sew and cook. He noted that ‘there was a school for both young and old where the natives learned to read and write, with some success’, but he deemed the effort ill-conceived as ‘the race will be extinct long before it becomes literate.’ He commented favorably on the rations they received which included ‘a little meat occasionally’. He was equally impressed when

10 Davis, *Thesaurus Craniorum* p.266.
informed that ‘those who loaf’ received diminished rations. Civilising and disciplining natives required a fine balance between punishment and reward.

Under constant pressure from Treasury to contain its budget, the Board became increasingly alarmed as chronic illness reduced land clearance, fencing and crop yields in 1867 and one quarter of the Kulin abandoned the station in 1867. Though Green still reported that he expected the station to achieve self-sufficiency by the end of the decade, it seemed an unlikely attainment. Expenditure on Coranderrk remained the major item in the Board’s budget, leaving the rival Anglican and Presbyterian missionary committees to compete for the remainder. The Board’s concern was substantially, but not simply, a question of accounting balances. Beyond that, the attainment of self-sufficiency measured the transition from savage to civil, from immoral and non-conforming ‘natives’ to citizen. It stood therefore, as a direct measure of the success of the Board’s precocious civilising experiment.

In November, 1867, Brough Smyth visited the station and reported critically that the stores at Coranderrk were not in good order and, unmoved by the fact that John and Mary Green and their children had succumbed to the fever, suggested in veiled terms that Green’s management of the station was ‘slovenly’. As labour on the station was remunerated in rations alone, Green had encouraged the Kulin to produce handicrafts for sale. They used their earnings to purchase items of food, clothing, furniture and incidentals not supplied by the Board. Brough Smyth now demanded that monies earned in that way, or through the sale of fruit and vegetables from their cottage gardens, ‘should be paid into consolidated revenue’ along with the profit from other station produce. When the station became self-supporting, then Parliament could exercise ‘liberality’ by rewarding workers who displayed ‘more than ordinary attention to duty’. What he proposed was a token given at the Board’s discretion rather than a wage due by right and it demeaned the sensibilities of workers, many of whom had lived independent lives before settling at Coranderrk. Brough Smyth’s move to take control of their small earnings represented an attack on Kulin independence and provoked a demand for wages

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to be paid for the work they did at the station in addition to the meagre rations they received from the Board.

Increasingly, Brough Smyth was concerned to bring these difficult people to heel and the Board’s accounts into balance. Along with his recent call for the enhancement of the Board’s powers to control the movements of the Aborigines of the colony, this seizure of income earned on their own initiative represented an incremental demotion of the Kulin in the colonial matrix from free subjects to confined inmates. Step by step they were being made to be dependent not on wages like the independent workers many had once been and continued to be when they returned to country, but on the charity and condescension of a Board which refused to supply the station with the tools and equipment needed to make it self-supporting. What had begun as an exercise in independence had rapidly deteriorated into an exercise that, by imposing failure, inexorably lent weight to the idea that the Aborigines were incapable of accommodating modernity.

Ominously, Brough Smyth now also observed that it was ‘unwise’ to teach the Kulin ‘useful trades’. ‘Uneducated whites’, he argued in an about-face that betrayed his growing ambivalence, would regard them as inferiors, and would look upon them ‘as ... creature[s] that by some extraordinary act of nature had come to be nearly like other men’. Forced to compete with Europeans they would fail. Countering his earlier expectation that they would soon take their place in the settler community, he now argued that they should be segregated because ‘improve him as we may, it is doubtful whether he would ever be self-reliant and able to exert self-control.’ ‘The best course’, he now argued, ‘is to keep the blacks together, and bring them as seldom as possible in contact with other races.’

For the Kulin, this was an alarming about face. Veiled in the language of paternalism, Brough Smyth’s words evinced a new enthusiasm to isolate them on model farms that doubled as state training institutions where their unpaid labour would profit the Board. Despite Green’s reports confirming that Aboriginal labour remained in high demand on pastoral stations right across the colony, what Brough Smyth had in mind was tantamount to forced labour and incarceration. Brough Smyth was less concerned with

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the implications of his proposal that the people be confined on the stations and more concerned to enhance his own reputation as an administrator by turning the station into a profitable, model farm inhabited by subordinate, compliant natives. He was, in addition, eager to extend the reputation he already had as a man of science, by exploiting the ethnological resource he had at hand. Like other members of the colony’s small intellectual fraternity, Brough Smyth was well aware of the crucial role the Australians had assumed in the debates over Darwin’s new thesis and conscious that the success of his experiment in civilising them would reap rewards, even if the ideological foundations that motivated him were, by the late 1860s, at odds with the weight of metropolitan anthropological opinion which held the Australians to be beyond redemption and fit only for extinction.

To achieve his vision, the Coranderrk labourers had to be forced to forego the now customary seasonal return of each clan to pastoral stations in their own country, and instead remain at Coranderrk throughout the year. In July (1867) Brough Smyth called on the Attorney General to prepare a bill ‘giving beneficial control over Aborigines and half-castes and Quadroons’. Equally ominously, Brough Smyth’s November (1867) report gave passing consideration to relocating the station and selling off the valuable land to replenish the Board’s coffers.

**Ambiguities and Polarities: the Board Secretary as ethnologist.**

Brough Smyth was already at work on what he hoped would be the definitive ethnology of the Aborigines of Victoria when Huxley, McLennan, Lubbock and Morgan went to press. As an administrator who had to deal with the complexities of controlling the lives of people who refused to see themselves as subordinates, Brough Smyth’s interpretation of the Australians was necessarily more complex than the unidimensional primitive imagined by the new anthropologists and social evolutionists or for that matter, by distant humanitarian. If he was hot tempered and impatient with his wards, he entertained no doubts as to their humanity and perspicacity.

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115 M.E. Hoare, “‘The Half-Mad Bureaucrat’.”
116 BPA Minutes, 9 July 1867.
The Aborigines of Victoria, published after he was summarily sacked from the Mines Department and had resigned in disgrace from the BPA in 1875, is a work mired in contradictions and a deliberate challenge to the simplifications of the metropolitan commentators, particularly Lubbock and Morgan. Its ambiguous representations of the Aborigines reflect the difficulties of marrying the Aborigine of the European imaginary with his own experience of them at close range as refractory but perspicacious wards whose resistance had stymied his best-laid plans to raise them, and the stations under his jurisdiction, into models of modern civility and economic self-sufficiency.

Even though the Australians had not used metals, he maintained that they were almost certainly more modern people than those whose stone tools Lubbock's archaeological researches had turned up in ancient sediments of Britain and Europe and their customs, if not their implements, placed them alongside more advanced cultures. Far from being the living representatives of 'stone age man', their kinship system and marriage regulations displayed complexities that confounded European understanding and hardly fitted the model of salacious communal promiscuity attributed to them by the social evolutionist school. Inaccurate and unsophisticated translations of kinship terminologies, he argued, accounted for the belief that they were ignorant of the processes of generation. Any Aboriginal man, he argued in response to Morgan, knew well enough that 'his father's brother is not his father'. ‘When a son tells you that he 'calls' his father's brother 'father,' he asserts merely that he follows a custom’ and if called upon ‘he could indicate distinctions and find words to express his meaning’. He concurred with the social evolutionists that contemporary marriage relations, be they European or Australian, had arisen from an ancient communal system, but Australian marriage systems too had evolved, and though they were neither Christian nor civilised, the Australians were fully conscious of their own history and progress.

He challenged those who regarded the Australians as ‘creatures of another species’ and rounded on those who favoured Strzelecki’s law which was ‘accepted and believed by so many, and made the text of some lay sermons intended to elevate the white man at the expense of his darker brother’. It was an ‘error’ that had ‘taken such

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119 Ibid. pp. xxv-xxvi.
deep root’ that a ‘simple denial of the truth of it would be unsatisfactory, if not useless.’ Arguing that ‘[o]ne properly-authenticated case of a female having borne children to a full-blooded black after having children to a white man would have been sufficient to destroy Count Strzelecki’s theory’, he cited instances from across the colony, questioned the credulity and credibility of the Count himself, and reiterated that ‘There is … not even the shadow of ground for the belief - that the Aborigines of Victoria - regarding them simply as animals - are in any way different from any other animals which belong to the human species.’ And finally disposing of Strzelecki, he called upon those who ‘dogmatise on questions of so much importance’ to investigate more deeply before they promulgate opinions which are likely to retard the advance of science, embitter the relations between races whose interests are conflicting, and offer inducements to the strong to be cruel to the weak.  

Against those who held the Australians to be less than human, Brough Smyth claimed for them ‘a much higher position amongst the races of the world than that hitherto ascribed to them’. In many ethnological works and travellers’ accounts ‘their faces are made to appear as like those of baboons as possible, [but] they are as thoroughly human in their features and expressions as the natives of Great Britain’. The Australian’s brain, he argued, was of a different quality to that of the inhabitants of the nearby islands, and ‘in many of his legends there is much that is not unlike the earlier forms of poetic conceptions that distinguish the Aryan race from other races’. Amongst their number were men of marked intelligence, including Coranderrk leader Simon Wonga who was of mild disposition, gentle and courteous, ‘ a good speaker ‘ and a man with ‘much influence with his people’. Ideologically allied with the pre-Darwinian humanitarians who drew inspiration from Prichard, Brough Smyth classified the Australians as savages who could be redeemed, and regenerated.

By the mid 1870s, indeed, Brough Smyth’s determination to promote his own scientific reputation by defending the Aborigines against their detractors saw him locked into a prescriptive binary in which Aboriginal regeneration was envisaged as the

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120 Ibid. pp. xxv, xxxiii, 93, 95.
121 Ibid. p. liv.
122 Ibid. p. 11.
123 Ibid. p. xviii.
124 Ibid. p.10.
achievement of Europeanness. He was persuaded of the veracity of a theory dating from the 1830s and revived in 1872 by the French anthropologist, Paul Topinard, that held the Australians to be a distant branch of the Aryan race, and thus distant cousins of the Europeans themselves. The young half-castes partake in their form, feature and color more of the character of the male parent than that of the Aboriginal female … [and the] children of a half-caste female and a white man are not to be distinguished from children of European parents', he noted. Within a few generations these distant Aryans would be white again. I consider the impact of Topinard’s theory further in chapter six.

Even so, such a heartfelt, albeit self-interested, defense of the Aborigines did not stop Brough Smyth rehearsing tales of Aboriginal cannibalism, infanticide and violent sexual conquest. Such ideas were not inimical to the world view of this Prichardian degenerationist. Humanitarians required savage fields upon which to practise their salvationist projects. The Board over which he had presided for fifteen years had justified its round up of the children of the Aborigines as an act of rescue, so while he challenged the social evolutionists’ precepts about the Aborigines, he was as keen as others before him to present a generic ‘aborigine’ who would ground that salvationist endeavour. Here were ‘savages’ who ‘killed and ate little children’, sometimes as custom dictated or because ‘it is a burden, because it is weakly, perhaps because it is deformed’ and sometimes merely in response to ‘craving for flesh’. It was not his intention, but he provided further evidence that such accusations inhabited the realm of colonial fantasy, when he recorded that the Aborigines were so ‘ashamed of the practice’ that they ‘usually deny [it]’ in relation to themselves, ‘but as constantly allege that “wild blacks” are guilty of the crime’.

Brough Smyth was above all an administrator and Kulin purposes and ambitions consistently clashed with his plans to inculcate order, economy, and habits of obedience and industry amongst them. His ambivalence towards them reflected this. ‘Nearly all the Aborigines are … prone to amusements’, Brough Smyth wrote in frustration, ‘and they dislike work and restraint of every kind … It is questionable whether any of them are capable of sustained labour, such as is requisite to obtain knowledge to fit them for the

125 Ibid., pp.xviii, lxvii.
126 Ibid. p.21.
business of civilized life’. ‘They can exert themselves vigorously’ in their own interests, ‘but prolonged labor with the object of securing ultimate gain is distasteful to them’. While the children at Coranderrk were ‘to say the least, equal to European Children’ in learning ability, he was not sanguine about their ‘capabilities of improvement’ which ‘stops short just at the point where an advance would lead to a complete change in the character of his mind’. Beyond the age of twelve or fourteen, he observed, even those ‘half-castes’ who were ‘improved’ by the mixture of white blood, tended to deteriorate and ‘exhibit...the admixture of Aboriginal blood more strongly’. It was of course the age at which they joined in the campaigns of their kin against the Board.

Frustrated by Kulin refusal to submit to the disciplines he sought to impose upon them - disciplines of calendar, work regimes, domestic order and subordination - Brough Smyth drifted away from the certainties with which he had begun his campaign to civilise them in 1860 towards an ambivalent construction in which he came more and more to conflate their defiance with innate racial incapacity. Time alone would tell, he concluded in a work written over many years, ‘whether they will continue to advance as they approach maturity. ... If they do not ... it may fairly be assumed that the prevalent opinion regarding the mental constitution of the Australians is correct’. Brough Smyth’s encroaching ambivalence about the innate capacities of those under his rule indicates the power of the new racial theories to affect opinion. By the late 1860s the new racial ideas emanating from the social evolutionist schools in Europe, Britain and America already commanded so much discursive weight that they functioned as the dominant paradigm against which contesting ideas about the Australians had to compete.

**Citizens and Rebels.**

In March, 1868, Simon Wonga, the Kulin leader, complained to the Board about its seizure of the income his people earned from ‘the disposal of produce’, about the inadequacy of their rations and about the Board’s refusal to pay them wages. He complained too that John Green’s frequent and extended absences from the station on inspection tours interfered with their progress towards self-sufficiency. Asserting their

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127 Ibid. pp. xxxvii-xxxviii, xxi.
128 Ibid. pp. 22-3, 29-30,
independence, more than a quarter of the residents had left the station and gone to seek work on pastoral runs or on the Alexandra goldfields partly to escape the fever, and partly in protest at the Board’s parsimony. Much of their antagonism was directed at Green who had destroyed their dogs and now transferred their earnings into the colonial Treasury. In June Wonga took a delegation of Kulin to Melbourne to present their complaints to the Board. Unappeased by the Board’s assurance that things would improve, in July they downed tools. To Brough Smyth such forthrightness reeked of a dangerous Jacobinism that perhaps harboured more savage propensities underneath.

With the Board’s competence, and his own, under attack in Parliament from the local representative for Healesville (Watkins) who was intent on opening the valuable Coranderrk lands up for selection, and with continuing discontent emanating from the station, Brough Smyth simultaneously encouraged Wonga with a grand vision for the development of new gardens, crops, new cottages and cottage industries at the station and prepared a Bill that would make them virtual prisoners in a state institution. In August 1869, the ‘Aboriginal Natives Protection Act’ was introduced in the Victorian parliament. Pandering to popular prejudice and to the Board’s increasingly authoritarian motives, Justice Minister Casey announced it as a measure designed to prevent the Aborigines from ‘wandering about among grog-shops, and ... becoming waifs and strays’. It would, he said, empower the Board ‘to keep the aboriginals, adults and children, on the stations’, to take control of their earnings when they were permitted to take work off-station, and to effectively ‘act in loco parentis’ to this hapless people. Such sentiments and designs were an affront to the Kulin who had melded their cultural imperatives with the life ways of the invaders and now lived and worked much like any other respectable citizen of the colony, except for their lack of deference in the face of authority.

Under the 1869 Act ‘every Aboriginal native of Australia and every Aboriginal half-caste or child of a half-caste, such half-caste or child habitually associating and

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129 Ibid. p. 22.
132 Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Session 1869, Vol.8, pp.1726-7, Legislative Assembly, 19 August 1869.
living with Aboriginals’ was deemed to be ‘Aboriginal’. Indicating the malleable and contingent nature of racial classifications in the colony, the Act designated that where identity was disputed, local magistrates were to determine the matter – as if race was now tantamount to criminality. Now they could be compelled to live where the Board ordered. It could either confine them on stations or break up coalitions by expelling troublemakers. The Act vested the Board with power to issue or withhold certificates without which they could no longer be employed, and to take control of wages they earned. Most threatening of all, the Act vested guardianship of all Aboriginal children in the Board. Where once its legal jurisdiction had been only over neglected, abandoned or orphaned children, the Board now had power to discipline the Kulin by enclosing their children in the children’s asylum at the station, or by exiling them to an ‘industrial or reformatory school’.  

The 1869 Act overturned a barely-articulated tenet of the colony’s political discourse that the Aborigines of the colony possessed the same civil rights as other men and women: to trade their labour where they could, to engage in social intercourse, and to exercise parental authority over their own children. Exiled from Melbourne in the 1840s and shunned by the majority of settlers as they had long been, the concept that the Aborigines of the colony should be walled in by law, represented a sea change in the colony’s social matrix. While they had long suffered violence, neglect, exploitation, discrimination and marginalisation, their reduction to incarcerated wards of state registered the moment when paternalism gave way to an undisguised and unmediated regime of coercion based on a privileging of ‘race’ with its conceptually inherent will to power and its eradicatory ambitions. With the passage of the 1869 Act ‘race’ for the first time became a discrete legislative category of exclusion in the colony, privileging anthropology’s claims that the Aborigines were a biologically and culturally primitive and fundamentally ‘lesser’ antecedent to modern men.

Brough Smyth inspected the station in February 1870 equipped with new powers to coerce. With the community’s economy compromised by the Board’s refusal to issue

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them with ‘certificates’ to go on the usual round of shearing, and with many of those who had left in 1868 forced back, Green reported ‘a good deal of trouble with some of the men about money’. When Smyth gathered the people together, they aired their grievances over the Board’s refusal to pay them wages. While Green had requested discretionary power to paternally bestow on ‘the good and steady workers a little money … just to encourage them’, Brough Smyth ingratiated himself with the Kulin, and undermined Green, when he agreed with them that they should be paid a wage. In Brough Smyth’s mind, the Kulin were now ‘so thoroughly domesticated’, that the payment of wages would provide disciplinary leverage that could be used to further advance the experiment of transforming them into respectable, independent working men. It was a feint that signalled the growing antagonism between the Board Secretary and the Coranderrk superintendent that would lead to Green’s dismissal in 1874. At the same meeting Brough Smyth also disingenuously sympathised with Kulin fears that, still without title to the station land, the Board would succumb to local pressure and lay it open to selection. Only a year earlier he had enthusiastically advocated just such a move.

But if the Kulin were briefly persuaded that Brough Smyth was their ally, they were soon disappointed. When Green reported that five residents, led by the Daung wurrung clan head Thomas Bamfield (Punch) and Tommy Arnot, had once again ‘deserted’ after he had withheld rations as a disciplinary measure, Brough Smyth ordered Green, in language that marked their captive state, to force the ‘absconders’ to return. Enacting such an order did little to recommend Green to his wards and seven more deaths from lung diseases and tuberculosis at the station during 1870 and early 1871 further undermined relations between the Kulin and their superintendent. The visiting medical inspector, Dr. Gibson, reported that poor quality flour had once again caused illness amongst the station children. As ever, the Board remained parsimonious about expenditure on health care and rations despite the deaths.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{134} 7th Report of the BPA, Smyth’s report, p.9, Green’s ‘Coranderrk’ report, p15.
\textsuperscript{135} 7th Report of the BPA, Gibson’s report, p.13. BPA Minutes, 6 June 1871, 6 September 1871.
Science and Morals

In 1870, Brough Smyth’s antagonism towards the social evolutionists, found practical expression in a manner that allowed him to further ingratiate himself with the Kulin. In 1869 Thomas Huxley, then president of the Ethnological Society of London, requested the assistance of the Colonial Office to solicit photographs and measurements of ‘natives’ from across the empire to be taken according to Huxley's 'photometric instructions'. The naked subject was to be positioned against an adjustable measuring rod so that their features could be calibrated and so they could be ranked into the hierarchy of mankind. Huxley was particularly interested in what he considered the ‘ape-like’ physiology of the Australians.

While the project was commended to the Board by both the Colonial Office and the colonial government, the Kulin refused to submit themselves to the process and in their refusal they were supported by the Board and particularly by its Secretary. Huxley’s objectification of the people as ape-like zoological specimens not only offended the sensibilities of the Christian men and women of Coranderrk but was ideologically misaligned with the Board Secretary’s civilising mission which was premised on the certitude of fundamental human equivalence. Professor McCoy, whom the government had charged with ‘getting access to pure bred samples of each tribe’ on Huxley’s behalf, suggested a compromise whereby the models would be permitted to cover their genitalia with ‘such scanty covering as the native notions of modesty require ... without diminishing the value of the series.’ McCoy, imagining ‘savages’, had no understanding of how fundamentally anathema such a suggestion was to the Kulin. They remained adamant. They would not submit to such indignity.

Brough Smyth defended the Aborigines’ resistance to the project for reasons both pragmatic and self-interested. Writing to the Chief Secretary, Brough Smyth argued that even if Huxley’s project advanced imperial science, it would undermine the moral codes that the Board had, with difficulty, impressed upon the people. In his opinion

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136 Bleek to Kimberley, Cape Town, 26 September 1871; in Huxley Papers from the Imperial College, Series 1, Vol. XV ‘Notes and Correspondence: Anthropology’ vol.1, Item 4, (SLV M903, reel 28)
138 McCoy to Chief Secretary McCulloch, 16 April 1870; Huxley Papers from the Imperial College, Series 1, Vol.XV, “Notes and Correspondence: Anthropology, vol.1, item 116. (SLV M903, reel 28)
it would be unwise to ask the Aborigines of this Colony to submit themselves to the photographer in the manner proposed by him. In Victoria the Aborigines … are civilised as regards their habits, but they are not sufficiently enlightened to submit themselves in a state of nudity for portraiture in order to the advancement of science. Indeed they are careful in the matter of clothing, and if [we allow?] photographers to visit the stations and take photographs with Professor Huxley’s instructions in … hand [it would?] … I am sure offend the Aborigines’.

They were, in short, not so enlightened as to realise how their own debasement in the imperial racial economy validated the moral claims of Australian colonists over Aboriginal lands and, indeed, upheld the whole edifice of European imperial power. In addition, he argued, it would undermine the authority of the station superintendent if they were to ask their wards ‘to exhibit in a state of nudity’. In this particular stand-off between science and specimen, the Kulin prevailed.

The Citizen as Savage

Throughout 1871 unrest continued at Coranderrk over the non-payment of wages. In September, Brough Smyth expelled the leaders of the malcontents by issuing them with work certificates and an injunction that they should ‘earn money by their own exertions’. At the same time Green continued with the round-up of free and independent Aborigines. Amongst a group from Mt. Hope was Johnny Terrick, rounded up despite his protestations and those of his employer. Two women were taken to Lake Condah station in the expectation that their husbands would follow when the shearing season was over. The station superintendent was directed to ensure they were not removed by their husbands. Following his inspection tour in mid-1872 Green submitted the names of 52 children ‘not under sufficient protection’ whom he was determined to take to Coranderrk. The children were aged from four to seventeen years. By January 1873, there were 29 men, 27 women and 71 children under the age

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139 Smyth to McCulloch, 17 May 1870; Huxley Papers, ibid., item 117.
140 BPA Minutes, 15 September 1871.
142 BPA Out Correspondence; Smyth to Chief Secretary, 11 September 1872 (BA 72/578).
of 16, plus ‘two or three newly born’ at Coranderrk, with most of the children housed in the children’s asylum.\textsuperscript{143}

As the concentration of the colony’s Aborigines continued, Brough Smyth returned his attentions to making Coranderrk a self-sufficient model training institution. At the behest of its agricultural advisor, as Diane Barwick has detailed, the Board commenced an ‘experiment in hop-growing’.\textsuperscript{144} In May 1872 Brough Smyth requested Green to submit a differential scale of wages for the working men at Coranderrk. Green recommended that the best worker, John Briggs, who had commanded a pound a week off-station as a shearer, be paid 10 shillings a week, with less productive men being paid wages down to as little as 3/- a week.\textsuperscript{145} In June, with the question of Kulin wages still unsettled, the Board employed a white ‘hop master’ and four white labourers on wages of four pounds a week and the preparation of the hop-gardens, the new orchard and the construction of the new cottages commenced. Brough Smyth also proposed that the asylum children be conscripted to work for ‘a certain number of hours’ to hurry along the preparations.\textsuperscript{146} Wholly without fanfare and in contradiction of its earlier injunction that the women should be respectably cloistered away in domestic tasks, the Board now also deployed the labour of the station women in the hop gardens.

In the winter of 1872, still without their promised meagre wages, the Kulin began to prepare the Coranderrk river flats for the production of hops under the direction of the unpopular, officious and punitive ‘hop master’ Burgess.\textsuperscript{147} With the adults employed fully in the hop gardens, the production of vegetables for the station now depended on the labour of twenty boys from the school.\textsuperscript{148} When two boys attempted to ‘escape’ from the station they were punished by the withdrawal of their meat ration for four days and Green was instructed to read them the relevant sections of the Act which rendered them unfree.\textsuperscript{149} Reduced to something akin to servitude, the Board used the withdrawal of already scant rations to discipline any who dissented from Burgess’ instructions and

\textsuperscript{144} BPA Minutes, 6 May 1872.
\textsuperscript{145} BPA Minutes, 6 May 1872. \textsuperscript{8th Report of the BPA, p.5.}
\textsuperscript{146} BPA Out Correspondence, Smyth to Burgess, 11 June 1872 (BA 72/302). BPA Minutes, 6 June 1872.
\textsuperscript{147} BPA Out Correspondence, Smyth to Green, 15 June 1872 (BA 72/309).
\textsuperscript{148} Green in \textsuperscript{8th Report of the BPA, 1872, p5.}
\textsuperscript{149} BPA Out Correspondence, Smyth to Green, August 1872 (72/443); specific date not given.
committed other misdemeanors.  The dissidents who, having been earlier expelled, still remained at Alexandra were to be ‘removed’ to Coranderrk by the police if necessary.  The Board reported with satisfaction that the Aborigines of the colony were now ‘carefully guarded’.  For the Kulin, the hope of an independent homeland had soured.

In September, 1872, Johnny Briggs, the son of the station’s best worker, was charged with ‘misconduct’ and sent to an Industrial School connected with the orphan asylum in Melbourne. In consequence, John Briggs instigated legal proceedings against John Green through the Police Magistrate at Heidelberg and left the station. The Board countered by invoking the Act, forcing his return to Coranderrk so that he might be made to ‘work for the support of his family’.  On his return, he continued to dissent and, acting as superintendent in her husband’s absence, Mary Green withheld rations from Briggs and his family.  When he complained the Board ordered them reinstated, but early in December Briggs again left the station without a certificate accompanied by his son and Johnny Charles.  The Board countered by expelling all three from the station under threat of arrest. Briggs was given the option to take his wife Louisa with him but the Board ordered that their children be taken into the dormitory. The Kulin were assembled, and with police in attendance, were warned against affording shelter or giving rations to the exiles and ‘of the consequences of leaving the station without permission’. Briggs subsequently wrote to the Chief Secretary to protest the board’s despotism.

Temper at the station cooled a little when the first profits from the hop crop were realised in the Autumn of 1873 and Green was instructed that he might begin ‘paying wages and procuring necessaries for the Aborigines’.  But they flared again in May when the Board refused Johnny Phillips permission to leave the station and expelled the rebellious Jemmy Barker.  Police were called in June when Harmony also left the station

150 BPA Out Correspondence, Smyth to Green, August 1872 (72/444); specific date not given.
151 BPA Minutes, 6 June 1872. BPA Out Correspondence: Smyth to Green, 19 February 1872 (BA 72/113); Smyth to McKenzie, 19 July 1872 (BA 72/420); Smyth to Green, 19 July 1873 (BA 72/421); Smyth to Chief Secretary, 24 July 1872 (BA 72/422).
153 BPA Out Correspondence: Smyth to Green, 16 September 1872 (BA 72/589); Smyth to C.E.Strutt 19 September 1872 (BA 72/596). BPA Minutes, 22 November 1872.
154 BPA Out Correspondence: Smyth to Mary Green, 6 November 1872 (BA 72/680); Smyth to John Green, 3 December 1872 (BA 72/706). BPA Minutes, 6 December 1872.
155 BPA Out Correspondence: Smyth to Green, 12 December 1872 (BA 72/733); Smyth to Green, 14 December 1872 (BA 72/738).  BPA Minutes 6 February 1873, 6 March 1873, 3 June 1873.
‘without leave’.  Those who had been forced under pain of arrest to return from the Alexandra gold fields in 1872 were refused certificates to enable them to return again to their own country.  

While residents at the Board’s outer stations were encouraged to go shearing, the comings and goings of those at Coranderrk were now closely regulated. Men who had readily found employment as shearsers earning wages the equal of those paid to whites were now forced to work for miserly wages and inadequate rations in the hop grounds at Coranderrk. In its annual report the Board noted that police assistance had been ‘frequently required’ to assist with the management of Aborigines during the year. With profound disingenuousness, it also noted, for the benefit of the colony’s humanitarianists, who had envisaged the new Act as a vehicle for salvaging the colony’s dying, destitute and exploited, that the certificate system had done much to ‘prevent evil disposed persons from withdrawing willing and industrious Aboriginal labourers from the stations under false pretences’. Despite the deaths of fourteen people at Coranderrk in the spring of 1873 from ‘chest disease’, and Brough Smyth’s acknowledgement that ‘the food as supplied at present is not such as should be given every day’ to working folk or to their children, the Board blithely reported that ‘it is only in cases where an Aboriginal escapes from the custody of his guardians that there is any chance of his suffering neglect’. Those who complained that they could not feed their families on the rations provided, and that they could earn better wages off-station were reminded, by the posting ‘in conspicuous places’ of selected clauses from the regulations, that without certificates they could not legally be employed outside the station and that they were effectively imprisoned.

Despite the simmering unrest at the station, the Board remained eager to promote its activities to interested scientific observers, so long as they did not compromise respectable standards. Amongst the visitors to the station was Henry Moseley, in Melbourne for two weeks in late March, 1874 with the Challenger expedition, sponsored jointly by the Royal Society of London and the Admiralty. Its principal brief was

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156 BPA Minutes, 6 May 1873.
157 BPA Minutes, 6 May 1873, 3 June 1873.
158 BPA Minutes, 4 July 1873, 7 August 1873.
oceanography, but it was also under instruction to closely observe and to take scaled photographs of ‘unmixed races’.  

Moseley was forewarned that the ‘natives’ were in dispute with the station superintendent and the Board. The ever-simmering tensions had been aggravated just days earlier when the Board publicly demeaned the Kulin by warning the secretary of a neighbouring cricket club ‘of the consequences of inducing the natives to leave the Station ... to take part in cricket matches without leave’.  

Moseley’s memoir of his visit to Coranderrk poignantly records the incommensurability of the primitive of the European imperial imagination with the concerns of people who were as engaged with the modern world as the next citizen of the colony and who, in addition, were forced to negotiate on a daily basis with government agents who intruded into every aspect of their lives. While Moseley observed their primitive cranial formations, they quizzed him about English cricket and about the price of rural labour in England. As he observed,

They had just finished picking the [hop]crop, so were playing cricket ... We found the cricket party in high spirits ... I was astonished at the extreme prominence of the supraciliary ridges of the men’s foreheads. It was much greater in some of the Blacks than I had expected to see it, and looks far more marked in the recent state than in the skull ... The men were all dressed as Europeans; they knew all about W.G. Grace and the All-England Eleven ... One of them ... wished to know how much a bushel was paid in England for such work, evidently wanting to be able to be even with Mr. Green in the matter. The great difficulty at these reserves is to manage the distribution of payment for labour. At present, or until lately, all the proceeds went to a common stock. Of course, this makes all lazy.

In recording the details of the dispute over wages and rations, Moseley’s memoir highlighted the disjunction between the Board’s civilising mission, with all its contradictions, and the formulae of European anthropology which considered the Australians so lacking in intellectual capacity as to be beneath redemption, lost in primeval time. In an inversion of the usual colonial condescensions, the ‘natives’ had the last laugh when they deliberately misled Moseley as to the reproductive physiology of the platypus, thus delaying his quest to unlock its secret for almost a decade.

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162 BPA Minutes 13 March 1874.
164 Ann Moyal, Platypus (Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2001)
The *Challenger’s* visit brought forth the contents of local cranial collections. James Dawson sent skulls from Port Fairy, A.W. Howitt sent them from Gippsland; others came from Portland, Benalla, Swan Hill. When William Turner, an eminent Edinburgh University anatomist, analysed the specimens, he compared the ‘massive and heavy’ Australian skulls to those of the Neanderthal and the ‘anthropoid ape’. In an unguarded moment, however, he admitted to excising one Australian skull from his calculations, it being too large to fit his presuppositions about what constituted a genuine Australian specimen. Having done so he then affirmed that ‘the mental region’ of the Australians ‘was often feeble’.\footnote{William Turner, *Report on the Human Crania and Other Bones of the Skeletons Collected During the Voyage of the Challenger Etc.*, ed. John Murray, 53 vols., vol. X ‘Zoology’, *Report of the Scientific Results of the Exploring Voyage of H.M.S. Challenger, 1873-6.* (John Murray, 1884), pp. 28-37.} As Stephen Jay Gould argued, such pragmatic interpretation and doctoring of specimens produced results that conformed nicely with the requirements of imperial science.\footnote{Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1981).}

Four months after Moseley’s visit to Coranderrk, Brough Smyth reported that the station’s second hop crop had realised good prices and ‘elicited the highest praise from experts’. It contributed almost a thousand pounds to the Board’s coffers. Green calculated what the Kulin already knew: that the meagre wages paid to them amounted to about 20% of what would have been paid had white workers produced the crop.\footnote{167} 

**Conclusion**

When the Kulin crossed the mountains from the abandoned Acheron station early in 1863 to take up residence at Coranderrk they came with high hopes that finally they would find refuge from the invaders who had spread across their lands. It was to be a place where they could raise their children, teach them both the traditional ways and the new, and which they, in concert with the Board, were determined to turn into a self-supporting and independent community. At that time the Board envisaged that the Aborigines, once trained in the disciplines and habits of the civilised, would take their place alongside the immigrants, as free members of the colonial citizenry. It was less a statement of active commitment to liberal inclusion than it was a simple expression of the logic of the civilising mission and of pragmatic local political economies. For the humanitarians at
the Board, there was no intrinsic reason to exclude savages-made-modern from taking an appropriately lowly place in the colony’s economic and social matrix.

With that in mind the Board set out to transform the people at Coranderrk into respectable, hard working, obedient, submissive, Christian and self-supporting men and women. Instead they found themselves confronted with people determined to claim the station as their own, who were prepared to work to that end for rations but rebelled when those rations were inadequate to sustain life, who demanded wages when the Board claimed the station’s produce as its own, who expected their complaints to be dealt with by the Board that claimed to defend their interests and who claimed for themselves - because it was the Aboriginal way - the rights of free men and women.

The Board, and its secretary, anxious to contain expenditure and assert authority, increasingly interpreted such rebellious self assertiveness through the exclusionary theories of ‘race’ that now buttressed mid-Victorian imperialism. By the late 1860s, the Coranderrk Kulin were cast as a ‘problem population’ that required incarceration for the purposes of disciplinary rehabilitation. By the middle years of the following decade, as I will argue further in later chapters, they were recast as beings with innate and irremediable racial incapacities. The Aborigines of Victoria not only failed to assume those ‘conventions and manners’ that might have licensed their inclusion, but increasingly, they also failed to measure up to what Uday Mehta designates an ‘anthropological minimum’ upon which any claim upon the ‘rights of man’ rested. Increasingly they were imagined as displaying not only ‘manifest’ political incompetence, but also biological and evolutionary incompetence. Brough Smyth’s ambivalent and contradictory treatise demonstrates the challenge and the lure that such weighty science posed for those who were in close and increasingly adversarial contact with colonial subjects who contested European imperial predestination and authority.

With its embrace of liberal humanitarianism wavering, and with its authority openly challenged by its wards, the Board moved to impose order by effectively imprisoning the Kulin on the station after 1869 so that, despite the hard-fought campaign

waged by the Kulin in defence of their civil and moral rights, the station became no longer a refuge but an incarceral institution. Gradients of human capacity - of race - hatched in the metropolitan academies to give scientific writ to the imperial project, intersected with the economic imperatives of the colony, with local prejudice and with the personal ambitions of Board members, to produce a regime capable of quarantining the immigrant population from the Aborigines.

Although the Kulin leaders fought against the extinguishment of their freedoms, by the early 1870s Coranderrk had become a regimented institution in which their every action was monitored, policed and tabulated by an administration determined to subdue people whom it now saw as wards of state marked off from other institutionalised populations only by the singular interest taken in them by imperial anthropologists.

In the following chapter I examine the children’s asylum at Coranderrk in which the implications of the idea of ‘race’ were played out most crucially through the incarceration, ‘rehabilitation’ and regulation of the reproductive pathways of girls of mixed descent. In the final chapter of the thesis I investigate the Board’s efforts to eradicate the Aboriginal presence from the colony and its deployment of the science of race to bring about that end.
CHAPTER FIVE
The Coranderrk Dormitory: Gender, Caste and Exclusion

Since the 1830s, philanthropists and evangelists bent on Christianising and civilising the Aborigines of Port Phillip had plotted to take control of their children in order to sever familial and cultural continuities. In the early years of the occupation, children were encouraged to attend the mission school and church services by the promise of extra rations and, much to the frustration of colony’s first missionary, George Langhorne, they came and went at will. By the late 1840s when La Trobe sponsored a Baptist boarding school at the Kulin gathering place on the outskirts of Melbourne, parents were discouraged from removing their children by the occasional interventions of police, but removed them regardless. By 1860, the round-up of Aboriginal children was seen by many colonists as the most pressing task for the newly-appointed Board for the Protection of the Aborigines. It was a project that stemmed from a confusion of motives - from genuinely philanthropic concerns for the survival of the Aborigines and the welfare of their children, to the rabidly racialist desires of many colonists to fence them in to prevent ‘miscegenation’ and finally render them extinct. From 1860 onwards the Board pursued its claims over Aboriginal children with vigour.

As discussed in chapter two, accusations that Aborigines committed infanticide upon ‘half-caste’ infants had been mobilised in the 1850s by influential colonial philanthropists to persuade the new Victorian parliament to institutionalise Aboriginal children. Ordinary governmental inertia and the restraining effect of occasional outbreaks of philanthropic guilt in the colony’s newspapers, meant, however, that while the government happily handed matters to do with Aboriginal welfare over to the Anglican and Presbyterian mission societies and to the Central Board, they declined to legislatively discriminate between the parental rights and obligations of ‘native’ and other citizens. When the Board was commissioned in June 1860, it was empowered to take custodial control only over neglected, abandoned and orphaned Aboriginal children but was denied the unlimited power it sought to ‘board out’, apprentice or otherwise arrange for the
‘disposal’ of all children of the Aborigines.¹ In practice, however, that circumscription on the seizure of children in the care of their kin was bypassed by the Board’s agents, and the majority of settlers were pleased enough to see the children contained behind the perimeter fence of the Coranderrk Children’s Asylum.

In this chapter I examine the slippages and subtexts that inhabited the settler state’s desires and designs in regard to Aboriginal children: its ambivalent paternal claims and disavowals over those of mixed descent, its indecision over whether such children should be classified as ‘black’ or ‘white’ and whether they should be trained for amalgamation into colonial society or remain forever segregated on the Board’s stations.

As anthropology gathered more and more weighty evidence to prove that the Australians were the lowest type of mankind, administrators became increasingly preoccupied with the policing of the colony’s racial boundaries – with ‘racial hygiene’. By the end of the 1860s, popular racialist ideology regarded hybrid bodies as morally and physically compromised, prone to the sort of illnesses that signified moral decay, like tuberculosis and venereal disease. They carried the seeds of infection and degeneration into the social corpus and to subsequent generations.² Girls of mixed descent, identified as the very embodiments of gendered moral and racial disorder, became the primary object of an carceral project, protectionist in rhetoric, harshly disciplinarian and punitive in practice. The Board’s uncertainty as to whether its primary intention was to protect the fragile, feminine whiteness of such girls from ‘savages’ or to prevent them from ‘temp[ing] the whites’ was reflected in the particular moral geography of the station.³ Fenced into an asylum which stood at the heart of the Coranderrk station, the girls were prevented from having social congress with those beyond the perimeter, be they black or white. The rigours of respectability, which the Board imposed in its determination to train them up to a cultural minimum that would equip them to enter civil society as menials, were inescapable for these children who, in popular opinion, were both white and black and neither white nor black.

¹ Ist Report of the Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of the Aborigines; Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, 1861-2, Vol.3; Paper No. 39, p.11.
³ John Morrison in “Report of the Board of Enquiry into the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station (1881)” (hereafter Coranderrk Enquiry, 1881), Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, Session 1882-3, Vol.2; Paper No.5. p. 102, Q4226.
But when the girls came of an age where it was no longer practical to keep them walled up in the children’s asylum, the question of their racial identity and of how to dispose of them became both vexing and pressing. While there were some at the Board who were as loathe to return them to the society of white men as to place them in the Coranderrk village, others regarded the inevitable contacts and contaminations that ‘boarding out’ entailed as an unavoidable station on the path to a modernity that was now conflated with whiteness. In the late 1860s the Board came under intense pressure from local settlers to declare the dormitory children white and to expel them from the Aboriginal stations. As settlers saw it, the children of white men were not entitled to occupy and inherit lands that would otherwise be available for white occupation. In 1877 and again in 1881 the question of whether the dormitory girls should be regarded as Aboriginal or as European - and of whether they could be made respectable enough, and ultimately white enough, to mother a generation of respectable white Australians - became the underlying theme of parliamentary enquiries.

As I will argue, from the late 1860s to the 1880s a tangle of intersecting discourses about racial identity, racial reproduction, caste, gender and respectability were focused on the Coranderrk dormitory. These two decades represent a crucial transitional period when the last vestiges of the inclusionary impulses of liberal humanitarianism gave way to the exclusionary categories and gradients of scientific racism, but in this colony, as elsewhere, race was constructed, finally, not out of any objective difference between black and white but out of a complex matrix of economic and social contingencies.

Here I consider the Board’s struggle to round up the children in the face of staunch Aboriginal resistance, and the occasional resistance of white fathers, its divisive debates over the nature of its project, its determined extension of its authority over Aboriginal children in order to break Aboriginal continuities, and its deployment of technologies of power within the dormitory complex to colonise the bodies and minds of children. As Anne McClintock observed, it was through the deployment of ‘rituals of domesticity ... often violent’ that colonised women and girls across the empire ‘were wrested from their putatively “natural”, yet , ironically, “unreasonable” state of savagery
and inducted through the domestic progress narrative into a hierarchical relation to white men.  

In this chapter I consider the gendered dimensions of John Green’s campaign to take control of the children of the colony’s Aborigines, the training regime of the asylum, and the political economies of caste and extinction that were enunciated as the Board mobilised the new science of race in its campaign to break Kulin resistance to its increasingly authoritarian rule and to dislodge them from the prized Coranderrk lands. With Green, Presbyterian concern with moral hygiene intersected with, and sometimes overrode, his determination to protect the rights of the Aborigines. As Inspector of Aborigines from 1861 to 1875, Green laboured to ‘rescue’ young Aboriginal women and girls, particularly those of mixed descent, from the un-Christian usages of men be they white or black. Combining Presbyterian moralism with a paternalistic and philanthropic concern for the welfare of his flock, Green found himself in a pragmatic alliance with the economic rationalists bent on clearing the last of the Aborigines from the land and with the new racialist, anxiously preoccupied with fears about morality, miscegenation and racial hygiene. His efforts were particularly focused on the collection of the female children of the Aborigines. The practical categories of race thus acquired a gendered dimension in as much as many Aboriginal men and boys, eagerly sought after as labourers on the colony’s pastoral runs, were effectively beyond the instrumental classifications of race - and we must assume, eventually melded into the colony’s ordinary citizenry. Ironically, in the dormitory complex at the heart of the Aboriginal station, Aboriginal girls were also prepared to mother generations of white Australians.

In the second part of the chapter I focus on the 1877 Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines which explored, in its principal subtext, where the line between black and white might be drawn. It was a question that shadowed the many moves and counter moves in the decades-long battle fought by the Kulin to defend Coranderrk against the covetous grasp of settlers and the Board’s determination to relocate them away from this last pocket of their own lands. The details of that battle have been finely wrought by Diane Barwick in her Rebellion at Coranderrk. In that monumental work Barwick has

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related how across the decade from 1875 to 1886, William Barak and the Daung wurrung clan leader Birdarak Thomas Bamfield, also known as Punch, led the Coranderrk people in a sophisticated defense of their proprietorship of the station, rallying the support of humanitarians, lobbying and petitioning parliamentarians, taking delegations to the Board and the Chief Secretary, mobilising press support for their cause, and taking direct action against the succession of unsympathetic and increasingly punitive and racist superintendents who replaced Green.

As noted in the introduction, Barwick initially accepted the Board’s claims that the Kulin were themselves cognisant of distinctions of caste, that the dormitory ‘half-castes’ regarded themselves as superior to ‘fullbloods’ and that the latter were jubilant when the Board’s decision to disperse the ‘half-castes’ was first announced in 1884.\(^5\) Following her lead, Michael Christie and Bain Attwood also accepted that the Board had exploited an existing ‘rift between Aborigines at Coranderrk in the late 1870s along racial lines’ in its campaign to dispossess the Kulin of Coranderrk.\(^6\) In her later, amended work, however, Barwick reinterpreted tensions that did exist amongst the station residents as disputes between Kulin (and their kin by marriage) who, irrespective of ‘caste’ had traditional rights at Coranderrk, and those without such kin-rights who had been brought to the station by agents of the Board.\(^7\) In addition, she noted that at a crucial juncture in 1883, a dispute arose between Kulin clans which the Board exploited. As her later work made clear, in neither case did these rifts indicate any Kulin assent to the social evolutionists’ calibrations of caste.

Barwick’s telling of the story of the Coranderrk rebellion, with its reconstruction of Kulin lineages, is unquestionably a major work of research and it has provided an invaluable resource and map for this study. Its detailed narration of factional battles at the Board, and in colonial politics, sometimes overwhelms however, and the work still retains traces of Barwick’s initial misreading of the way the Kulin reacted to the Board’s imposition of distinctions of caste to undermine the Kulin’s occupation of Coranderrk.

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\(^5\) Diane E. Barwick, "Rebellion at Coranderrk: Seminar Paper Presented to Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra" (1968), p.17.


Because she initially accepted that divisions of caste were integral to intra-Kulin relations, and because Barwick’s final preparation of the work ceased prematurely with her untimely death, there also remain lingering confusions about her designation of various players as supporters of the Kulin. For example, Members of Parliament Ewan Hugh Cameron is accounted by Barwick as a supporter of the retention of Coranderrk even though he clearly intended that the valuable lands should remain in Kulin hands only until the demise of the last ‘full blood’.  

More crucially, she lays too little emphasis on the significance of the fact that even the most ardent supporters of the Kulin in the 1880s, including the socially conservative philanthropist Anne Bon and the liberal parliamentarians Alfred Deakin, John Dow and Graham Berry, accepted that ‘half-castes’, ‘quadroons’ and ‘octrooons’ were, in the social evolutionist sense, beyond Aboriginality, and had forfeited any moral right of possession at Coranderrk. Privileging caste, their support for the hiring out of the older dormitory girls ‘to service’, in opposition to Curr’s insistence that they should remain incarcerated, transformed into support for the reformed Board’s assimilationist policy. Barwick is wont to pass over the magnitude of the betrayal wrought by the connivance of erstwhile Kulin supporters with the racial discourse that underscored colonial power relations. As I will argue, social evolutionism was so essentially insinuated into the colonial order of things by the 1870s that even genuine allies of the Kulin became embroiled in its classifications and condescensions and failed to recognise that the Kulin themselves paid no heed to distinctions of caste. In revisiting the history of the Coranderrk Rebellion I have focussed on the way that the ambiguities of caste and the authority of science were deployed by colonists to construct a racial binary that would finally acquit colonists of any lingering moral imperative to recognise Aboriginal rights in land. Shifting the focus to the Coranderrk dormitory and to the interplay between local and metropolitan constructions of race also enables the intersection of race, caste and gender to be revealed to a greater extent than in Barwick’s text.

8 ibid. Compare pp. 128, 147,185.
9 Ibid. Ch.13 and Ch.14, especially pp233- 261.
Geographies of Race.

In July 1861 the Board appointed John Green as Inspector of Aborigines to assist the ageing Guardian of Aborigines, William Thomas. According to Barwick, Green accepted the position on condition that he be permitted to advance his evangelical ministry to the Aborigines by rounding up the neglected children he found on his inspection tours. Immediately upon assuming his new office, he took control of a ‘half-caste’ girl who had come for treatment at the Melbourne Hospital, to prevent her from being returned to her ‘tribe’. Between 1860 and 1863, dislocated children tracked down by Green were placed in the Orphan Asylum at Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) while the Board debated with the Lands Department whether an ‘Aboriginal training establishment’ should be established close to the city, or in a more isolated spot.

Asserting rights in loco parentis, the Board planned to separate the children from their kin, to educate them in the European mode and to prepare them for entry into the settler community. It was especially determined to integrate those of mixed descent. ‘The latter element in our population … are increasing’, argued the BPA in 1861, and it is a serious duty to interfere at once to prevent their growing up amongst us with the habits of the savage, as they possess the instincts, powers of mind, and altogether different constitution of the white man.

The Lands Department, voicing popular prejudice, was equally determined that Aborigines of any age or ‘caste’ be segregated from the settler community and that the proposed children’s establishment be built at least 25 miles from the city. In this debate it was not only the location of the institution that was at issue but whether such children should be placed within or without the colonial community - of whether their parentage made them essentially white or black - and whether it was from white men or from their Aboriginal kin that they were to be quarantined. In the event, the Lands Department prevailed and the long-delayed purpose-built children’s asylum became the centre-piece

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10 BPA Minutes, Australian Archives, Victoria, B314; 9 July 1861.
11 Barwick, Rebellion at Coranderrk (1998), p.65. I have been unable to locate the source of her information.
12 BPA Minutes, 9 July 1861.
13 BPA Minutes, 26 November 1860, 10 December 1860, 15 April 61, 9 July 61, 4 November 61, 25 August 1862, 26 January 1863.
14 1st Report of the BPA, 1861, p.11.
of the Coranderrk Aboriginal station on the outer fringe of the settled central district.\(^{15}\) It consisted of a schoolroom and six dormitories ‘lofty, well ventilated and well lighted’ planned (but not built) in accordance with the most modern specifications laid down by Florence Nightingale for the prevention of mortality and morbidity from tuberculosis and other chest ailments amongst native children in colonial schools.\(^{16}\) In this ‘model’ asylum, self-consciously progressive and experimental, the Board envisaged the conversion of native children into modern citizens through a program that combined physical exercise and outdoor labour with classroom instruction, again after Nightingale.\(^{17}\)

When the first buildings of the asylum were completed at the end of 1863, the Board issued instructions to its honorary correspondents to seek out ‘orphans and children who had been abandoned’, adding, however, that it would willingly extend the brief issued by parliament by receiving any other children ‘surrendered … by the Aborigines themselves’. When few were voluntarily offered up, it noted, with evident disappointment and not a little surprise, that ‘the blacks are reluctant to give up their children. They are, usually, very kind to their offspring, and they are jealous of any interference with them by the whites’.\(^{18}\)

While John Green publicly denied that force was used when collecting children for the asylum, Board records, including his own reports, indicate that pressures of various sorts, from bribery, to the withholding of rations, to direct police intervention, were regularly employed to persuade Aborigines to relinquish their children. Four adults and six children from Parker’s old Protectorate station at Mt Franklin were forcibly relocated to Coranderrk in March 1864, despite their protestations.\(^{19}\) Amongst the children was Thomas Dunolly, one of the three kinsmen whom Barak subsequently

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\(^{15}\) BPA Minutes 26 January 1863.


\(^{17}\) 3rd Report of the BPA, p.6.


appointed as his ‘ngurungaeta’ or speakers at Coranderrk.\textsuperscript{20} More were brought from Seymour in June and Green was hopeful of securing others from the western district.\textsuperscript{21} Under instructions to ‘remove any children from distant stations where parents or guardians would consent to their being taken to Coranderrk’, Green pressured the people at Carngham to allowed their children to go to the Board’s model asylum. When Green left with their children, Carngham adults set off on foot to walk 150 miles to Coranderrk where they stayed with their children before returning home. Through their local correspondent they later pressed the Board to establish a station and school in their own country so that their children might be returned, but to no avail.\textsuperscript{22}

Sometimes, however, Aborigines welcomed the opportunity to have their children educated in the central asylum. In January 1865 Green informed the BPA that ‘a man and woman in Gippsland were desirous of sending their two children to Coranderrk to be educated’.\textsuperscript{23} How much pressure was brought to bear in this case is impossible to determine.\textsuperscript{24} By July 1865 the Coranderrk dormitory housed fifteen boys and eleven girls, kept ‘apart from the rest of the blacks’ on the station.\textsuperscript{25} Ten other children of school age lived with their families in the station village and attended the asylum school as day pupils, as did Green’s own children.

Late in 1868 Green suggested to the Board that rations no longer be issued through local correspondents but be available only through the six stations it administered. ‘They would all very soon make to one or another of the stations, when they found that they could not get supplies elsewhere’ calculated Green. If such persuasive measures failed to draw forth Aboriginal children, Green recommended that the Board adopt direct action and simply ‘take them to Coranderrk’.\textsuperscript{26} Children were also

\textsuperscript{21} BPA Minutes, 27 June 1864, 15 August 1864.
\textsuperscript{22} BPA Minutes, 16 February 1865, 27 March 1865, 8 May 1865.
\textsuperscript{23} BPA Minutes, 3 January 1865.
\textsuperscript{24} George Gilbert used the Board’s authority to retrieve his children. He was told they were dead but later learned they had been ‘taken charge of’ by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Melbourne, Dr Goold. He wrote to the Board and they were returned to Ramahyuck station. Minutes13 July 1866.
\textsuperscript{25} Green in 5\textsuperscript{th} Report of the BPA; Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, Session 1866, Vol. 2, Paper No.13, p.6.
\textsuperscript{26} Green in 6\textsuperscript{th} Report of the BPA; Victoria Parliamentary Papers, Session 1869, Vol. 4, Paper No.47, p.10.
sometimes seized when they or their mothers were arbitrarily declared to be ‘prostitutes’.  

Marginalisation: Hybridity, Gender and Race

The Board’s motives, and Green’s own, shuttled between protective humanitarianism, moralistic paternalism and a desire to reinforce the colony’s fragile racial boundaries. By the middle of the 1860s, the inclusionary motive of training Aboriginal children to become ‘useful members of society’ had been superceded by a project whose primary object was the segregation of Aboriginal and ‘half-caste’ girls and the prevention of interracial reproduction. In a colony acutely desirous of establishing its claims to respectability, the visible presence of children of mixed descent was especially confronting, revealing as they did in every sinew of their compromised bodies the moral delinquencies of the settler population. Nor, as noted in chapter four, was the colony immune from the spreading anxieties about miscegenation emanating out of a war-ravaged America. Increasingly the Board’s motives, and those of John Green, strayed from a humanitarian and protective brief that had assumed some residue of natural Aboriginal right over their own children, to one predicated on the need to construct a cordon sanitaire around Aboriginal girls, particularly, but not only, around those of mixed descent, who were deemed to be especially prone, by dint of their pre-existing impurity of body, to moral weakness. By the middle of the decade the Board shuttled unstably between claiming such girls to its breast in order to protect and discipline their fragile whiteness, and incarcerating them because they threatened to compromise the morals and the racial integrity of the settler population.

27 Green to "Royal Commission on the Aborigines," Victoria Parliamentary Papers, Session 1877-8, Vol.3; Paper no.76., pp.85 ff.
29 See Richard Broome, Aboriginal Australians: Black Responses to White Dominance 1788-2001, Third ed. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001), p.87. Note also that the Northern Territory’s Aboriginals Ordinance (1918) regarded ‘half-caste’ males above the age of 18 years as not Aboriginal and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of the Ordinance but extended its ‘exceptionally wide’ and almost unrestrained powers over any ‘female half-caste’ of any age who was ‘not legally married to a person who is substantially of European origin or descent and living with her husband’. "Case Notes: Cubillo V Commonwealth," Melbourne University Law Review, no. 25 (2001), p.6.
In its annual report for 1864, for example, the Board proclaimed its determination to remove ‘half-caste girls and orphans … [from] those persons who may have assumed charge of them’ so as to ‘protect them from the perils which now surround them’, but by two years later those same girls had transmogrified into active agents of moral disorder.\(^{30}\) No longer were they the subjects of protective operations. Instead, the colony’s fragile moral economy now needed to be insulated from their contaminating and alluring presence. These girls, said the Board in its report for 1866, ‘hang on the outskirts of civilization, a disgrace to the colony, and a standing rebuke to those who profess to care for decency and to be offended by the constant exhibition of immorality and vice’.\(^{31}\) Where once governors and philanthropists railed against the moral depravities of low class male settlers, now girls of mixed descent, mere children, represented the principal object of reproach and required incarceration.

Brough Smyth considered that children of mixed descent showed ‘but little of the blood of the mother’ and were ‘not to be distinguished from children of European parents’.\(^{32}\) Convinced that they could easily merge into the colonial population without trace, he was determined that they should be reconfigured into bearers of middle-class respectability by the institutional disciplines of the dormitory complex. He regretted that as matters stood, ‘black and half-caste girls’ domiciled with their maternal kin could not yet legally ‘be taken from their tribe by force’ and that Green had been, in the main, unable to ‘persuade [them] … to leave of their own accord’.\(^{33}\)

In contrast, Green’s essentially moralistic and paternalistic agenda was premised on a desire to preserve, protect and evangelise the Aborigines, and did not entirely correspond with Brough Smyth’s bureaucratic determinations or with the new racialist hubris. The two did, however, share a Presbyterian pre-occupation with the regulation of female sexuality and they concurred on the necessity of extending the Board’s powers to take charge of all Aboriginal children, especially girls, by force if necessary. ‘I consider’,
Green wrote in 1872, that ‘the Board would do more to prevent the race becoming extinct by collecting and looking after the girls than by any other means.’

Whether it was racial, moral or physical dissipation that Green most feared, and whether brought about by contact with white men or through Aboriginal cultural practices, was unclear, but he was as determined to rescue girls betrothed in the traditional Aboriginal manner as he was to take those he found living in domestic and sexual bondage with white men. If for Green, the enclosure of girls in the asylum so that they could be trained, disciplined and made Christian and respectable was an evangelical imperative only tangentially connected with the new discourses about racial purity, it inevitably became entangled with overtly racist projects. As Anne McClintock argues, for colonial administrators and evangelists alike, female sexuality constituted the ‘central transmitter’ of racial and moral corruption and as such it was female sexuality that became the object of the most ‘rigorous policing’. By the end of the 1860s, the effects of Green’s humanitarianism was barely distinguishable from the effect that would have derived from practices advocated by the colony’s most virulent racists with their anxious paranoias about degeneration, contagion and boundary disorder. He was no less determined than they to break down Aboriginal networks. His resolve to construct an impermeable protective boundary around the enclosed girls exemplified a pernicious Calvinist agenda that objectified female bodies as sites of moral disorder and contamination and seamlessly merged with racist discourses.

In Green’s world-view, girls of mixed descent were morally stained by the transgressive coupling that engendered them and required moral rehabilitation to prevent the blighting of subsequent generations. As he observed in 1868, after returning from a tour of inspection of outlying stations and ration depots, fewer ‘half-castes’ had been born since he had begun removing the children and he regarded that as ‘sufficient proof’ that the Aborigines are both physically and morally improved within the last ten years. In Green’s moral economy the tally of ‘half-castes’ was an inverse measure of

34 Green in 8th Report of the BPA, Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, Session 1872, Legislative Assembly, Vol.3; Paper No.60, p.9.
35 Green to "Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1877.,” , p.84.
36 McClintock, Imperial Leather , pp. 46-7, 61-2.
respectability and the separation, punishment, purification, and racial reassignment of the ‘contaminated’ girls would affect the moral expiation of the colony as a whole. The regime of the asylum aptly rehearsed a ritual template described by Victor Turner and Mary Douglas. Here were children, who, cast as scapegoats, were isolated in liminal space with their identities rendered ‘ambiguous’, and who were routinely subjected to harsh disciplinary regimes before they emerged, transformed into colonised subalterns. ‘Colonial discourse’, observed McClintock, ‘repeatedly rehearses this pattern - dangerous marginality, segregation, reintegration’.  

In 1869 the Board was finally granted the absolute power it had long sought to relocate all Aborigines to its stations, by force if necessary. In addition, it acquired extra powers over children domiciled with their parents on the Board’s stations. Under the regulations that became law in February 1871, the Board could now ‘order the removal of any Aboriginal child neglected by its parents, or left unprotected’ into the station dormitories, or remove them still further ‘to an industrial or reformatory school’.

Armed with these new powers, Green renewed his efforts to gather in the last of the Aboriginal children, but he still met with resistance. At Mount Hope in the winter of 1870 he

saw 3 half-caste women, 1 half-caste lad, and five children ... 1 half-caste and 4 three-caste white. I was going to bring them to Coranderrk, and they all seemed willing to come ... but next morning they were all gone (hid) ... I think some of the white men who cohabit with them assisted them to get away.  

Green vowed to return. At Echuca he informed the NSW missionary R.H.Mathews that he intended to take all the children on the Victorian side of the river to Coranderrk in order to ‘remove them some distance from their old haunts’. In the summer of 1871-2 an ‘Order-in-Council’ was issued for custody of a 10 year old ‘half-caste’ girl living ‘in bad hands’ amongst her Aboriginal kin at Murchison. Green was determined that she should be taken to Coranderrk before she became, in his words, ‘contaminated’. The

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40 7th Report of the BPA, p.5.
police were instructed to remove her ‘in as quiet a manner as possible so as not to arouse [the] suspicions’ of her kin and forward her on to Coranderrk. A ‘half-caste’ boy of the same age was also sought and a ‘black’ infant so young that he ‘could not be taken unless his mother came with him’.  

The implication that children only slightly above the age of infancy were taken from their mothers was clear.

Following his inspection tour along the Murray in mid-1872, Green submitted the names of fifty-two children ‘not under sufficient protection’, whom he was determined to relocate to the Coranderrk children’s asylum. Of these, twenty were girls of mixed descent, another nine were ‘Black’ girls. By January 1873, forty-five of those children were domiciled in the children’s asylum, but a number were still known to be at large in the north-east of the colony. Under duress, some were sent to Coranderrk by Mrs. Mitchell who distributed rations at Tangambalanga, but in March Green was instructed to ‘make another effort to remove the Aboriginal children and young persons from the middle and lower Murray to Coranderrk’. Melbourne Hospital authorities were also instructed not to allow Aboriginal children to be released to their kin. Instead, hospitalisation now meant automatic transference to the Coranderrk asylum.

The enclosure in the asylum of children previously domiciled with their parents on Board stations was also employed to regulate the behaviour of inmates. Late in 1871 ‘orphans’ from Framlingham were transferred to Coranderrk. It was a manoeuvre intended to cow those at the Board’s station at Framlingham, in the south-west of the colony, who had joined the Coranderrk wages campaign. In April 1873 an Order-in-Council was issued for the transfer of a rebellious lad from Hagenauser’s Ramahyuck station to Coranderrk. A month later a request from the parents of a child incarcerated in the Coranderrk dormitory to resume the custody of their child within the station was refused on the grounds that they were ‘not fit guardians for the infant’.

Green’s prolonged campaign to take control of two children at Reidesdale near Beechworth in 1872 and 1873 particularly highlights the transformation of the

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41 BPA Minutes, 22 February 1872. Board Out Correspondence, Australian Archives, Victoria, B329; Smyth to Chief Commissioner of Police, 15 March 1872 (BA 72/148). Green in 8th Report of the BPA.
42 Board Out Correspondence, AAV B329, Smyth to Chief Secretary, 11 September, 1872 (BA 72/578).
44 BPA Minutes, 7 March 1873, 7 October 1873.
Coranderrk children’s asylum from a place where dislocated children or children in imminent danger of starvation or neglect were housed, to a place in which the colony’s moral and racial boundaries were shored up. In 1869 Green reported that thirteen children who lived amongst their kin and received rations from Curtis Reid, a member of an established land-holding family, were all healthy and attended the local school. [6th rep, 1869, p16] Nevertheless, in September 1872, Green included five of the Reidesdale children, all girls of mixed descent, on his list of those to be sent to Coranderrk. Six months later, Green reported that Reid had refused to send two of the girls. ‘One of them’, reported Green,

is nurse in Mr. Reid’s family, the other lives with her mother at Mr. Reid’s; the mother does all Mrs. Reid’s washing. I could not induce her to give me her girl, who is about ten years of age. She has another child, about ten month’s old. Both her children are three-castes white. I asked Mr. Reid to try and persuade her to give me the girl, but he would not do so, and told me that she could go to the school from there. I think the Board should order Mr. Reid to give both the children up, so that they may come here to school.^[47]

Clearly these children were not neglected. Yet their ambiguous identities and in-placeness on Reid’s station, and his alliance with the children’s mother in her determination to keep her children, were disturbing reminders of unacceptable moral indiscretions enacted by settlers which could only be voided by the physical removal and enclosure of the offending bodies of female children in the Coranderrk dormitory. Green did not specifically name Reid as the children’s father, but Board members must have been conscious that the publication of the details of the case along side his name in its annual report to parliament would have gone far towards shaming him into submission.

By gentlemen’s agreement, a veil of discretion ordinarily surrounded the paternity of such children. William Thomas had once been severely castigated by the Board when he breached that convention by publicly naming a white father in 1866.^[48] Green, who officiated at marriage ceremonies at Coranderrk throughout the 1860s and early 1870s and witnessed certificates that often named the white father of the bride or groom, was only ever once asked to ascertain the paternity of a child of mixed descent by the

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[^45]: Board Out Correspondence, AAV B329, Smyth to Green, 9/12/1871(BA 71/886). BPA Minutes 3 April 1873, 6 May 1873.
In that case, Mr. Robert Kinnear was called upon by the Board to provide financial support to a child due to 'the halfcaste Lizzie', but still, both mother and child were sent to Coranderrk. What became of the Reid children is unclear, but the Board’s annual reports for 1874 and 1875 noted that despite resistance, ‘children are being removed one by one and sent to the stations’. They noted also that police were regularly called upon ‘to assist’. Significantly, Reidesdale boys, readily employable in the vibrant Beechworth economy, escaped the Board’s net. In this colony, racial classification was mediated by economics and by the gendered parameters of respectable morality and was only incidentally determined by biology and heritance.

By 1875, when Green resigned as Inspector of Aborigines after being summarily sacked from his post as superintendent at Coranderrk a year earlier following a falling-out with Brough Smyth, he had relocated some 80 Aboriginal children to the Board’s stations, in addition to those who relocated with their families. By then Coranderrk was home to sixty-nine children under the age of fifteen years, more than 60% of them female, and most of them housed in the children’s asylum.

Segregation: the Children’s Asylum

Once enclosed behind the perimeter fence that separated the five or six acres of the children’s asylum from the rest of the station, child-inmates were subjected to a program of continuous discipline and training and were kept ‘under close observation all day’. ‘My rule’, boasted Green, ‘was that the children should not go outside the fence ... I had 40 or 45 there, and just by a snap of the fingers I had them all in the school-house before you could count to twenty’. They were allowed beyond the confines of the asylum only ‘when they were with me or the schoolmaster’. While John and Mary Green’s rule

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48 BPA Minutes, 24 September 1866, 29 November 1866.
49 Green to Coranderrk Enquiry, 1881, p.134.
51 10th Report of the BPA, Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, session 1874, Legislative Assembly, Vol.3; Paper No. 61, p.4., 11th BPA Report, p.4.
52 Green to Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1877, pp.84.
54 Argus 9 September, 1876, p.9.
55 Green to Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1877, p.87.
over the children was tempered by a benevolence not duplicated by their successors, it had, from the start, all the features that Erving Goffman associates with ‘total institutions’ that constitute ‘forcing houses for changing persons; … a natural experiment on what can be done to the self’. In common with other nineteenth century institutions, the Coranderrk children’s asylum applied techniques of continuous surveillance and ‘systematic mortification’ to produce ‘disculturation’ and the incorporation by inmates of lifelong feelings of inferiority, weakness, blameworthiness and guilt.  

For the enclosed children, the day began with a scant breakfast in the school-room before the outer-station community joined them for ‘muster’ and inspection in the asylum compound at 8.00am. All then attended prayers, ‘conducted with strict propriety and earnestness’ also in the schoolroom. Brough Smyth was particularly impressed by ‘the orderly, quiet, almost solemn manner’ with which inmates conducted themselves at evening and morning prayers. On Sundays adults and children alike were engaged all day in religious offices in which Green reminded them that their every move was observed by the all-seeing eye of the Christian God.

On week-days, children attended school from 10.00 am until 11.30 and from 1.30 until 3.00 p.m. each day. Green’s own children attended the school as day-pupils as, at various times, did other European children from the district. Experimentally progressive in its conception, the program combined the outdoor physical activities of military drilling and gymnastics with repetitive indoor learning as proposed by Miss Nightingale and the advocates of the new ‘infant school system’, and strove to inculcate ‘order’, ‘cleanliness’, ‘regularity’, and ‘good conduct’ amongst the pupils. ‘Moral training’ was high on the syllabus. The hours were measured off and punctuality was ensured by the ringing of the station bell.

59 In 1884, for example, the Coranderrk school catered for 38 children, thirteen of whom were white: ‘Coranderrk School Census, Inspector’s Report’, 11 December 1884; Board In Correspondence, AAV B313, Item 218/31-2.
The pedagogic technologies at the Coranderrk school, as in other Common Schools of the colony, consisted of writing on slates and in copy books, reading and taking dictation from school primers, arithmetic, geometry and algebra, lessons in imperial geography and ‘popular astronomy’, drawing, and the singing of ‘good old English songs’ and hymns. As Brough Smyth noted, the close confines of asylum and schoolroom afforded the teacher ample opportunity to ‘study … their nature and aptitudes’ in a manner reminiscent of the methods of anthropology, so that ‘when he shall have gained their confidence, and brought them under control, he may fairly look for success’. Here were natives to be observed, classified, tamed and domesticated. While the Kulin on the outer station continued to speak their own languages in combination with English, English alone was permitted in the closely monitored asylum. The new colonial order of things was to be infused into the depths of body and mind. On his annual inspections of the station school, Brough Smyth regularly expressed surprise at the high standards attained by Coranderrk students. Their ‘improvement quite astonished me’ and ‘all the books were better kept and cleaner than was to be expected’, he noted approvingly in 1867.

For boys, the daily training routine also entailed farm chores. They milked the cows morning and night, cut firewood and fetched water for the dormitories and for the white station staff. The boys also tended the asylum vegetable garden and lent a hand on the outer farm. For the girls, there was the cloistered space of the kitchen where the older girls cooked for the whole asylum and were trained in the domestic rituals of purification and cleansing under the watchful eye of the matron, as if the scrubbing of pots and dormitory floors could salve away the stigmas of race and, for those of mixed descent, of moral lapse. The dormitory girls were also instructed in the preparation and preservation of farm produce and sewed clothes for the child inmates from the same cloth worn by inmates of the colony’s penal institutions. ‘Some of the girls are fair house servants’ reported Green, and they practised the skills, disciplines and servilities of domestic service by attending the white employees domiciled at the station. Brough Smyth was gratified to see ‘so many marks of … domestication’ amongst the children at Coranderrk

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when he visited the station in the Spring of 1867. It must have come as a welcome relief from monotonous routine when Green closed the school for a few days in the autumn so that the children, both girls and boys, could join the station workers in threshing the station crops.

Inmates took their meals in the schoolroom where their manners and behaviours were, as always, closely observed and rigorously disciplined. Meals consisted of bread and tea for breakfast, meat of poor cuts that required long boiling to make it edible, or offal, or soup for lunch, and jam and bread and tea in the evening. To this base fare was added a little milk from the station cows when available, a small quantity of butter ‘in the summer months’, small quantities of vegetables when available - potatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions - and occasionally a little fruit grown on the station. Most of the latter was mixed with copious quantities of ration-quality sugar and turned into jam. In the early years under Green, the supply of vegetables was relatively reliable, although even then the visiting medical inspector Dr. Gibson more than once noted the lack of green vegetables. After 1872, when the bulk of the station’s labour force, including the children, was diverted into the newly-planted hop plantation, the supply of vegetables to the asylum became even more irregular. From then onwards, the inadequacy of food in the asylum and on the outer station became an abiding cause of unrest.

The inadequate diet ensured that when the station was hit by infectious fevers and influenza, the dormitory children, like the outer station residents, had little immunity. In the winter of 1873 many children were rendered ‘very feeble’ and fourteen year old Agnes died of pneumonia. Thirteen other station residents also died that winter.

After dinner and evening prayers, the children were locked into their dormitories. Despite the dormitories being regularly ‘wash[ed] out and ... thoroughly clean[ed]’ by the girls, Dr. Gibson noted that they were overcrowded, drafty, and infested with ‘bugs’. Routine cleaning and washing of the dormitories could not keep the rough hewn boards from shrinking and letting in envoys from a less tame world outside. Similarly, the

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65 ‘Report of attendance of pupils at the Aboriginal school, Coranderrk Station during the month of April 1870’. Board In Correspondence, AAV B313, Box 11, item 182.
theoretical emphasis on ‘civilised’ personal hygiene was undermined by the Board’s failure to provide bathing facilities in the children’s asylum or elsewhere on the station. It did provide the asylum with one ‘water closet’ and the children were vigorously punished if they showed a preference for traditional modes of toileting.

The dormitory beds consisted of frames made on the station and mattresses stuffed with rushes gathered from the river. Each child was issued with one blanket, scant defense against the deep cold of the Coranderrk winter. As a hedge against the cold, and the loneliness that must have haunted these displaced children, and because there were too few beds for the fast growing asylum population, beds were routinely shared. When the station was hit by fever in the winter of 1865, Dr. Gibson noted that there were neither sufficient beds nor a separate hut to quarantine the infectious cases from the rest of the station children. Gibson noted also that the regulation serge and cotton shirts with which the Board issued the children were insufficiently warm for the winter season and the children had no shoes.

How the children were made to comply with the regimentation of dormitory life was rarely a matter of discussion by the Board but it can be inferred. Corporal punishment was generally considered by Europeans of the Victorian era as a prerequisite for the disciplining of children and rarely remarked upon. In an age where caning of children was the norm, only one case of unduly severe discipline was recorded by the colony’s school inspectors for the whole of 1871. The same inspector regarded the banishment of corporal punishment from the public schools of New York in 1870 as a false move that was bound to lead to an outbreak of indiscipline. The ordinary violence entailed in the routine punishment of children in Victorian schoolrooms thus hardly rated comment.

Aboriginal parents, however, traditionally practised less physical modes of discipline and the Kulin, whose children also attended the school within the fenced-off children’s asylum, were not behind hand in exercising what power they had to ensure their children were protected. As noted in chapter four, they had refused to work with a

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70 6th Report of the BPA, pp.21, 23.
number of teachers appointed to their school in the early years and with the Greens’ complicity, had forced their resignations. After Green’s dismissal, the Kulin were without his mediating influence and subsequent superintendents exercised more heavy-handed disciplinary regimes.

Green’s successor as superintendent at Coranderrk, Heinrich Stahle, appointed in August 1874, regularly dealt ‘a good whipping’ to children and then implored them to pray for the removal of their sins. The Board, however, did not regard such behaviour as unduly severe and accepted Stahle’s explanation that children were liable to ‘exaggerate every little slap ... into a big flogging’. In May 1880 the station exploded into a state of near rebellion when superintendent Strickland viciously assaulted twelve year old Phinnimore Jackson whom he had engaged as an unpaid servant, whipping him with a buckled rein. Jackson’s male relatives openly challenged Strickland’s authority and threatened to remove all the children from the dormitories ‘as they were being knocked about and half killed’. Strickland was subsequently dismissed by the Board but not before the children had suffered another eighteen months of his harsh rule and the Board had rammed home a new regulation which gave station managers power to order 'Every Aboriginal male under 14 years of age, and ... all unmarried Aboriginal females under the age of 18 years' to 'reside, and take their meals, and sleep' in the asylum boarding house, thus making absolute its power over children who had hitherto lived with their parents on the stations.

Dormitory children were, in all likelihood, also subjected to routine sexual intimidation and abuse. While such matters were handled with such discretion by the Board that they have almost escaped the public and historic record, hints of what the children suffered remain. As noted in the previous chapter, the mistreatment of institutionalised children in the colony became a matter of public notoriety in 1866 when

73 Kramer to BPA, in ibid., p.105.
the superintendent of the Prince’s Bridge Industrial School was accused of sexually molesting girls at that establishment. That enquiry revealed that the male superintendent had engaged in a range of improprieties such as inspecting the girls’ dormitories when they were undressing and being ‘too familiar’ with them. It recommended that female staff should always be on hand in such institutions to take care of the young women and children. When the new Coranderrk teacher, Payne, was accused the following year of unsatisfactory conduct of an undisclosed nature, the Board discreetly dismissed him. Later that year the Board discreetly noted complaints made in the Education Royal Commission about ‘abuses’ of Aboriginal children.

For some time the station was without a teacher so that ‘the greater part of their teaching [fell to] … the elder pupils’. Unable to find a suitably qualified married couple, a single man, Lang, was appointed to the post in July 1867, but he too took advantage of the vulnerable children under his care and was dismissed after Green’s accusation that Lang was ‘guilty of gross misconduct’, aired in front of the whole station congregation, was upheld by a Board enquiry. Despite Green’s efforts to establish a quarantine zone around the Coranderrk girls, dissemblers still penetrated its boundaries and sexual predation and institutionalised violence become part of the daily routine for the asylum children.

If John and Mary Green treated the dormitory children with a degree of benevolence, on their departure the asylum was rapidly transformed by the Board’s new agents into a place where young inmates were deliberately broken into subservient colonial subalterns in a regimen which, like that described by Fanon, injected them with ‘fear, inferiority complexes, trepidation, servility, despair, abasement’. During the course of the Royal Commission that enquired into the Board’s management of the stations in 1877, Mr. Deans, the schoolmaster at Coranderrk, explained how the moral propriety of the asylum was propagated. Against charges from Ogilvie that the behaviour of the station girls was loose, Deans replied:

76 BPA Minutes, 22 May 1867, 11 October 1867
78 BPA Minutes, 9 June 1869, 13 July 1869, 10 September 1869.
Never ... The girls are very strictly watched by the matron Mrs. Halliday ... When she is away I think the place is locked up. They are secure, as there is no way of their getting out, except the few who are at work doing their various domestic work. ... Mr. Halliday has one key and I have the other.  

For some graduates, the daily articulation between obsessional domestic purification drills, violent punishment, constant surveillance and sexual predation by their keepers produced subjects foreclosed into a state of abjection in which they were held perpetually captive to a compulsive struggle to expel impurities from body, mind and habitus. Like ‘Jane King’, an inmate of New South Wales’ Cootamundra Girls Home in the 1920’s, whose compulsive cleansing rituals and embodied shame have been sensitively recorded by Peter Read, graduates of the Coranderrk asylum were also sometimes sentenced to a life-long struggle with embodied dirt. As Goffman argued, total institutions produce compliant, guilt-ridden graduates for whom such self-mortification may be the only remedy for chronic psychological distress.

Wayne Fife and Line Nyhagen Predelli respectively argue that daily routines in similar institutions in Papua New Guinea and Madagascar were designed to reach into the interior depths of the colonised and ‘re-member’ them with self-disciplining and self-regulating habits and values that created ‘a new moral body’ that supported the ‘embracing context’ of colonialism. Here, in short, were technologies of power designed to produce subjects whose embodied neuroses condemned them to perpetual subservience. The dormitory project lifted Aboriginal children, and particularly girls of mixed descent, out of their maternal culture, stripped them of their identities and prepared them for absorption into a culture where their very marginality and exclusion would serve as a warning to those who might compromise the categoric boundaries of race. Doubly

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80 Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Robertson, p.79-81, Green p.81-88 , Deans, p.91. Duffy in *Argus* 5 September 76, p. 6
segregated in an asylum within the Aboriginal station, these ambivalently raced children were to be ‘domesticated’ in every sense of that ambiguous word. Locked in and always under close surveillance, the daily cleansing of mind, body and habitation imposed a form of violence that forced inmates into the self-punishing terrain of psychic obsession. In the Coranderrk dormitory what Luise White has called ‘the subtle terrains and terrors of domesticity’ constitute the field of power.\(^{84}\) For those of mixed descent, colonising power was compounded by what McClintock terms ‘the poetics of ambivalence’ which additionally destabilize the identities and allegiances of inmates.\(^{85}\)

**Reintegration: Caste and a Calculus of Extinction.**

In 1867, only four years after the Kulin had been forced from their ‘Goshen’ on the Acheron and had laboriously set about the task of reestablishing their huts and gardens at Coranderrk, the parliamentary representative for Ararat, McLellan, challenged the right of Aborigines of mixed descent to live there. There were, he complained, 'half-caste children ... running about in a savage state [who] … ought to be drafted from the establishment, and put to some useful employment, in order that they might grow up respectable members of society'. If something was not done to remedy the situation 'in a few years the Government would have stations for the shelter not of aborigines but of white savages'.\(^ {86}\) Far from inviting these youngster to partake of the fruits of the new society, McLellan’s intention in declaring them essentially white was to dispose of what the colony’s liberal humanitarians still held to be the moral right of the colony’s ‘original occupants’ to these residual pockets of land. A year later the powerful Minister for Lands, James Grant, whose department still refused to transfer the title of the Coranderrk lands to the Kulin, argued that one-tenth of the acreage of the station was sufficient for the Aborigines: that one hundred European families would prosper on the land the Kulin so profligately occupied.\(^ {87}\)

Healesville's representative, Watkins, reiterated these sentiments when he too called for 'the young aborigines and half-castes' to be made 'of service to the country and

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\(^{85}\) McClintock, *Imperial Leather* p.66

\(^{86}\) Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Session 1867 Vol.3. 28 March 1867, p. 695.
independent of the stations'. It was, he argued, 'absurd that large portions of the country should be allowed to lie waste, merely that the aborigines might have hunting or fishing grounds' and he called on the Board to table figures 'distinguishing the half-castes from the aborigines'. The Board, however, was unable to provide such a breakdown of pedigree. While it deployed the whiteness of many Aboriginal children to isolate them in the children’s asylums, once corralled, it collapsed distinction of caste and all became simply ‘Aborigines’ again.

Undaunted, Watkins continued to lobby for the opening up of the station lands for selection and in April 1869 Grant announced his intention to sell-off half of the Coranderrk reserve. The Board all but conceded Coranderrk when it moved at its next meeting 'to obtain a grant of land in some locality not likely to be invaded by settlers'. Only John Green's refusal to persuade the Coranderrk people to vacate the station blocked the Board's plan to relocate them to Westernport and sent Brough Smyth scurrying to the Chief Secretary to argue for the retention of the station.

These challenges to the entitlement of those of mixed descent to live on lands reserved for ‘Aborigines’ led inevitably to the question of what was to become of the children in the dormitory when they reached an age when they could no longer be held within its precincts. Up to that time, young men who out-grew the asylum were transferred into the single men’s cottage in the station village and joined the station workforce. Young women, however, remained cloistered in the dormitory complex, where they cooked, washed, cleaned, and provided some emotional comfort to the younger children within, until they married. While it had initially been envisaged by colonial humanitarians that graduates would take their place amongst the colony’s working classes, when it came to releasing unprotected girls the Board drew back from fear that they would again fall into the clutches of ‘publicans and depraved characters, who are ever on the watch to inveigle them from their homes’. Kulin morality

87 VPD, Session 1868 Vol. 6 20 August 1868, p.752.
88 VPD, Session 1867 Vol.3 10 April 1867, pp.817-820.
89 VPD, Session 1868 Vol.6 18 August 1868, p684; 20 August, 1868, p.752.
90 BPA Minutes 16 April 1869.
91 BPA Minutes 28 April 1869.
93 7th Report of the BPA, p.15.
traditionally had much in common with Green’s own moral code and they were as determined as he to keep the girls under close control.

But the Board and its agents were equally perturbed by the prospect of domiciling the young women with the Kulin on the outer station. ‘The present system’, Dr. Gibson observed, ‘seems only capable of neutralizing itself, as those who have had all the advantages of training and civilizing … separated from the full grown, and … uncivilizable portion of the natives, are (as they attain maturity) being gradually thrust into the general camp’ with all its ‘contaminating influences’.94 Like Watkins and McLellan, he argued that the girls in particular should be ‘boarded out’ into domestic service. Only then could the hard-won moral continence that, in Gibson’s opinion, fundamentally divided them from their Aboriginal kin, be preserved.

Despite support for Gibson’s plan from Watkins, who observed provocatively in the parliament that ‘every generation was becoming much whiter’, in 1869 the Board again pressed for authority to forcibly retain the young adults on its stations.95 If the Board’s Vice-President, James MacBain, calculated that alluding to girls ‘contaminated … by contact with the lowest class of whites’ would stir the humanitarian sensibilities of parliamentarians, for many it provoked instead potent anxieties about miscegenation and racial degeneration.96 With the new Aborigines Protection Act of 1869 in place, the Board redoubled its efforts to concentrate Aborigines onto its stations and the campaign to appropriate the Coranderrk lands by undermining the entitlements of those of mixed descent fell into temporary abeyance. It was not revisited in the parliament until the latter years of the following decade.97

"No Mountain for Me on the Murray" (William Barak, 1876)

Early in 1875 the Woi wurrung clan head, Simon Wonga, died of tuberculosis. In March, Dr. Gibson, still the BPA’s visiting medical officer, reported that ‘measles had attacked the whole population’ at Coranderrk. By the end of 1875, thirty one Coranderrk residents, children and adults alike, had succumbed to the combined effects of

95 Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Session 1869 Vol.9, 18 November 1869, p. 2315. 6th BPA Report, p.8.
malnutrition, measles, tuberculosis and pneumonia. As Dr. McCrae, by now the colony’s Chief Medical Officer, emphasised when he reported early in 1876 on the sanitary conditions at the station, more than one in five of the station’s inmates had perished, (the toll was one in three if the deaths for 1873 and 1874 were added in) and ‘this awful mortality’ was eleven times that of the general population. Amidst the grief and anger that accompanied such loss, Wonga’s cousin William Barak assumed the leadership of the Kulin clans. Following Wonga’s example, Barak led a delegation of seven men to Melbourne on the 14th July, 1875, to formally complain to the BPA about conditions at the station and about Green's dismissal. Their complaints were summarily dismissed and they were ordered to return to Coranderrk. The Board was so alarmed, however, by the surging tally of deaths and by the continuing indiscipline at Coranderrk, that members took the coach to Healesville to inspect the station at first hand on 7th August, 1875. At its next meeting, a posse of new BPA members, bent on restoring discipline to the station, forced through a motion to close the station down and move the Kulin to an isolated station on the Murray, on the spurious grounds that its proximity to Healesville fostered immorality and indiscipline, and that the sub-alpine climate made it an unfit place for Aborigines. Behind the move lay an awareness amongst Board members, as amongst local farmers and townsfolk, that the experiment in hop growing, initiated three years earlier, had converted the wastelands of the Coranderrk river flats into a valuable prize whose sale would not only refurbish the Board’s empty coffers but also remove to a distance these troublesome inmates who sullied the Board’s philanthropic credentials.

**Social Evolutionists at the Board**

On the 14th July, 1875, the same day that Barak’s delegation confronted the Board about the soaring death rate and the dire conditions at Coranderrk, three new members also

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99 BPA Minutes 9 April 1875; 14 July 1875.

100 BPA Minutes, 18 August 1875.
attended for the first time. As a young man in the 1840s, E.M. Curr had taken up the ‘Tongala’ run at the confluence of the Goulburn and Murray Rivers. He had relied upon Aboriginal labour and now regarded himself as an expert on Aboriginal ethnology.

Albert Le Souef was the son of the Assistant Protector who briefly ministered to the Daung wurrung in the early 1840s. Robinson recorded that the Daung wurrung regarded the elder Le Souef as cruel and tyrannical. The son served on the executive of the Victorian Acclimatisation Society with the BPA’s third new member, F.R. Godfrey, MLA, a member of the colony’s Anglican ascendancy. Albert Le Souef, who later became the first director of the Melbourne Zoo, looked to the colony’s natives with the same scientific eye that he directed towards its curious fauna. All three, conservatives and ‘establishment’, were bent on restoring discipline and economy at Coranderrk. They brought to the Board a new focus on race that would rapidly foreclose on the old Board’s original project of transforming the Aborigines into respectable, independent, colonial citizens. Barely a month after these three joined the BPA they voted in chorus, as already noted, to close Coranderrk and exile the Kulin to the Murray – beyond the boundaries of their own country.

A month later, in September 1875, the new Board appointed an upper Yarra farm manager, Christian Ogilvie, as temporary superintendent at Coranderrk, with a brief to enforce ‘strict obedience’ from the rebellious inmates. In a report written just weeks after assuming the new post, Ogilvie added his voice to those of Curr, Godfrey and Le Souef ‘against it being a suitable location for them’. Admitting that he had no evidence of either drunkenness or prostitution taking place at Coranderrk, he associated the bodily contagion that had taken so many lives with a contagion of unruliness and immorality caused by the proximity of the station ‘too near a white population for the Aborigines to be kept clear of the vices incidental to the two races being in such contiguity’. With a view to improving both health and order, he recommended that the inmates be required to take their food in the regimented atmosphere of a communal mess hall. Bodily order and discipline could be restored through vigilant surveillance.

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101 BPA Minutes, 14 July, 1875.
103 BPA Minutes 25 August 1875.
Ogilvie also proposed the division of the community into 'classes' and prescribed for each a separate strategy of management. 'All full-blooded Aborigines, partly or wholly ignorant of the laws of civilization' he proposed to manage in 'a purely paternal manner'. 'All others above a certain age ... should be required to sign an agreement with the superintendent to obey all his lawful orders'. Insubordination might incur anything from 'mild punishment', such as forfeiture of the tobacco ration, to being brought before the magistrate's bench 'exactly as a white man would be' for 'any flagrant breach of discipline'. They ought, in addition, argued Ogilvie, cutting across the 1869 Act which pressed the colony’s Aborigines to relocate to the Board’s stations, be 'encouraged' to seek work off station – while entrusting their children to the dormitory. Ogilvie's third class, 'the Educational Class', contained the young who had been educated and trained in station schools. He proposed that when these 'youths of both sexes' reached 'a sufficient age', they should be 'made to feel their personal responsibility' and to 'battle for their living the same as white people'. He recommended, and the Board agreed, that it be made 'compulsory on the youth of both sexes that they should be apprenticed to responsible masters and mistresses immediately after their education was completed'.

While Ogilvie’s scheme laid a racialised gradient over the developmental project, he still subscribed to the economically pragmatic assumption that the Aborigines as a discrete social unit should be absorbed into the settler populace. When, two years later, he criticised Hagenauer’s placement of men at the Ramahyuck mission station on the electoral roll, he did so not out of any sense that they were racially incapable of exercising the responsibilities of citizens, but on the grounds that they ought not partake of the benefits of citizenship while living in a state ‘poor house’. ‘The ‘great principle’, he reminded the Board, was neither to segregate them nor to provide them with a homeland but ‘to eventually absorb them into the general population of the colony’.

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104 12th Report of the BPA, pp.5-6.
105 Ibid. Ogilvie to Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, p.1.
Hagenauer’s notification to the Board that he had placed Ramahyuck men on the electoral roll is noted by Ogilvie in a letter to the BPA dated 10 April 1877: See BPA 13th Report of the BPA, p.5. Also see Christine Finnimore and Pat Stretton, "Black Fellow Citizens: Aborigines and the Commonwealth Franchise," *Australian Historical Studies* 25, no. 101 (October, 1993), pp521-535, for discussion of how the Aborigines lost the right to vote following the federation of the Australian colonies.
When Ogilvie left the station to undertake an inspection tour of the outer stations with Curr late in 1875, he instructed the local police to visit Coranderrk weekly.\(^{106}\) Undaunted, the Kulin seized the opportunity provided by his absence to counter the renewed threat to close their station by lobbying their neighbour, George Harker, to intercede on their behalf. In October, Harker, who had been the Treasurer in the colonial government that had reserved the Acheron lands for the Kulin in 1859, wrote to the newly-installed Chief Secretary Graham Berry to oppose the closure of Coranderrk.\(^{107}\) In November 1875, with the death toll still rising, the residents downed tools in the hop gardens until rations were increased and wages owing were paid.\(^{108}\)

Whilst inspecting the outer stations, Ogilvie took particular note of the ‘caste’ of the Aborigines over whom he now exercised authority. Green, as previously noted, had particularly targeted girls of mixed descent in his round-up of Aboriginal children, and designations such as ‘quadroon’ and ‘octoroon’ had appeared erratically and incidentally in his reports, but once those children were relocated to the station dormitories all were treated alike. Now, for the first time, Ogilvie’s inspection report furnished a table that cross-referenced ‘Colour’ against the educational attainments - reading, writing and cyphering - of the children at the station school (which, incidentally, failed to indicate any distinction between the abilities of ‘black’ and ‘half-caste’ children).\(^{109}\) Ogilvie's designation of 'classes', and his formal tabulations of ‘caste’ however unstably they were drawn in 1876, represents the first instrumental dissection of the community along 'blood lines' and it heralded the revival of the push by settlers on the upper Yarra to expel those of mixed descent from Coranderrk. For his part, Curr dismissed any graduated correlation between ‘caste’ and civil competency. He regarded the Aborigines, one and all, as ‘savages’ who were best left to die out. To their joint report of the inspection tour he contributed the opinion that the Board’s scarce funds ought not to be wasted on the provision of medical care to Aborigines at a rate the ‘same as [for] white' or on the improvement of huts on the stations.\(^{110}\)

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\(^{106}\) BPA Minutes 6 October 1875.
\(^{108}\) BPA Minutes, 10 November 1875.
\(^{109}\) 12th Report of the BPA, pp7-12, 19, Table 2.
The effect of the new disciplinary regime was immediately felt by residents at Coranderrk and unrest dogged the station throughout 1876. The principal object of the Board’s powerful new guard was the enforcement of economies and the suppression of Kulin resistance. As Barwick has detailed, Ogilvie began his campaign to impose order at the station by bringing in white labour to pick the hop crop. He raised Kulin ire when he permitted the hop overseer to build his house on ground that they had laboriously cleared for a vegetable garden, and he offended against Kulin protocols when he manhandled the Daung wurrung leader Thomas Bamfield. Bamfield rounded on Ogilvie, accusing him and the Board of wanting to ‘make slaves of them’.\textsuperscript{111} It was a plaint that encapsulated the awareness of the Kulin that their vision of an independent and self-sufficient farming community in which they could blend traditional cultural imperatives with those necessitated by their enforced engagement with European ways was rapidly being subverted by an administration bent on segregation, regimentation and institutionalisation.

Their fears were compounded when Ogilvie was promoted to Inspector of Station and a sergeant of police, Hugh Halliday, was appointed as the new superintendent at Coranderrk.\textsuperscript{112} For the Kulin, the reinstatement of John Green now became urgent. With Harker’s assistance they lobbied their allies amongst the old guard at the Board and in parliament.\textsuperscript{113} Dissension at the BPA and the coincidental censure of Brough Smyth at the Mines Department - to the considerable delight of the residents at Coranderrk - combined to bring matters at Coranderrk to the forefront of public attention.\textsuperscript{114} In February, 1876, the \textit{Age} came out in support of the Kulin campaign to retain the station, to have Green reinstated as superintendent, and condemned the Board’s administration.\textsuperscript{115} It recorded William Barak’s emphatic words on the subject of the threatened closure: ‘Me no leave it, Yarra, my father’s country. There's no mountain for me on the Murray’.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Argus,} 1 September 1876, p7. Victorian Public Records Office and Australian Archives ‘\textit{My Heart is Breaking}’, p.139.
\textsuperscript{113} Barwick, \textit{Rebellion at Coranderrk} (1998), p.119-123.
\textsuperscript{114} “Christian Ogilvie's Coranderrk Journal” in Victorian Public Records Office and Australian Archives, ‘\textit{My Heart is Breaking}’: entry for 4 February, 1876, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{115} Barwick, \textit{Rebellion at Coranderrk} (1998), pp.107, 111, 125.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid. p.126. \textit{Age} 19 February 1876.
addition, Anne Bon, who employed Daung wurrung men when they returned seasonally to their homelands on the Delatite River, and who had influence with the influential liberal parliamentarian and intermittent Chief Secretary, Graham Berry, now emerged as a tenacious ally of the Kulin.

Two days after Halliday was appointed, Barak again led the Kulin senior men to the city to protest to Chief Secretary McPherson about the employment of white hop pickers, the sacking of Green, and to ascertain the truth of the rumours circulating around Healesville that they were to be removed from Coranderrk. To the chagrin of the BPA’s vice-chairman, Godfrey, McPherson assured them the government had no intention of closing the station. In the parliament a week later Godfrey railed against interfering humanitarians and ranted that the Kulin were ‘lazy and loath to work’ and that now ‘the men would be altogether beyond control’. The Board, he disingenuously maintained, had ‘never intended to break up the station’.

A few weeks later, the government commissioned the colony’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr. McCrae, to report on conditions at the station. McCrae was scathing in his assessment of the Board’s management of the station and derided its claim that the climate at Coranderrk was unsuited to Aborigines. He attributed the rising death toll to the primitive sanitary facilities at the station, to the contamination of the water supply by night soil, to the ‘wretched hovels’ - ‘ill-constructed’, draughty, damp, vermin-infested in which ten persons sometimes occupied space ‘barely … sufficient to support the health of two’- and to the inadequate clothing and food rations which meant that ‘persons attacked by [measles] have scarcely a chance of surviving’. The Board was by now wounded, its internal divisions apparent to all, its operations the subject of public scrutiny and censure and its subjects vindicated and ever more insubordinate. In the autumn, with labour an increasingly scarce commodity in the colony, the Kulin pressed home their advantage by taking work with local pastoralists Paul De Castella and Guillaume De

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118 Ibid. Godfrey, pp.2329-31
119 Dr. McCrae’s report in 12th Report of the BPA, pp.21-2
Pury, without certificates.\textsuperscript{120} By the time the annual report of 1876 was presented to parliament in the Spring session, the Board’s plan to close the station had been shelved.

This public humiliation, however, only hardened the determination of the disciplinarians at the Board to break up the Coranderrk community. Turning their sights to the rising generation whose leading members had been actively involved in Barak’s campaign, they determined to amend the Aborigines Act of 1869 to enable them to 'apprentice out all lads who, having finally finished school, object to remain on the station'.\textsuperscript{121} Few in fact objected to remaining on the station which was their home, but like their elders they insisted on the right to come and go without interference from government agents. But as the new superintendent, Halliday, reminded them when he expelled one youth as a disciplinary measure in April 1876 and 'licensed [him] out ... with a view to forming associations for him with the white population', under the terms of the 1869 Act, they were no longer free subjects.\textsuperscript{122} Significantly, an application from a colonist 'to hire a girl from the Coranderrk Station' was rejected, with the Board recording that at present, it 'would decline to hire out girls'.\textsuperscript{123}

While the boy’s rebelliousness might be curbed by isolating him from his kin and leaving him to face the prejudice of colonists alone, the proposal to ‘board out’ girls raised a more complex set of colonial anxieties, both humanitarian and racialist. For the former it raised images of undefended girls being thrown in the way of men and of moral disorders; for the latter it evoked the equally alarming spectre of racial contamination, of miscegenation.

In July and August 1876, conditions at the station again became the subject of heated public and parliamentary debate.\textsuperscript{124} In two town meetings, Healesville residents divided over the right of the Kulin to occupy such valuable lands and John Green made ‘serious verbal charges’ about the management of the station and about Halliday’s refusal to call for medical aid in connection with a series of deaths at the station. Others leveled

\textsuperscript{120} In regard to the scarcity of labour in the colony, in August 1877 A.W. Howitt lamented that land selection ‘has made labour very scarce. All the men who ten years ago were labourers are now landlords’: A.W. Howitt to William Howitt 3 August 1877 in Howitt Papers, SLV MS 9356, Box 1048/2a.
\textsuperscript{121} 12th Report of the BPA, 1876, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{122} BPA Minutes, 25 April 1876, 3 May 1876.
\textsuperscript{123} BPA Minutes, 17 May 1876.
\textsuperscript{124} BPA Minutes, 31 July 1876. Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Session 1876, Vol. 24; 24 August 1876, pp.507-12.
unsubstantiated charges of immorality against the Kulin and called for the closure of the station to protect the moral climate of the district. Late in August, amidst calls for a parliamentary enquiry, BPA members accompanied Healesville’s own parliamentary representative E.H. Cameron, and the Chief Secretary’s confidante John Gavan Duffy, MLA, and an assortment of press reporters to Coranderrk to investigate.\textsuperscript{125} Godfrey’s brief official report of the visit could not disguise the inadequacy of medical care at the station. Instead he attempted to deflect the focus onto the alleged drunkenness of Aborigines domiciled so near to Healesville, emphasising again the need to remove them.\textsuperscript{126} Cameron, in contrast, reported that both the station manager, Halliday, and the Board were inept and called for a Select Committee to enquire into all aspects of the Board’s ministrations.\textsuperscript{127}

For its part, the \textit{Argus} reiterated the charge of locals that many of the Kulin were ‘so fair that one wonders where the drop of black blood which obtained for them admission to the station lies hidden. It certainly does not show itself in their epidermis’. It was, the reporter joked, ‘a particularly wise Coranderrk pupil that knows its own father.’\textsuperscript{128} He went on to castigate well-to-do men in our community who know themselves to be their fathers, and yet permit them to remain where they are, and face a future which is … too likely to prove disastrous … Some of these girls … are formed by nature to be the delight of happy and well-regulated homes if only they had fair play, and those upon whom they have claims … incur a most grave responsibility.\textsuperscript{129}

Ostensibly censorious of white dereliction, and couched in the language of inclusion and reclamation, the argument rearranged itself into a poorly camouflaged attack on the entitlement of the offspring of white men to largesse rightly due to ‘Aborigines’ alone. Focusing tightly on the obligation of upright citizens to protect these daughters of white men from the immorality and illegitimacy that was rumoured (and rumoured only, he admitted) to be rife at Coranderrk, the correspondent argued that such girls should be ‘drafted out’ as servants where they might ‘marry advantageously’ – to white men- with the happy result that ‘what little black blood they have in their veins would be \textit{bred out} in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{125} \textit{Argus} 31 August 1876, p6. Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Session 1876, Vol.24; 24 August 1876, pp.507-12.
\bibitem{126} \textit{Argus} 2 September 1876, p5.
\bibitem{127} Victoria, Parliamentary Debates, Session 1876, Vol. 24; 24 August 1876, pp.507-12.
\bibitem{128} \textit{Argus} 1 September 1876, p.7; 2 September 1876, p5; 9 September 1876, p9.
\end{thebibliography}
For the Kulin who read the report in the daily news, this blithe call to appropriate their female children and to cast them into the hands of white men had alarming implications.

Duffy’s report to the Chief Secretary also focused on the need to check the moral disorders that were popularly associated with Coranderrk. Influenced by Halliday and Ogilvie, he reported that if the dormitory children graduated to the station village they would be pitifully ‘demoralised by being … exposed to all the dangers of mixing with the older and less innocent inmates’. Constructing a finely graduated demarcation between black and white according to quotients of caste, he too called for the dormitory children ‘many of whom are almost white, and scarcely one, if one, a pure aboriginal’, to be ‘boarded out’ before they became contaminated by association with ‘half-caste girls who have been leading the most immoral lives’. In a confused mixture of punitive sentiments and paternalism he warned that if the children were not removed, the state would soon find itself ‘supporting a number of quadroons and octoroons well able to take care of themselves, and who might easily be absorbed into the general population, while the genuine blackfellow will have ceased to exist.’

He concluded that as ‘a public institution … for the moral training and physical welfare of the aborigines, as an experiment in lifting them to a higher civilisation’ Coranderrk was ‘a lamentable failure’ and that its inmates should be apportioned amongst the stations under the control of missionaries ‘able to exercise that moral control’ necessary to bring them to heel. To prevent the Kulin sending out embassies to garner support from Aborigines on the other stations, the Board immediately ordered them confined to the station and resolved (still against the dissent of the old guard) that Coranderrk was ‘not a fit locality for Aborigines.’

A month later, when MacBain tried to rally support in parliament for the retention of Coranderrk and for the reinstatement of John Green, Godfrey harvested the mounting prejudice against ‘half-castes’ to call for the Coranderrk children, ‘many of [them]… half-castes and some of them nearly white’, to be ‘apprenticed to various trades amongst

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129 Argus 1 September 1876, p.7
130 Argus 9 September 1876, p.9
131 Argus 5 September 1876, p.6 (italics added).
132 Ibid.
their white brethren’ and for any too young to be disposed of in that manner to be removed to the more disciplined atmosphere of the missionary-run stations and away from the hotbed of discontent that was Coranderrk. The Board’s stations, he argued, should be retained for the use of ‘old and infirm blacks’ alone. For opposite reasons both MacBain and Godfrey supported Cameron’s call for an enquiry ‘into the whole question of the future treatment of the blacks’.

Early in 1877 a Royal Commission was established to enquire into the administration of Aboriginal affairs in the colony in general, into the causes of unrest at Coranderrk in particular and into whether the children in the station asylums should be boarded out. During the course of its enquiries the Royal Commission threw up unlikely alliances between segregationists, like Curr, who wanted to keep the Aborigines walled in for fear that they would corrupt the moral and racial sanctity of the settler community, humanitarians concerned that the boarding out of the dormitory girls amounted to sexual indenture, and the Kulin who fought to retain their ‘Goshen’. Ranged against this pragmatic coalition were the settlers who greedily eyed off the Coranderrk lands and assimilationists, including those at the Board, who happily anticipated the defeat of the Kulin and their elimination through ‘breeding out’. Behind many of the questions put to witnesses by the commissioners lay the vexing issue of how to draw the line between black and white in a manner that would reconcile the competing interests of colonists.

With the colony’s Chief Justice, William Stawell, in the chair and Godfrey, Cameron, Duffy, the Anglican philanthropist Rusden and A.W. Howitt on the bench (the latter already a valued correspondent of the social evolutionist Lewis Henry Morgan) the Royal Commission sat between April and July 1877. It examined twenty-four witnesses, including four Coranderrk men carefully chosen by Godfrey. In addition it classified the colony’s 1,067 recognised Aborigines (still only 486 of whom resided on the stations) according to whether they were ‘black’ or of ‘mixed blood’, and solicited opinion from ‘local guardians’ on the boarding out of the children, and on whether ‘the main object of a station [should] be to train the aborigines to earn their own living

133 BPA Minutes 6 September 1876, 8 September 1876.
abroad, or to form self-supporting communities on each station'.

According to Barwick, the Commission's hearings were carefully orchestrated throughout by Godfrey, who led much of the questioning.

Amongst those examined was the Reverend Alex Mackie who filled Green's shoes as visiting Presbyterian minister at Coranderrk after the Board warned Green off. Like most other local settlers, Mackie argued that Coranderrk should be laid open for selection, leaving enough land for the needs of the diminishing numbers of 'real blacks' while those who were 'almost pure Europeans' were sent out to make their own way. Constructing a developmental gradient that conformed to the logic of social evolutionary racial teleologies, he argued that the 'half-castes are far more intelligent naturally, even without any definite instruction'. So too, the Aborigines had 'not the same kind of attachment [to their children] as civilized Christians have'. They were more attached to their 'half-caste' children 'because of their white blood', but it was a 'blind sort of attachment', and while they would resist having their infant children taken from them, once they were 'weaned and independent of the mother there is not the same attachment' and they 'might be gradually drafted off'. When it was put to him, however, that 'in the schools there is no perceptible difference between the half-caste and the aborigines in the power of acquiring learning', his flirtation with social evolutionary logic faltered and he agreed that both classes were 'equal in power of learning to whites'. It was probably Howitt, keen to display his ethnological range, who also challenged Mackie as to whether he was aware that 'they regard uncles and aunts like second fathers and second mothers' and suggested that these extended consanguinities 'show that the attachment extends long after infancy'. As to how the young women would fare 'in service', and whether they could 'resist temptation', Mackie agreed that they would fare as well as young European women of the same social rank. 'There are good and bad among them ... but some of the half-castes, who have been brought up under proper instruction [and] put out with proper care, might do very well'.

As the fragility of Mackie's racial pyramid indicated, human reality did not always conform to imperial dictate.

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135 Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines, 1877, Appendices A&B
136 Rev. A. Mackie to Royal Commission, 1877, pp.52-4.
The Commission also examined the most powerful of the Board’s new social evolutionists, E.M Curr. An ally of Godfrey in some matters, Curr was implacably opposed to his plan of boarding out the young to promote their absorption into the settler community. For Curr, the distinction between ‘half-castes’ and ‘full bloods’ that so engaged Mackie and Godfrey, was immaterial. For Curr ‘the Aborigines’ remained irredeemably and uniformly ‘savage’. ‘[T]he native is a child’, he told the commissioners, and

[j]ust as a mob of cattle cannot be tamed in a single generation, so we cannot at once civilize these people ... [T]hough we can teach them to read and to write more easily and as well as our own children, this is not civilization ... for true civilization requires morality, which cannot exist without religion ... [T]he views and habits of mind of the blacks are unlike ours, and cannot entirely assimilate to ours for generations. 137

To Curr’s mind, training and discipline alone could not turn an Aborigine ‘into an Englishman’ any more than it could raise ‘the Irish, Scot [or] Welsh’ to such heights. Only through 'a judicious and long-continued policy' of training and segregation across generations could 'blacks' even begin to approach the lower echelons of modern men. Despite acknowledging that many Aborigines commanded wages on a par with white labourers in rural areas, he maintained that they ought to be prevented from taking employment off the stations by force of law if necessary because, beyond the disciplinary regime of the station, 'the whites would debauch the women; the men would drink themselves to death'. Those who had not yet 'come in' to stations ought to be compelled to do so: 'I would treat them as children from the very beginning; they are nothing better'. He recommended to the commissioners 'that sufficient reserves of land should be made for the natives; that on these they should be required to ... live, die and be buried’. 138

As to whether 'black children' ought to be 'boarded out', Curr was adamant that it would lead only to moral and physical dissipation, of both white and black. Those who had been boarded out had 'learnt to copy rather the vices than the virtues of the white man, and have become less desirable citizens than they were.’ He pointed an accusing finger at those who desired the eradication of the Aborigines through the 'absorption by the whites of this colony of the remnant of our black population.' Taking the moral high

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137 Curr to Royal Commission, 1877, p.77.
138 Curr to Royal Commission, 1877, p.77-78.
ground, he argued that 'absorption' was a mistake. '[T]here is no absorption in the case and I think never can be; substitute eradication for absorption, and I think you will be correct.' But what really concerned Curr, soon to be the leading figure on the Aborigines Protection Board, was not Aboriginal welfare but the racial hygiene of Europeans in this outpost of empire.

For Curr, well versed in the new anthropology, racial amalgamation spoke of contamination and infection, of the unincorporable. ‘A black can never become one of us; his colour will not alter nor his propensities'. It was, he said, in a moment of unguarded frankness, both a 'foregone conclusion' and desirable that they should 'die out'. '[W]e have pretended but never really wished to save them from extermination. The Anglo-Saxon in Australia, as elsewhere does not foster weakly races. He wants their lands.' In so saying, Curr brought into the open what most others in public life considered better left unsaid. Behind his words lay the weighty authority of the most modern of social evolutionary anthropological theory which positioned the Australians on the lowest rung of the human evolutionary ladder, and it defied scientific logic to suggest that they could slough off their evolutionary deficits and be made modern, or white, in the space of a generation or two.

Less hubristic functionaries of the Board, also opposed to the boarding out of the station girls, found themselves in uncomfortable alliance with Curr on the matter of the boarding out of the station children. Miss Robertson, the dormitory matron and an ally of Green, felt that the girls lacked the 'strength of mind to withstand temptations they would meet with except in a few families'. Frederich Hagenauer, the colony’s leading missionary and superintendent at the Ramahyuck station in Gippsland, told of previous experiments in boarding out that had failed: their 'black nature got so strong' that they had to be returned to the station. In his opinion '[t]heir moral status and their self-control is not strong enough for scattering them abroad yet'. Hagenauer was convinced that Aborigines, regardless of caste, were as intelligent on the whole as Europeans, and the much publicised one hundred percent mark awarded to the Ramahyuck school by the colony’s Schools Inspector in 1872 and 1874 reinforced his opinion. But he was also

139 Ibid.
convinced that they would revert to primitive habits if they were released from the paternal discipline of the stations. 140

Indicating the extent to which the formulae of the new anthropology informed public prejudice, the Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, Perry, observed that 'it was almost as impossible for them to resist ... temptation as it was for one of the lower animals to resist the inclination to follow its instincts'. God had not made the earth 'simply for the savage tribes to wander over', and those who hindered the progress of the higher races 'should be swept away'. 141 He was a confirmed segregationist and opposed to the boarding out of young Aborigines.

The colony’s Presbyterians were divided on the issue. One convener of its Missions Committee deprecated the proposal to 'turn the aborigines adrift on the white population' before the passing of two or three more generations. 142 The other, the Reverend Robert Hamilton, had preached to the Kulin with John Green ‘ever since they were wanderers in the bush’ and had for the past three years employed one of the Kulin girls ‘on certificate’ as a trusted domestic servant. He saw no reason why others should not also be allowed to take employment, if they and their parents so desired, in suitable homes where their religious and moral welfare could be guaranteed. Hamilton’s plea for the reinstatement of Green, delivered on behalf of the Kulin, was excised from the Royal Commission transcript at Godfrey’s insistence. 143 Godfrey’s hold over the Commission was such that he was also able to prevent Barak, Bamfield and their young speakers from addressing it.

Instead, four carefully chosen allies of the new manager Halliday, men to whom he had given coveted jobs, were examined. They expressed themselves well-contented with the management of the station, and under pressure, maintained that only a few wanted Green back. But Godfrey’s hold over them was not absolute and they pressed home the community’s demand for improved housing and an extension of the meat ration. On the question of whether they would object to being removed to the Murray, James Edgar was understandably in two minds. A Burrappa man from the Murray

140 Robertson to Royal Commission, 1877, p.80. Hagenauer to Royal Commission, 1877, pp.35-6, 44-5 and Appendix D, p.125.
141 Argus 29 May 1877, p.7: ‘Church of England Mission to the Aborigines’.
142 Rev. Murdoch Macdonald to Royal Commission, 1877, p.74.
without connections through kin to the Coranderrk Kulin, Edgar had been a horsebreaker of independent means before being forced onto the Coranderrk station by Green around 1872. Alex Campbell, of the same clan, had also been press-ganged by Green. He had been employed as a stockman for a pound a week plus rations, and when he came to Coranderrk to marry, Green refused to issue a work certificate to permit him to leave. No friend of Green, he told the Commission that he would readily quit the station if he could procure a certificate to return to his employer. Martin Simpson and Tommy Farmer, Djadja wurrung-Kulin but less closely affiliated with Barak’s people than were the Daung wurrung and Boon wurrung, each expressed a decided wish to remain at Coranderrk.

According to Barwick, the evidence of these four was controlled in such a manner that the wider grievances of the Kulin were prevented from being aired. It was Ogilvie in fact who presented the view of the Kulin when he read excerpts from letters they had written to the Board saying that 'all the men are anxious to know who owns the land - the people or the Board' and that 'we would like Mr. Green back'. The determination of most of the people to stay at Coranderrk was so great he believed that it would take 'twenty or thirty police' to remove them. As to the forcible removal of their children from the station, they were irrevocably opposed, but the four who did speak were not asked their opinion on that matter by the Commission.

Despite Godfrey’s efforts to control the evidence submitted to the Commission, the final report rejected his call to board out the asylum children as a precursor to their absorption into the general population. Segregationists, social evolutionists and paternalists combined to reject the proposal. Stawell, who publicly advocated the boarding out of non-Aboriginal children from the Orphan Asylum at Brighton, perhaps supported Godfrey, but the majority held that this ‘race just emerging from barbarism’ was far from ready for freedom from the paternal direction of the station system and the young especially still required a ‘controlling and directing influence’ over them. On the question of whether the ‘half-castes’ could be more easily ‘absorbed’ into the general population than those of ‘full blood’, segregationists and paternalists alike inclined to the

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143 Hamilton to Royal Commission, p.75.
145 Ibid. p.12-14.
view that ‘half-castes’ were ‘just as liable to temptation, and yield as easily to it’ as ‘full blacks’ and any appearance of ‘sound distinction’ between Aboriginal and ‘half-caste’ ‘is only superficial, and fails at the moment of trial.’ Those at Coranderrk, surly and rebellious, - perhaps, speculated the Commission, the product of an overly liberal scale of diet - were especially in need of further guidance and disciplining. In the commissioners’ opinion, the BPA ought to concentrate on herding the remaining ‘wandering’ Aborigines onto its stations, by force and withdrawal of rations if necessary, rather than on their premature ‘dispersion throughout the community’.

Yet the report was cognisant of the importance they attached ‘to the stations being considered theirs’. It drew particular attention to the iteration by the humanitarian and Kulin ally Thomas Embling of the distress that rumours of station closures caused them. In calling for substantial improvements to be made to their station – the renovation of the cottages, the improvement of sanitary facilities and drainage, the extension of the hop grounds, the payment of ‘fair’ wages by piece-work, and the fencing of the station so that stock could be fattened to provide meat - and in dismissing out of hand any suggestion of its closure, it delivered the Kulin a substantial victory over the Board.

Godfrey’s influence was evident, nonetheless, in the recapitulation of the powers of station superintendents to control the movements of their wards. At each station, the superintendent’s power to expel troublemakers was to be reinforced, as was his discretion over the issue of work certificates. Wages earned off-station must be passed through him. The stations were to be like diminutive outposts of empire governed by a man imbued with 'a liberal education [and] capable of governing others', preferably a missionary devoted to the reclamation of lesser subjects of the Crown and quarantined from interfering parliamentarians and outsiders who might encourage 'insubordination and discontent'. Finally, Rusden added the obligatory, disarming, and increasingly empty

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147 *Argus* 29 August 1876, p. 6: 'Melbourne Orphan Asylum'.

homily to the ‘sacred obligation’ of the parliament to take ‘care of the natives who have been dispossessed of their inheritance by colonization’.  

Relations between the Board, the government, the Kulin and their neighbours deteriorated in the wake of the Royal Commission. At the Board, Godfrey and Curr remained implacably divided on the question of how to dispose of the children locked away in its asylums. Having failed in its plan to exile the Kulin rebels to a remote reserve on the Murray, the new guard at the Board was confronted by a population more confident of its rights and even more determined to resist the authority of the Board. But it was a pyrrhic victory only. The Kulin had not secured the title to the station and their neighbours still eyed their lands greedily; nor had they succeeded in having Green reinstated. The disciplinarian superintendent Halliday remained over them and they now found themselves ever more bound down by the spreading influence of social evolutionist theories. Such theories now simultaneously demanded that, as primitives, they be segregated on reserves until they faded away, for their own good and for the good of the settler population, and challenged the right of Aborigines of caste to dwell on those reserves.

The Kulin were only too aware that the Board they now dealt with regarded them as something between specimens and inmates rather than as subjects of the Queen, and that the challenge to their occupation of Coranderrk had only been fended off because the segregationists had won out over those who sought to bring about their final extinction by amalgamation. Their victory, if it could be called that, had nothing to do with any residue of Aboriginal right or entitlement over either their children or their land. Whether the segregationists, the assimilationists or the Kulin would finally win out still remained to be seen.

**Conclusion**

A confused amalgam of Calvinistic moralism, humanitarian paternalism, local economic imperatives and prejudices, and the most modern theories of social evolutionist anthropology suffused the Board’s thinking as it considered the ambiguities of the hybrid, female-gendered body during the 1860s and 1870s. Such bodies became the object of

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moral and racial rehabilitative projects and the focus of racialist anxieties. Announcing sexual, moral and racial disorder, it was they whom Green most ardently sought out for incarceration in the Coranderrk children’s asylum. As McClintock argues,

the poetics of contagion justified a politics of exclusion and gave social sanction to the middle class fixation with … the sanitation of sexual boundaries ... so that sexuality, in particular women’s sexuality, was cordoned off as the central transmitter of racial ... contagion.150

John Green was both the chief protagonist of this preoccupation with the moral dimensions of the hybrid female body and an unwitting party to the slippage from humanitarianism to racial sanitising.

A decade later, it was against those same girls that the Board directed the main force of its attack on the rebellious Kulin, when, designating them as proximate whites, it determined to eradicate the Kulin by ‘breeding’ the young women with white men. The home-grown racial formulae which underwrote this pragmatic project of ‘absorption’ were fundamentally at odds with the theoretical dictates of the social evolutionary anthropology hatched by metropolitan anthropologists, which positioned the Australians as living specimens of primitive man. While those theories served Britain’s expansionary motives, local economic imperatives produced a different, but equally enabling, science of race. In the final chapter I consider how a new strand of European anthropology and colonial pragmatism cross-pollinated to produce a theory that repositioned the Australians as ‘ancient Caucasians’ and thereby gave scientific rationale to the Board’s determination to break Kulin resistance by setting ‘half-caste’ against ‘pure blood’ and by ‘breeding’ them out.

150 McClintock, *Imperial Leather* p.47
Despite the recommendations of the Royal Commission, between 1878 and 1886 the Coranderrk Kulin came under increasing scrutiny from the Board and pressure mounted for the closure of the station. Undeterred, they continued to campaign for their rights to decent wages, for the right to come and go from the station as they wished, for control over their children, and for title to the Coranderrk lands. In this final chapter I consider how the Board deployed the construct of caste to dislodge the Kulin from Coranderrk. In theorising race through the graduated arithmetics of caste, Victorian colonists bisected the surviving Aboriginal population into two factions. One part was constructed as authentically Aboriginal. To the ‘blacks’ colonists grudgingly conceded a moral right to occupy small corners of their ancestral lands until they faded into extinction leaving the land retrospectively terra nullius. A second class of ‘half-castes’ ‘quadroons’ and ‘octroons’ were deemed to be no longer ‘black’, and were stripped of that vestigal moral right over the lands of their mothers. The Board divided the Aboriginal communities of the colony in this way with the deliberate intention of wrenching the generations apart and effecting the final eradication of the ‘original occupants of the soil’.

As I will argue, in the 1880s mutually contradictory streams of anthropology were engaged by colonial administrators to rationalise the segregation of the ‘full-bloods’ on the Aboriginal stations and the expulsion of the ‘half-castes’. No longer citizens-in-training, the former were reclassified as living relics of primitive humanity on a trajectory towards imminent extinction. In contrast, those of mixed descent, at one generation’s remove, were classed as pseudo-Europeans who could be made fully white within a few generations by the judicious regulation of their conjugal arrangements.

For some years E.M.Curr, a staunch social evolutionist and segregationist, held out against the amalgamationists at the Board led by Godfrey until the latter resigned from the Board in March 1879. The logic of Curr’s position was supported by decades of European anthropological thought and by the contribution made to imperial anthropology
by his arch rival A.W. Howitt. In contrast, the amalgamationists who supported the popular clamour for the exile of the ‘half-castes’ raised no theoretical armoury: practical economics and prejudice alone propelled their claims. Quite incidentally, nevertheless, they acquired their own anthropological champion in Paul Topinard, who calculated that the Australians could be restored to an original caucasian ‘purity’ by amalgamation with European settlers and be made fully white in just five generations. By the 1890s Topinard’s racial calculus had acquired the status of orthodoxy and would provide the scientific authority for the breaking up of other communities across the continent in the new century. The Victorian Board did not wait for such authority. In the 1880s, with the backing of erstwhile Kulin supporters, the BPA exiled those of mixed descent from the station and sent the young women from the dormitory into ‘service’ with the deliberate intention that they should marry white. If the logic of simultaneously denoting the Australians as obsolete primitives and nearly white, and thus nearly modern, was sometimes problematic, such niceties were of little concern to the pragmatic utilitarians at the Board.

In this final chapter I follow events at Coranderrk from 1881 to 1888: from the Board of Enquiry that investigated the continuing unrest at Coranderrk and again challenged the identity of Kulin of mixed descent, to the unwitting undermining of the Kulin by their white allies, Curr’s resistance to the amalgamation project, the institution of that project with the passage of the 1886 so-called ‘Half-castes Act’, to the final denouement of the ‘breeding out’ program.

Caste and Character

Despite the Royal Commission’s emphatic rejection of the proposal to ‘board out’ the asylum children, in March 1878 the Board launched its own campaign to expel the ‘half-castes’ from Coranderrk when it solicited opinion from its senior missionary, Frederich Hagenauer, on the merits of ‘whites adopting half-caste children’.1 To restore its tarnished public reputation the Board raised wages at Coranderrk but at the same time it quietly curtailed the meat ration. As the government prevaricated over whether to set aside funds to enact the recommended improvements to Coranderrk, there were new

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1BPA Minutes, Australian Archives, Victoria: B314; 1 March 1878
complaints about the station from Healesville residents and renewed rumblings of discontent from the station. In response, the autocratic Page ordered that insubordinate residents be issued with work certificates and expelled. In addition, he ordered that the statistical returns from the station, which detailed the performance of each worker and the results of each pupil, should now also tally ‘blood’ quotients so that the relative achievements of ‘black’s and ‘half-castes’ would be apparent to all. Particular attention was to be paid to the caste of newborns so that the anticipated moral delinquencies of the station girls would also be revealed. In May, Board members resolved to intensify their surveillance of the station by visiting 'without warning'. They were roused to fury when preempted by a Kulin delegation led by Barak, Bamfield and the young ‘speaker’ Robert Wandin that left for Melbourne to press Chief Secretary Berry to immediately enact the improvements recommended by the Royal Commission. In response to the pleas of that delegation, Berry sent Age agricultural journalist and MLA, John Dow, to investigate matters at the station over the Board's head.5

Unbowed, Curr and Halliday closely supervised Dow’s inspection of the station. In his report to Berry, Dow repeated their unfounded assertion that indiscipline at the station was a result of quarrelling [and] disunion … [between the] full blooded Blacks amongst whom there is some amount of drunkenness and a great dislike to regular work [and] ... the half-castes by comparison a very orderly lot, by whom undoubtedly the greater portion of the work on the establishment is carried on.6

As had become evident during the Commission hearings, Halliday had deliberately exploited tensions that resulted from the enforced relocation of a small number of members of unaffiliated clans onto the Coranderrk station following the passage of the 1869 Act. By promoting non-Kulin to coveted jobs on the station he had aggravated traditional enmities, but these were divisions that had nothing to do with issues of 'caste'. Most of those of mixed descent at Coranderrk, as Barwick indicated, were in fact Kulin

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2BPA Minutes 1 March 1878, 1 April 1878
3BPA Minutes 1 April 1878.
6 Dow to Berry, 30 May 1878; BPA In Letters, Australian Archives, Victoria B313, Box 11, item 188, pp7-10.
and the relatives and children of ‘full blacks’. Imposed constructs of ‘caste’ were incommensurate with Kulin kinship continuities or their notions of obligation and right.\(^7\) In Barwick’s opinion this report from a fellow liberal and a trusted lieutenant planted in Berry’s mind the idea that the ‘blacks’ looked upon the ‘half-castes’ as interlopers and would welcome their removal. It was an idea that would come back to haunt the Kulin.\(^8\)

In July 1878, Halliday wrote to Page to propose that the Board ‘consider the advisability of giving the half-caste Aboriginals ... a station to themselves apart from the blacks’, as a means towards ‘their further moral and social improvement’ and because ‘they do not agree too well together on the same station’. He proposed too that the ‘Quadroons’ could already be ‘licensed out as whites and would pass as such’.\(^9\) With indiscipline still rife at the station, the Board instead revived the plan to remove the residents one and all to a remote station.\(^10\) More immediately, and with unrest spreading to the stations at Lake Condah, Ramahyuck, and Framlingham, Page took action to track and inhibit communications between station residents by placing visitors books at all the stations in which ‘shall be stated the object of all such visits’, and by declining all requests for rail passes.\(^11\) He also expelled four youths from Coranderrk for three months on the grounds that they ‘refused to work and made themselves objectionable’.\(^12\) The Board also sacked Halliday who had proved unable to quell his charges.

Disciplinary expulsions continued into the spring of 1878 with the removal of the youths Richard Rowan and William Briggs to an industrial school.\(^13\) In December, Board member Albert Le Souef moved that steps be taken ‘to have all half-caste boys and girls on attaining the age of fourteen years apprenticed to trades’.\(^14\) It was a plan that entailed the interim relocation of the young to the industrial school annexed to the

\(^8\) Ibid. p. 162-3.
\(^9\) Halliday to BPA 24 July, 1878. printed as appendix 1, 14th report, 1878.
\(^10\) BPA Minutes 1 August 1878, 4 September 1878.
\(^12\) BPA Minutes 26 March 1879
\(^13\) BPA Minutes 9 October 1878
\(^14\) BPA Minutes 4 December 1878
Brighton Orphan Asylum from where they would be indentured under conditions that forbade parental contact. Such a plan, however, raised the old division between Godfrey and Curr on the question of boarding out and Curr, now Vice-Chairman of the Board, again dissented on the grounds that Aborigines, regardless of ‘caste’ were unfitted for release into the community even when they were kept under close surveillance. After considerable discussion Curr and Le Souef each compromised and the Board resolved that a few carefully selected boys only should be apprenticed, as an ‘experiment’.

**An Anthropology of Caste: Utilitarian Science and the Revival of an Old Theory**

Late in 1878 Robert Brough Smyth’s long-awaited *The Aborigines of Victoria* was published. It was favorably reviewed in London by Sir John Lubbock but, nearer to home, Lorimer Fison declared it ‘a miserable failure’ and wondered how ‘a man could have such opportunities … and yet make so little out of them’. Fison and A.W. Howitt, whose anthropological questionnaires had been circulated under Brough Smyth’s signature in 1874, were then preparing their jointly authored *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, which appeared in 1880 under a long prefatory essay from their patron and mentor, the eminent American social evolutionist, Lewis Henry Morgan. The fierce rivalries that ranged Lubbock and John Ferguson McLennan against Morgan and Edward Burnett Tylor had their counterpart in Australia too and Howitt and Fison also scorned Curr’s circulation of questionnaires in emulation of their own method. Curr, remarked Fison, proprietorially, was ‘in possession of several of our facts’ and warned Howitt that unless they made haste with their own publication, ‘we shall be accused of ploughing with the … Curr heifers’.

Less malign than Curr in his estimation of the humanity of the Aborigines, Howitt nevertheless shared the latter’s social evolutionist outlook. Both regarded the passing of the Australians as an evolutionary imperative, but while Curr approached it without a hint

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15 The operation of the colony’s industrial schools and boarding out program was regulated by the *Neglected and Criminal Children’s Act 1864* and the *Neglected and Criminal Children’s Amendment Act* of 1874. See Victorian Parliamentary Papers, Session 1864-5, Vol.3; Paper No.10; Session 1864-5 Vol.4, Paper No.47; 1866 2nd. Session Vol.2 Paper No.12; and Session 1879-80, Vol.2, Papers No.2 and No.23.
16 BPA Minutes 15 January 1879.
18 Fison to Morgan, 6 January 1880, quoting Howitt, in Ibid. p.425.
of regret, Howitt looked on the passing of a people whose ‘social and domestic life … [preserved] what may have been the domestic and social life of the ancestors of barbarous and of civilized races' with a note of melancholy. Using information supplied by a network of correspondents and informants that included the Board’s missionary superintendents Heinrich Stahle, John Bulmer and Frederich Hagenauer, the Brabiralung man Tulaba Billy Macleod and, later, William Barak, Howitt constructed a romantic, social evolutionist script that foretold the extinction of the Kurnai even as it exposed the complexity of their kinship systems, religious beliefs and social regulations. Methodologically in advance of his time, his interpretation remained captive within the parameters of imperial and racial ideology.

In Gippsland, he wrote, ‘the tide of settlement’ with its ‘line of blood’, has ‘advanced along an ever-widening line, breaking the native tribes with its first waves and overwhelming their wrecks with its flood. It … will [not] cease until the last tribe has been broken and overwhelmed’. Naturalising the European occupation, Howitt mused on whether the Aborigines might have survived had they been capable of adapting and ‘become physically and mentally such as a white man’ and been brought anew ‘in[to] equilibrium with his new surroundings.’ But, he argued, the ‘strength of hereditary physical and mental peculiarities’ had mitigated against their ‘modification’ with the result that they would soon ‘rapidly and inevitably becoming extinct’. While a few might ‘leave descendants, perhaps of half-blood, …[to] become absorbed into the general community’, as a people they were destined to be swept aside by evolution’s advance.19

Howitt’s text at times displayed an uneasy awareness of the incongruities against which imperial racial grids were constructed. His ‘primitive’ informants were clearly intelligent and had mastered English to a degree not matched by his capacity with their languages, and he privately reserved judgement on whether the Australians possessed ‘a potentiality of intellectual progress’.20 But like Curr and the metropolitan social evolutionists, he considered that the principal value of the surviving Aboriginal people

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20 A.W. Howitt, in Howitt Papers, State Library of Victoria, MS 9356 Box 1053/2b; p.36/32 (dual numbering).
was in what they revealed about the progress of humanity from primitive to imperial European.

In contrast, Curr’s anthropological opus, *The Australian Race*, composed principally in 1882 when he held sway at the BPA, reiterated the opinions he had expressed to the Royal Commission in 1877 and contained no hint of doubt about the inferiority of the ‘savages’ over whom he ruled. They were child like, those of mixed descent resembled the mother more than the father, tending therefore to retain Aboriginal features and habits, and were perhaps even more degraded by miscegenation than their pure-blooded forebears. They were particularly lacking in ‘the moral sentiments’. If the ‘half-castes’ had ‘more brains than the full-blooded Blacks’ they were also ‘more difficult to manage’: miscegenation only enhanced their guile, and left them more in need of discipline and surveillance. As a race one and all knew ‘little of principle, honour, or morality’, they were treacherous, cowardly and in every way ‘inferior to the White man’. Despite his administrative functions at the Board, which on occasion at least brought him into relatively close contact with the colony’s Aborigines, Curr looked on them as little more than anthropological curiosities. He was adamant that they had not and never would reach ‘a stage of progress’ commensurate with Brough Smyth’s ethnology. His text moved seamlessly between the 'bloodthirsty proclivities of the savage' who were cannibals, infanticides and remorseless murderers of defenseless white women and children, and the imbecility of the Kulin at ‘the government station at Healesville’ who demonstrated a primitive and innate 'absence of all taste for agriculture'. Even if such people could be raised into some semblance of civilisation, that advance would be jeopardised if they were freed from the Board’s stations and, as he put it, 'returned to their forests'.

But while Howitt, Fison, Curr and the British and American social evolutionists constructed the Australian as exemplar of generic primitive man, thus privileging the logic of segregation and extinction, such theories were difficult to reconcile with the

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22 Ibid. pp. 18-19, 26, 38-43
23 Ibid. p.52
24 Ibid. pp.76-9, 102-5.
utilitarian policies of Curr’s more pragmatic adversaries at the Board; and with the presence of a body of intelligent, perspicacious and forthright Aborigines. However, for Board members bent on disciplining and dividing the unruly Kulin by banishing their young into situations likely to foster ‘amalgamation’ with the settler population, anthropology now provided scientific indemnity with the reprise of an almost forgotten theory.

In an imperial age, Europeans remained fascinated, and not a little panicked, by the effects of the inevitable racial ‘crossings’ that occurred as they spread across the globe. In 1874 the British Association published an updated version of its *Queries... for Travellers*, designed, as in the 1840s, to focus the eye of those who ventured into ‘uncivilized lands’, on the human capital of the empire. Once again, particular attention was drawn to ‘the fecundity of mongrels’ and to the question of whether ‘crossing’ produced ‘improvement or deterioration’. Anxiety about the deterioration of the European races was evident in the manual’s warning that ‘the pure Dutch race’ had already ‘become speedily sterile in Java’ as a result of such unions. It was, by implication, the racial responsibility of European colonists to avoid such enervating unions. Once again it was also noted that the Australians were a people whose fecundity was reduced in ‘crossed unions’. To this collaborative manual, the French anthropologist Paul Broca contributed a complex arithmetic matrix that enumerated the ‘blood’ quotients of ‘crosses’ and ‘return crosses’ unto the eighth degree. It was a model that offered the comforting proposition that the racially defiled could be restored to purity by judicious breeding.25

Soon after the publication of the BAAS’s new anthropological manual, Paul Topinard, Broca’s protégé at the Anthropological Society of Paris, critically reworked Broca’s arithmetic to produce a theory that was to have profound implications for the Aborigines of Australia. Topinard advanced the theory that while the Australians were separated from Europeans by an evolutionary divide of ages standing, they remained linked by a primordial racial affinity. The Australians, he suggested, were ‘archaic Caucasians’ who had lost contact with the more evolved branches of the race as they
traversed the globe. Stranded in a time capsule in their antipodean backwater they had fallen into savagery, but could yet be made modern and catch up with their advanced racial brethren by crossing them with the white population. While Broca had enumerated the fractions of contamination and processes of repurification of European blood, Topinard put forward the radical proposition that in the space of a few generations, black could be made white.\textsuperscript{26}

Topinard’s thesis was the result of his revisiting of Paul Broca’s work on hybridity in the human ‘genus’: work which, as already noted, drew much of its inspiration from Strzelecki. Focusing, as Broca had, on the supposed ‘noneugenesis’ of mixed-descent offspring of Australians and European colonists, Topinard wrote to the French consuls in Melbourne and Sydney seeking information on a population of metis known to have once inhabited the islands of Bass Strait. From Melbourne, M. Castelnau informed Topinard that there were numerous metis in the colony who were ‘vigorous and intelligent’, who were regularly employed as shearsers and boundary riders and were evidently fertile with both whites and blacks. He expressed some astonishment that the question of their existence and their fecundity should still be contested.\textsuperscript{27} On the strength of Castelnau’s intelligence, Topinard finally dismissed Strzelecki’s ‘bizarre proposition’; but he was at pains to uphold the reputation of his mentor, Broca.\textsuperscript{28}

In Broca’s defence, Topinard now proposed that just as more than one ‘race’ occupied the geographic territory of France, so too in Australia at least two and possibly four distinct indigenous races existed whose ability to produce fertile offspring with Europeans varied according to their evolutionary and biological proximity to Europeans.\textsuperscript{29} Topinard’s theory was informed by the recent reprise by Thomas Huxley

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\item \textsuperscript{25} Dr. Beddoe, "Crosses," in \textit{Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the Use of Travellers and Residents in Uncivilized Lands; Drawn up by a Committee Appointed by the British Association for the Advancement of Science}, ed. Edward Burnett Tylor and others (London: Edward Stanford, 1874), pp.22-24.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Paul Topinard, "Les Métis D'Australiens Et D'Européens," \textit{Revue D'Anthropologie} (1875), pp.244-7.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Topinard, \textit{Etude} (1872), pp.102-5.
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and by W.H.I.Bleek at the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, of a theory which proposed a connection between the languages spoken by the people of the Dekkan Plateau of India and the people of south-eastern Australia. It was a theory that first appeared in the 1830s and had briefly been noted by Prichard in the 1840s. Like Huxley and Bleek, Topinard proposed a distant linguistic and racial connection, by way of India, between the Aryans and Caucasians of Europe and one of these primitive Australian races. It was a theory that preserved Broca’s reputation while accounting for the ubiquitous and fertile intermixing of colonised and coloniser in Australia.

In later years, Topinard denounced the ultra-nationalist ideal of a community bound by ‘blood’ and abandoned the concept of race entirely, declaring that ‘men seem only to present individual variations’. But in 1872, still preoccupied with the science of race, Topinard added his authority to the theory that the ready ‘crossing’ of the Australians of the south-east of the continent with their white brethren indicated their primordial affinity with the advanced races of Europe. In 1875 he publicly speculated on the question of whether a prolonged series of crossings would result in the production of a distinct intermediate new race - and thus provide evidence for Darwin’s theory of the origin of species - or whether repeated ‘crossings’ in a chosen direction would eventually counteract the initial hybridity. As Topinard put it, would ‘la distance sera encore amoindrie, si bien que par la répétition du même mécanisme elle finira par être nulle’ - would the (anthropological) distance become so diminished by the repetition of that process that all trace of one of the original races would be nullified.

In essence, Topinard turned Broca’s theory that racial purity could be restored through return crossings on its head, and proposed instead that, if applied to a whole population, the same process could be employed to render a race extinct. For the vindictive men at the Board who were already determined upon a policy of absorption, Topinard’s work was

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propitious. It enabled them to represent their pragmatic plan to conjure away the last of the colony’s Aborigines as a morally respectable and scientifically progressive program designed to restore the Aborigines to an original whiteness.

The following year, 1876, Topinard drew up a breeding schedule that enumerated how a race could be rendered *nulle* in five generations:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Metis of the first blood} & = W^{1/2} + B^{1/2} \\
\text{second blood} & = W^{3/4} + B^{1/4} \\
\text{third blood} & = W^{7/8} + B^{1/8} \\
\text{fourth blood} & = W^{15/16} + B^{1/16} \\
\text{fifth blood} & = W^{31/32} + B^{1/32}.
\end{align*}
\]

By the fifth or six generation, reckoned Topinard, ‘all traces of hybridism has generally disappeared, [and] the features of the mother-race have reverted to the original type’.

Here, in Topinard’s arithmetic, was an elegantly simple solution to the problem of how to dispose of the Aborigines of Victoria. ‘The real power of whiteness’, observed Luise White recently, ‘may have been in the ease with which it could be diluted’. As Topinard’s table demonstrated, there was a matching power and utility in the ease with which ‘whiteness’ could be reconstituted.

Topinard’s theory was immediately taken up, albeit somewhat tentatively, by Robert Brough Smyth, an avid reader of the latest ethnological installments from Europe. In 1878 Brough Smyth followed Topinard in arguing that the Aborigines of Victoria were 'the representatives, in the savage state' of the Aryan race, 'which gave civilization to Europe'. A year later, Hyde Clarke, Vice President of Huxley’s amalgamated Anthropological Institute, lent support to the theory in a paper read to the members of the Royal Society of Victoria. Praising Brough Smyth’s work, he too argued that the Australians had been ‘at some former period, under the influence of a white race’ and argued that there was a ‘wonderful identity of the Australian first personal pronoun with the Dravidian and some other Indian languages’.

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reminded Melburnians of an arcane observation contained in the exploration journals of Charles Sturt, which seemed to confirm the Australian connection with Europeans in the distant past. Way back in the 1840s, in Prichard’s heyday, Sturt had met Aborigines in Central Australia whom he was convinced ‘had an intimate knowledge of freemasonry, and gave the signs only known to the mystic brotherhood’. 37

By the beginning of the 1880s, the idea that the Australians had sprung from Caucasian roots had become thoroughly infused into local thinking, despite E.M.Curr’s disparagement of the theory. Yet the alternate theory that banished the Australians to the distant reaches of evolution’s continuum also remained in circulation. By 1893, when Alfred Wallace concluded that the Australians ‘must be classed as Caucasians’, the two theories sat in contradictory, but seemingly happy, contiguity, each possessing its own utility for colonial administrators. While the ‘ancient Caucasians’ theory enabled colonial administrators to effect what Warwick Anderson has recently identified as ‘a readjustment of racial categories’ that incorporated Aboriginal Australians – those of mixed descent at least - into the category of ‘whiteness’ as ‘distant relatives and object lessons’ to those who might stray from right living, the other theory still prescribed segregation unto extinction for the ‘blacks’. 38 During the 1880s the Victorian Board for the Protection of Aborigines deployed both theories in tandem in its campaign to bring ‘finality’ to the problem posed by the presence of rebellious Aborigines in the colony. Popular prejudice joined with political expediency to ensure that the two theories could coexist, without concern for the finer points of logic and scientific method. 39

The Coranderrk Enquiry of 1881: Ailments, Insubordination and Savagery.
Throughout 1879, as the competing schools of anthropologists argued about the origins of the Australians and whether they could be absorbed into the settler population, complaints continued to emanate from Coranderrk about the regime of the new manager the Reverend Frederick Strickland and his wife, who, more than any previous managers,

were haughty and distant and publicly disdainful of their wards. He was wont to exclaim that living at Coranderrk was 'like living in hell' and both refused to enter the cottages in the village when inmates were ill. Their governance of the station not only stirred Aboriginal anger but antagonised other employees of the Board. With the death toll on the station again on the rise from the endemic lung disease, Kulin ally Anne Bon cajoled Chief Secretary Berry to direct the BPA to investigate Strickland's administration. The Board struck back by again calling for the abandonment of the station, using the mounting death rate as leverage. There were now, reported Jennings, one of the last of the BPA’s old guard of humanitarians, many parents on the station ‘who have buried two, four, or six children, and occasionally are left childless' by a disease that seemed to be impervious to medical attention and which struck predominantly at those in the prime of life, between twelve and twenty five years of age. Jennings called for an expert report into the contagion but agreed that conditions at the station were 'too cold and wet' for the Aboriginal constitution and acceded to the call for the station to be closed. As Jennings’ health report passed through the hands of the Board’s Secretary Page, a persuasive cover note was attached emphasising that the station property would realise the very substantial sum of 33,000 pounds if sold – a sum amounting to three times the Board’s annual Treasury vote.

Following Jennings’ report, Berry once again despatched the colony’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr. McCrae, to Coranderrk. Again, McCrae identified inadequate housing and 'sanitary defects ... [as] the cause of the excessive mortality', rather than the climate. He complained that the remedial measures he had recommended three years earlier, including the provision of a small on-site hospital where those with contagious diseases could be isolated, had not been acted upon, and he castigated the government for

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40 Thomas Michie, (a.k.a Thomas Bamfield, Punch) and Alfred Morgan, evidence to Coranderrk Enquiry, 1881, pp. 7, 13.
41 BPA Minutes 2 July 1879, 3 December 1879.
42 BPA Minutes 30 April 1879.
43 BPA Minutes 30 April 1879, 7 May 1879, 4 June 1879.
44 Jennings’ report to Chief Secretary, 12 June 1879, entitled “Aborigines: Report and Correspondence Relative to the Mortality Amongst the Residents of the Aboriginal stations of Victoria”, in Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, Legislative Assembly, Session 1879-80, Vol.3; Paper No. 86.
its neglect. The Board was outraged that Berry had commissioned the report without its consent.

With an international Social Sciences Congress scheduled to be held in Melbourne later in the year, and aware of the kudos that would attach in that forum to their work amongst the Aborigines, and determined to have the best of Berry, late in July (1879) Le Souef suggested that the Board commission local surgeon, Mr. William Thomson, to report on the health of the Aborigines.

Thomson was somewhat of a wild-child in Melbourne's medical circles. He had edited the *Australian Medical Journal* from 1859 to 1861, but had fallen out with the Medical Society of Victoria over his vigorous advocacy of the contagionist doctrine and the germ theory of disease. In 1863, and again in 1870, Thomson had taken the eminent English physician Samuel Dougan Bird to task over the latter's advocacy of the supposed curative effects of the Australian climate. Thomson countered that tubercular disease was as prevalent across the colony of Victoria as in England and Wales and was caused by the combined effects of poor diet, neglect and poor ventilation in which the 'latent seeds' of the disease 'germinated'. It was not, as some suggested, a moral injunction on an 'assumed vicious life'. In choosing the controversial Thomson, whose views, had Curr and Le Souef considered them more closely, might have been expected to confirm McCrae’s opinions, the quest for scientific reputation temporarily undermined the manoeuvrings of politics.

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45. 15th Report of the BPA, Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, Session 1879-80, Legislative Assembly, Vol.3; Paper No. 68, Appendix XI.
46. McCrae's Report to Chief Secretary, 26 June 1879, included with Jennings’ report, in ‘Aborigines: Report and Correspondence Relative to the Mortality Amongst the Residents of the Aboriginal stations of Victoria’. McCrae’s report of 24 March 1876 is, pointedly, included as an enclosure in this report.
47. BPA Minutes 4 June 1879, 2 July 1879.
48. BPA Minutes 23 July 1879.
To facilitate Thomson’s investigations, the Kulin were now enjoined to make the arduous trek to the Melbourne Hospital when they required medical treatment.\(^{50}\) Their fears that they would not return were well founded. The Melbourne Hospital had the highest death rate of any in the colony, and the ordinary trauma of hospitalisation was magnified, as already noted, by the knowledge that the bodies of the dead would be violated and traded to scientific practitioners.\(^{51}\) In addition, in its quest to establish more clearly a line of demarcation between the ‘pure Blacks’ and the ‘half-castes’, who, by the logic of social evolutionism, might be expected to be better equipped to survive European diseases, station managers were now ordered to furnish tabulated records 'distinguishing pure Blacks, half-castes and quadroons as far as is practicable and specifying the disease of which they die'.\(^{52}\) As usual, the interests of science coincided with the Board’s increasingly intrusive and punitive surveillance project and its growing determination to break apart the Kulin nation.

The now chronic acrimony between the Kulin and the station superintendent at Coranderrk came to a head in May 1880 when Strickland whipped twelve year old Phinnimore Jackson with a rein and buckle. Phinnimore was an inmate of the children’s asylum whom Strickland had engaged as an unpaid servant. In what Strickland designated as a case of 'insubordination among the halfcastes', a point of which the Board made much, Alfred Davis, Jack Briggs, and Alick Campbell came to the boy's rescue, threatening to 'take away all the children as they were being knocked about and half killed', and to assault Strickland if he did not desist.\(^{53}\) Each man now took a boy out of the dormitory in defiance of Strickland. At Strickland's insistence, the Board laid criminal charges against all three and expelled them. Two others, Alfred Morgan and John Charles were also charged over the same incident.\(^{54}\) With the management of the station again the subject of debate in parliament, Curr demanded that station managers be

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\(^{50}\) BPA Minutes 1 October 1879, 29 November 1879

\(^{51}\) William Thomson, *On Phthisis* (1870), p28, notes that the death rate for all patients who entered the Melbourne Hospital in the 1868-9 was just over 50%. By 1881 that figure had been reduced to just under 17%; see *Public Charities, Report of Inspector for the Year Ended 30th June 1882* in Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, Session 1882-3; Vol.2&3, Paper No.73. Appendix. 8.

\(^{52}\) BPA Minutes 23 July 1879, 6 August 1879.


\(^{54}\) BPA Minutes 27 May 1880, 2 June 1880. Constable Tevlin to Coranderrk Enquiry, 1881, p.107.
given greater power over the movements and discipline of children and young women on
the stations.\textsuperscript{55} As a result, on July 16 1880 a new regulation was gazetted under the 1869
Act which gave station managers power to order 'Every Aboriginal male under 14 years
of age, and ... all unmarried Aboriginal females under the age of 18 years' to 'reside, and
take their meals, and sleep' in the dormitory complex.\textsuperscript{56}

This extension of the Board’s powers over the children of the Kulin, some of
whom already resided in the dormitory but many of whom had hitherto been domiciled in
the station village with their parents, represented a challenge of major proportions to
Kulin self-determination and it was met with fierce resistance. In October, Strickland was
given permission 'to prosecute those parents who refused to let their children go to the
Boarding House when so ordered by him'.\textsuperscript{57} Once again it was through the extension of
governance over Aboriginal children that the Board sought to break the will and the
resistance of its wards.

With Bon’s help, the Kulin again rallied their supporters in the parliament and in
the press.\textsuperscript{58} Late in March 1881, twenty-one of the station residents marched to
Melbourne to press Berry to decommission the BPA. The delegates also insisted that
‘they did not want to be removed from the station' and that they should 'have some more
control over the station themselves with a view to make it more self-supporting than it
was at present'. It was, they argued, the interference of the Board and the incapacities of
its agents which rendered them paupers and prevented them from living as independent
farmers. Once again they asked for the reinstatement of John Green and the chance to
make their station self-sufficient. The \textit{Argus} reported that 'the novel sight’ of their arrival
at Parliament House ‘attracted a great deal of attention’.\textsuperscript{59} A telegram from Strickland
belatedly alerted the Board to the delegation's impending arrival, so that Le Souef was

\textsuperscript{56} 'Regulations made under the Act to provide for the protection and management of the Aboriginal natives
of Victoria 16 July, 1880 No.2,' appended to 23rd. Report of the BPA, Victoria, Parliamentary Papers,
\textsuperscript{57} BPA Minutes 6 October 1880.
\textsuperscript{58} Bon to Graham Berry 23 March 1881, 'The Blacks are neither slaves nor criminals, then why are they
treated as such?'; in Victorian Public Records Office: VPRS 1226 Box 4, item 81/V2688, dated 23 March
1881.
\textsuperscript{59} Coranderrk Enquiry, 1881, evidence of John Norris, pp.114-115, especially Q.4612. BPA Minutes 6
April 1881. \textit{Argus}, 30 March 1881: Cutting is included in VPRS 1226 Box 4, item N3179 along with
Page’s insistence that BPA members be present when Berry received the Coranderrk delegation.
present at their parley with Berry where he fulminated 'that the present delegation ought to show Mr. Berry how necessary it was to break the station up as recommended for years by the Board as it was impossible to manage the station with this continual interference going on'. Page, arbitrarily asserting the authority to control the movements of station residents, accused the men of being absent from the station ‘without permission and contrary to the regulations of the Establishment’. The day, however, belonged to the Kulin. The _Argus_ affirmed that Berry 'promised distinctly that the blacks should not be moved', openly accused the Protection Board of obstruction and favored the reinstatement of Green.

Whilst the BPA minutes that recorded Le Souef's version of the meeting initially described the delegation members as generic 'blacks', a margin note added later pointedly observed that they included 'half-castes' amongst their number. Superintendent Hugh Halliday had once praised the ‘half-castes’ as being more reliable and trustworthy than the ‘blacks’, but the enraged members of the Board now implied, in a reversal of that orthodox logic, that bodily impurity made these same ‘half-castes, more guileful and insubordinate than the more docile ‘pure blacks’, and led them to become the troublemakers at Coranderrk. Early in June it again pressed Berry to exile three of the delegation leaders, Johnny Philips, Alfred Morgan and Thomas Bamfield (the latter the Daung wurrung clan leader and a man of ‘full’ descent). A week later, on the 8th June 1881, Page duly wrote to the Chief Secretary. There were, wrote Page:

> so many able-bodied Halfcastes at Coranderrk who are quite capable of earning their own living [that] the Board proposes to commence at once to reduce their number by sending away three men and their wives. The children will be retained if the parents do not object. Two of the men selected you particularly noticed in April last, when they formed part of a deputation to you. I remarked that they should not be living on a Black station but should go out to work. By degrees the Board hopes to get rid of all the halfcastes who are capable of providing for themselves. In taking this step the Board knows that it will meet as usual with outside opposition but hopes that you will give it your support in carrying out the very necessary reform.

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60 BPA Minutes 28 March 1881, 6 April 1881.
61 Page to Chief Secretary, 28 March 1881; VPRS 1226, Box 4, item N3179.
62 1881 Coranderrk Board of Enquiry, p.115. _Argus_ 30 March 1881.
63 BPA Minutes 6 April 81.
64 BPA Minutes 1 June 1881.
65 Page to Chief Secretary, 6 June 1881; AAV B329, BPA Out Correspondence, Vol.5, Item 3, Letter 81/229.
Berry acceded to the expulsion orders which forced the three men and their wives from the station in July. Under pressure from Bon, however, he also commissioned a Board of Enquiry into the causes of the chronic unrest at the station, once again challenging the Board’s authority. At stake in this struggle between the Board, the Chief Secretary and the Kulin lay the profoundly important issue of whether the Aborigines of the colony were to be citizens and free men and women, or wards of state.

Late in September 1881 the Board of Enquiry began its hearings. The enquiry panel was implacably split into two factions with the Coranderrk allies in one camp and BPA supporters in the other. Throughout its proceedings, Anne Bon vied with the local MLA, E.H.Cameron, to determine the course of the interrogations. Bon, a consummate lobbyist, rallied the press in a manner which ensured that both the Age and the Argus levelled trenchant criticism at the BPA. Throughout the hearings, from 29th September to 8th December 1881, unrest continued at Coranderrk over the employment of white labour. Page intercepted correspondence between the residents and their supporters and urged the closure of the station with a note of increasing desperation. Early in October, the Coranderrk workers went on strike for a week over the question of the meat ration. Most were heavily in debt to local butchers as a result of the withdrawal of the ration to the able-bodied. Strickland reported that 'Punch, Barak, Dunolly and Morgan' were the leaders and they were 'in a state of revolt'. On the 26th October, in an effort to inhibit the rebels seeking support from residents at other stations, Page again prohibited the issue of rail passes.

Divide and Rule
As with the Royal Commission of 1877, the majority of the BPA members, with the notable and influential exception of E.M.Curr, used the enquiry to pursue the campaign to divide the Kulin along the imagined fault line of caste. For their part, the Kulin argued for the appointment of a manager who would assist them to make a self-sufficient...

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66 BPA Minutes 6 July 1881.
69 BPA Minutes 15 November 1881. Strickland to Page, 10 October 1881; VPRS 1226, Box 4, item U9612.
70 Page to Sergt. Trousen, 26 October 1881; BPA Out Correspondence, Vol.5, item 3, letterbook, p. 102.
homeland for themselves and their descendents, and for the right to live as free people. Fifteen Kulin addressed the enquiry, while others made written submissions. The proceedings of the enquiry were closely followed by the press.

In the face of hostile questioning from Cameron, the Daung wurrung clan leader, Birdarak Thomas Bamfield, Punch, whom Page had recently banished from Coranderrk, insisted that under Strickland their station was falling into disrepair. Strickland had made no improvements, he interfered with the erection of fences so that neighbouring farmers used the station lands as an open common; the station gardens produced no vegetables, the milking herd had deteriorated so that the children had no milk, and Strickland and his wife refused to visit the sick or supply them with extra rations. Since the meat ration had been withdrawn, the Coranderrk folk were forced to spend all of their wages on meat, and even then they frequently had only bread and tea for their meals. Later witnesses confirmed that many were deeply in debt to the Healesville butchers who sold them scraps at exorbitant prices. In addition, the clothing supplied by the Board, Bamfield complained, was inadequate.

Whereas the people universally remembered that Green had gone amongst them and worked with them, and that Mary Green had nursed them, Bamfield charged that Strickland was disdainful of them and both he and his wife were frequently drunk, a fact which Mrs. Deans, the temporary teacher, later confirmed. She also confirmed that Strickland was in the habit of flogging the children in the asylum.

Bamfield was adamant that they could make the station self-sufficient themselves. He offered his own scheme for the better management of the station whereby the workers would be divided into two gangs, one to work the hops, the other to fence the paddocks and work the gardens. He rounded off his testimony with the vow that under Green, 'I worked for ten years for nothing, just to try to keep ourselves in the station' and would do so again if it meant retaining their land. 'I think they have done enough in this country to ruin the natives without taking it from us any more'.

William Barak affirmed that the

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71 Michie (Bamfield) to Coranderrk Enquiry, 1881, pp. 6-9; Morgan to Enquiry, pp.12-13; Dunolly to Enquiry, p.18; Strickland to Enquiry, pp.30, 94; Deans to Enquiry, p.71.
residents wanted to run the place themselves under Green's direction. The government, he said, should 'give us this ground and let us manage here'.

Like Barak, who had recently lost his wife and his only son, David, to tuberculosis, many of those who testified had lost children to the disease. Tommy Avoca's children had all died of the disease as had Willie Parker's; Robert Wandin had lost one child, and Alfred Morgan and Thomas Bamfield, three each. Mrs. Hamilton testified that Mrs. Strickland had refused to issue extra rations when her children were sick and 'crying for soup' and that she had refused to cross the threshold when belatedly delivering medicine after one of the children had died from scarlet fever. When Barak took his dying son down to the Melbourne Hospital, the Board made no arrangement for him to be met in town or for the boy's admission to hospital, and Barak had been forced to carry the boy from the coach depot at Richmond to Mrs. Bon's at Kew. When the child was admitted to hospital the following day, hospital staff 'struggle(d) to separate' the terrified child from his father. Barak did not see the boy alive again. 'They had a dread of being shut up in an institution like ours', nurse McKie told the enquiry.

Barak later told Alfred Howitt how after his son's death he and Tommy Punch 'were crying about him all evening', and that Punch subsequently dreamt of the boy: 'I saw the poor fellow – he was here – he said stand there. There were two stirrups hanging down and he said … go up these – don’t be afraid you won’t fall down.'

To emphasise the point that one and all wanted to maintain their station, on the 16th November the residents submitted a petition to the enquiry signed or marked by 46 adult residents, including all the principal men and women of the station, without distinction as to whether they were 'black' or of mixed descent. The petition reiterated the demands made by the witnesses. The names of senior clan elders William Barak, Thomas Bamfield and Dick Richard headed the list. It called for the reappointment of Green, for the dismantling of the BPA and insisted that 'then we will show the country that the station could self-support itself'.

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72 Ibid., evidence of Barak, pp. 9-10.
74 Ibid., evidence of McKie, p.41; James Williams, p42; Barak, p. 99. BPA Minutes 20 October 1881. 
75 Barak to Howitt, 1881, in Howitt Papers, SLV MS 9356, Box 1053/2b, p.15.
76 Petition in Coranderrk Enquiry, 1881, p. 98.
Ignoring the pleas of the Coranderrk people, the local parliamentary representative and Board of Enquiry member, E.H.Cameron, adopted a line of questioning intended to lay open the reported fissure in the community between 'pure blacks', 'half-castes' and 'any other degrees'. According to Strickland, only Ann Briggs and William Barak could legitimately claim to be indigenous to the district. The rest, he argued, were displaced persons gathered there by Green. They had no traditional claims at Coranderrk and could readily be relocated again. In Strickland's opinion, none of the residents were good workers, but he distinguished between the 'pure aboriginals' who lacked 'a sense of duty to work' and the 'half-castes' who were simply indolent. 'The pure blacks', he said, 'if in health, are more useful' being more easily controlled. The 'blacks' worked willingly enough, but the 'half-castes' were insubordinate. Some of them, indeed, refused to work unless they were paid 'the full price a white man is paid'. It was the insubordination of the 'half-castes', and not his inept management, that had led to the deterioration of the hop harvest and the failure of the potato crop.

If racial mixing produced behavioural delinquency, it also produced physical infirmity in the opinion of one of the medical experts brought in to consider the causes of the persistently high death toll. While the colony’s Chief Medical Officer, McCrae, again insisted that it was not the climate of Coranderrk but the failure of the Board to provide adequate housing and food, warm clothing and covered drainage, that was the cause of the endemic tuberculosis and pleuro-pneumonia at the station, and surgeon William Thomson argued that it was caused by the continuing circulation of germs and the debilitating after-effects of the measles epidemic of 1874-5, Dr William Armstrong of the Melbourne Hospital presented a different conclusion. He argued that miscegenation made the people susceptible to tuberculosis, that 'not being pure blooded ... the different strains of blood tend to deteriorate them and render them more liable to tubercular diseases'. If Armstrong’s logic ran counter to the Board’s own theory that even heightened insubordination could be considered a perverse indication of the improvements brought about by the infusion of white ‘blood’, it nevertheless supported

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77 Strickland to Coranderrk Enquiry, evidence, p. 1.
78 Ibid., Strickland, pp.1-4. Harris, p.5.
79 Ibid., McCrae, p. 35.
the Board’s claim that the half-castes were different in kind to the ‘full bloods’ and were not authentic Aborigines at all.

**Morals and Amalgamation**

Two of the older girls, over 18 years of age yet still incarcerated, illegally, in the locked confines of the children’s asylum, also addressed the enquiry. They complained that they were kept perpetually under close surveillance and were compelled by Mrs. Strickland to perform unpaid domestic work for her household and to cook and sew for the ‘orphans’. In her testimony, Eda Brangy described how ‘we used to be locked up, and if we wanted anything it was given through the wires, just like we were prisoners’. They were prohibited from visiting the huts on the station and ‘we were not allowed to go to fish’ on the river flats, which was the place on the station once given over to women but from where they were now prohibited from going since local rumour had accused them of having congress there with white men. To escape from the dormitory regime they wished to leave the station and go into service.

But when it came to releasing young women into the general community, the moral anxieties of colonists were stirred. The Reverend Alexander Mackie, a Presbyterian minister in the nearby town of Lilydale, and a regular visitor to the Coranderrk station, presented his own idiosyncratic racial arithmetic to the committee. His was a finely nuanced calculation of the corruptions that might ensue if the young women were released from the station dormitory. 'If you marry a half-caste to a white the succeeding race will approach nearer to the whites. If you marry a full black to a white you increase the number of aboriginals.' He instanced the case of a young woman of mixed descent who had reversed what he saw as a natural dissolution of the Aboriginal presence by marrying 'a full black'. 'I think that girl would have been much better away from the station, and married to a European', he opined. Mackie advocated the placement of the youngest children in white families where they could be prepared for amalgamation. But he opposed the free employment of 'aborigines and half-castes'. It was only under the close supervision entailed in the early placement of children in 'proper

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81 Ibid., Eda Brangy and Alice Grant, pp.68-70.
82 Ibid., Mackie, p.91.
families' that amalgamation could be properly regulated and moral degradation and racial recontamination be avoided. The young women who had expressed an anxious desire to be freed from the orphan house, he argued, had not had the necessary training to avoid moral dissipation. John Morrison, on the other hand, a local publican and storekeeper who had no particular objection to the presence of the Aboriginal station at Healesville, was sanguine about the processes of amalgamation. It was, he suggested, inevitable that the Aborigines would be absorbed into the general populace and the process ought to be allowed to take its course. Parodying a popular advertisement, he remarked jocularly, 'You can make them white here without soap'.

For Hagenauer, the proposal to send girls to service presented a moral dilemma. Once he had intended that the Aborigines as a whole should eventually take their place in the colony’s general community, but he was now persuaded that there was a developmental distinction between ‘black’ and ‘half-caste’. Putting aside his fears that releasing the young ‘half-castes’ from the station would place them in temptation’s way, he argued that it was necessary to ‘draw them into the white population’ lest they ‘be brought down to the level of the blacks’. It was, he said, vital that ‘those half-caste people, who receive such good education and training, and are able to earn so much wages, should not be numbered with the blacks any longer ... but should be encouraged to cast in their lot with the white population’. He had already taken the initiative of sending ‘half-caste orphan children’ from Ramahyuck to the Orphan Asylum at Brighton ‘to keep them from the blacks altogether’. From there, the children would be boarded out to white families, who contracted to promote their moral and religious education, the girls to be trained as domestic servants, the boys in manual trades. Both would be drilled in habits of ‘truthfulness, obedience, personal cleanliness and industry’. As Hagenauer was well aware, once boarded out, the girls in particular would be easy prey for unscrupulous white men, while their own relatives were denied access to them.
In contrast to the majority of witnesses to the enquiry, Curr, who still referred to the colony’s Aborigines as 'savages', continued to argue for the need to keep them apart from whites, and alone amongst BPA members refused to differentiate between 'blacks' and 'half-castes'. As in 1877, he held that they were universally like children, easily led for good or evil and that they should not be ‘absorbed’ into the settler population, lest the white population suffer degenerative effects. Strickland's punitive methods received Curr's wholehearted approval and he continued to push for the removal of the Kulin to a remote station on the Murray.\(^\text{86}\) When the Protection Board met on the 15th November to consider its overdue annual report, it was Curr who adamantly blocked the majority call for the expulsion of the ‘half-castes’ from the station, and with Page absent, pushed through a final paragraph that called for the continuing segregation of the Aborigines as a whole. It was a policy reversal that enabled him to charge that it was Bon’s faction, and not the Board, that was bent on breaking their ‘family ties’, condemning the men to vagabondage and the women to prostitution.\(^\text{87}\)

Three months after the last of the witnesses addressed the Coranderrk Board of Enquiry, a split report was presented to the Chief Secretary.\(^\text{88}\) In the interim the factions on that committee fought bitterly and publicly by means of correspondence in the *Argus* over the recommendations of the final report and over Strickland's accusations of interference by Bon.\(^\text{89}\) The Kulin, too, publicised their case in the press. On 9 February, 1882, the Coranderrk men, having read a draft of the report, addressed a letter to the *Argus* signed by Thomas Dunolly, Robert Wandon, John Charles, William Parker, William Barak and Thomas Michie Bamfield, in which they challenged the principal report's finding that there were jealousies and rivalries amongst them that divided them by caste. They stated unequivocally their desire not to have 'any boards over us … and only one manager', and named Strickland as the cause of the station's decline.\(^\text{90}\) Two

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\(^{86}\) Curr to Coranderrk Enquiry, pp.120-121.


\(^{88}\) BPA Minutes 22 March 1882. Victoria, Parliamentary Papers, Legislative Assembly, Votes and Procedures, 27 April 1882.

\(^{89}\) *Argus* 3 February 1882, p.5, 6 February 1882, p.9.

\(^{90}\) *Argus* 11 February 1882, p.10.
days later Strickland retorted, accusing Bon of undermining discipline at the station by openly challenging his authority to 'correct or punish' the station children and by telling the men that his injunction that they seek his permission before leaving the station was 'oppression not to be allowed or endured'. Since then, he wrote, 'the men have done as they pleased' and the children 'have become impertinent, and often openly defiant ...With such an authorised start on the larrikin track, it is to be feared they will swell the army of candidates for the prison or the lash'.

A week later, the Kulin, through the newly elected and liberally-inclined Alfred Deakin, presented a petition signed by twenty-one of the Coranderrk men, to Chief Secretary Grant. It reiterated their desire to have no manager but Green over them, for Page to be dismissed and for the station to be under the direct control of the Chief Secretary. They called for all these matters to be concluded hastily so that the hop-picking might proceed without interruption. 'We are not children for the board to do as they like with us any longer' they wrote. The signatories included all the senior Kulin men headed by William Barak, Thomas Avoca, Dick Richard and Thomas Bamfield and their younger relatives, both 'pure' and of mixed descent. Once again, the Board's claim that the Coranderrk people were divided by caste and that the 'blacks' would welcome the removal of the ‘half-castes’ was shown to be unfounded.

The unity of the Coranderrk people was confirmed by the police constable at Healesville who informed Page that 'the whole of the Blacks' wish for the removal of Strickland and the reinstatement of Green. Police investigations instigated by Page also confirmed, much to the latter’s frustration, that the letters and petitions that had appeared in the Melbourne press had been composed by the Kulin themselves, and not by Bon, as Page had alleged. As all sides in this war waited for the government’s response to the Board of Enquiry’s report, Page continued to control the movements of the Kulin by arbitrarily issuing or refusing rail passes and work certificates. In January he had reluctantly issued Punch with a pass but refused to issue them to two women who wished

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91 Argus 17 February 1882, p7.
to visit their families; a month later he refused passes to a group who wished to travel from Echuca to Coranderrk.93

In the first week of March 1882 the Board of Enquiry report appeared in three separate and conflicting parts. A brief, joint report, signed by all the members, castigated the BPA but stopped short of recommending the decommissioning of the BPA. Prolonged negotiations between the factions had secured the recommendation that the Coranderrk station be retained. Succinctly, it also recommended the resumption of meat rations, a more regular distribution of clothing and blankets, a reduction in the amount of labour directed to the cultivation of hops, the cessation of the employment of white labour in the hop grounds, the reestablishment of the vegetable gardens to enhance nutrition, the fencing of the station, the erection of two new houses for the elderly residents who still lived in mia-mias, and improved sanitary facilities and drainage. It also called on the Board to provide a small hospital hut and regular medical attendance at the station. This represented a substantial victory for the Kulin. Ominously, however, it made a pointed distinction between 'the full-blooded blacks' who were to be 'maintained in comfort' and whose rations 'ought not to depend upon their work', and those of mixed descent who should be compelled to earn their living. Since many of the oldest Kulin were also of 'full descent' it was a division of labour that fitted easily enough with Kulin protocols.94

In *Addendum A*, Bon and her four allies, including the two local farmers, John Kerr and Duncan McNab, accused the BPA of 'culpable negligence' and 'heartless indifference' to the sick and the dying at Coranderrk, emphasised the attachment of the people to the station, and particularly noted that '[t]he Aborigines deny the existence of jealousy among themselves'. They attributed the unrest at the station solely to the BPA's pressure to close the station and its dismissal of Green. Whereas the joint report recommended that 'both male and female half-castes and quadroons over thirteen years of age should be encouraged to hire themselves out, under proper supervision', Bon's faction added that they should first be trained for suitable employment and that the station was

93 Page to Punch (Thomas Bamfield) 10 January 1882, Page to Station Master Echuca, 28 February 1882; BPA Out Correspondence, AAV B329, Vol.5, item 3.
'still to be considered their home' to which they could come and go as free citizens. The five also tersely castigated the BPA for its refusal to permit the young women kept in the orphan house to go out to service. Finally, they called for the permanent reservation of the land, and for Coranderrk to be removed from the BPA's jurisdiction.95

The remaining commissioners, Cameron, Armstrong, De Pury and Steel, were local men imbued with local prejudices against the Kulin. Steel had once (unsuccessfully) applied for the excision of land from the Coranderrk reserve. In Addendum B they argued that if the 'Blacks' continued to be disaffected after the recommended improvements had been made, the station should be closed and the residents removed to an 'isolated part of the colony, under missionary management'. They lauded the dedicated officers and members of the BPA and branded the Coranderrk residents 'the least capable of all persons in deciding how or by whom the station should be managed'.96 Late in March 1882, with the government still unable to decide between the alternative plans put to it by the enquiry’s factions, the Kulin marched to Melbourne, as they had a year earlier, to urge the Chief Secretary to reinstate Green and defend their right to remain at Coranderrk.97

In April, the BPA issued its response to the accusations aired in the enquiry. Abandoning Strickland, it acknowledged that there had been elements of incompetence at Coranderrk. In a counterattack, it argued that its attempts to instill 'self-discipline and mental exercise' amongst the station’s residents had been consistently undermined by Bon and by the government’s refusal to countenance the closure of the station.

But the response also revealed rifts amongst Board members on the critical issue of whether the Aborigines were to be absorbed into the colony’s citizenry or be walled in until they died out. Curr's continuing dominance at the Board was evident in its public rejection of the plan to hire out 'halfcaste girls'. His abhorrence of ‘miscegenation’ was only partly concealed behind the rationalisation that it was impossible to secure employers who would exercise the necessary disciplines to ensure the 'moral and physical' well-being of the girls. To emphasise the point, the Board reminded the government of Hagenauer's claim that 'we have to receive them back with babies'.

Privately Le Souef and Page pushed for a policy that would see the young Kulin women wedded to white men. As for the 'half-caste' men, the BPA dismissed the complaints of the Kulin that Page arbitrarily issued or withheld work certificates as a disciplinary tool, and now argued that it was only too pleased to release those who 'should do a great deal more towards their own support than they have hitherto done'. To counter the Kulin argument that it was mismanagement by the Board and its superintendents that had made their station a failure, the Board invoked popular prejudice. Disdainful of the Kulin pledge that they could make Coranderrk self-supporting if Green was placed over them again, the Board attacked 'the residue of our tribes [who live] in idleness' and praised its own endeavours 'to induce them gradually to adopt the white man's habits of self-reliance and labor'.

Against the ardent declarations of the Kulin that they would make the station self-supporting and live as free and independent working men and women if released from the interference of the Board, was ranged the whole weight of the politics of race with its inescapable categories of failure and its warrants for governance.

**Provocations and False Moves**

As the report awaited the consideration of the government, the animosity of land-hungry farmers and would-be selectors was unleashed on the Kulin, who occupied some of the most valuable lands in the district. On 5 May 1882, Thomas Punch Bamfield was sentenced to 30 days in prison in connection with an incident that had occurred weeks earlier when he had returned to the station from the local Easter race meeting late in the night, angered, unruly and (although most of the Coranderrk folk were teetotal) inebriated. A scene of domestic uproar ensued before other residents took him in hand, but in the meantime Strickland had summoned the police who assaulted Punch, causing the latter to make verbal threats against Strickland. Earlier in the day Punch had been provoked at the race course by belligerent settlers who coveted the station lands. The extent of local ill-will towards the Kulin was evident in the local newspaper’s report of 97 Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria*, pp.189-90.


the race day affair which denounced the ‘misplaced efforts of a few pseudo philanthropists’ who favoured the idea of keeping a lot of half-castes at public expense at Coranderrk … downtrodden creatures [who] swell[ed] around in store clothes and fancy scarves … among their less fortunate, or at all events, much less well dressed fellow creatures not lucky enough to have a streak of dark blood in their veins.

Strickland seized on the opportunity to undermine his despised wards by detailing, in the local press, the fracas that had ensued when the Coranderrk race goers returned to the station and expressing his hope that ‘no sentimentalism will prevent a wise and paternal Government from moving the blacks to a more remote situation’. In his own defence, Thomas Bamfield penned a letter that accused Strickland of deliberately aggravating local antagonism towards the station residents. When the case came to court, a bench of magistrates that included the pastoralists DePury and Armstrong, both of whom had sat on the Coranderrk Enquiry in opposition to Bon’s faction and the latter himself one of the race day provocateurs, sentenced Bamfield to a month in gaol with hard labour. The third member of the bench, Woolcott, expressed 'his regret that he could not make it longer'.

When, three days later (8 May 1882) Bon, the Reverend Alex Mackie, Dow, Deakin and the Age journalist George Syme (brother to the newspaper’s proprietor David Syme and who had briefly served on the BPA before resigning in protest over Green’s dismissal) combined to persuade Chief Secretary Grant to have him released, the Healesville magistrates jointly resigned their commissions in protest. During the following week large public meetings were held at Healesville, Lilydale, Yarra Flats and Eltham to support the justices and to protest Punch's release. Relations between the Kulin and the settlers on the upper Yarra reached their lowest point with settlers charging that the Kulin seemed to be above the law.

Bamfield’s premature release also called forth a rash of letters to the Melbourne press, correspondence between the BPA and the government and questions in parliament.

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100 Boroondara Standard, 13 April 1882.
102 Boroondara Standard, 11 May 1882.
104 Boroondara Standard 18 May 1882.
from supporters of the Board’s plan to close the station, and from allies of the Coranderrk residents. In a long debate, Dow roundly attacked Page and detailed the Board’s unremitting ten-year campaign to evict the Kulin from land that, he argued, had been promised to the Kulin in perpetuity by Governor Barkly in 1863. The Board and the covetous settlers of Healesville, he said, had deliberately provoked them with a view to forcing their removal and the plan had failed only because they were 'a peculiarly law-abiding people' led by 'one of the quietest and most mildly-disposed blacks' who 'would not hold his tongue under oppression'.

But still convinced, as he had been by Halliday and Curr in 1878, that the Kulin ‘full bloods’ desired the expulsion of their ‘half-caste’ kin, Dow went on to construct an argument that was to fatally undercut the Kulin campaign to retain their homelands in perpetuity. With the moral dues that colonists owed the benighted ‘blacks’ uppermost in his mind, Dow argued that ‘white propagation’ was the cause of ‘disorganization’ at Coranderrk and that if it was allowed to continue it would ‘render necessary the maintenance of the station for ever and ever.’ Dow called on the Board to cease employing white hoppickers at Coranderrk and to pay the Aborigines proper remuneration for doing that work, but he also argued, as he had done in 1878, that ‘the half-castes should be drafted off to service and that the station should be left entirely to the blacks.’ In doing so he reneged on the agreement painstakingly extracted from the full Coranderrk Enquiry Board by Bon, ‘that both male and female half-castes and quadroons over thirteen years of age should be encouraged to hire themselves out, under proper supervision’. But Bon’s addendum, signed by Dow himself, had, as already noted, added the rider to that clause that ‘the station [was] still to be considered their home’.

Now, with his appeal for ‘the blacks’ to ‘be allowed to remain in undisturbed possession’ until they died out and thus finally freed the land for occupation by settlers, Dow in effect switched allegiances, despite his call for Page to cease ‘chivying’ them.

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109 Victoria Parliamentary Debates, 18 May 1882,
Dow’s argument undermined the most fundamental of Kulin imperatives: that Coranderrk should always remain the home of the Kulin and their descendants, regardless of any imposed notion of caste. Had the Kulin been apprised of the content of Dow’s speech, they would have been alarmed at its implications. But neither the Age nor the Argus included that part of his speech in their parliamentary reports.¹¹⁰

More disconcertingly, Bon, Deakin, Berry and Robert Hamilton, now the Presbyterian Co-Moderator of Victoria, now also wavered on this crucial point and followed Dow’s lead in emphasising the moral rights of the ‘black’, but not the ‘half-castes’, to remain at Coranderrk until they passed away. With Berry now on the Opposition benches and the conservative James Grant ensconced as Chief Secretary, there can be little doubt that the dilution of their claims on behalf of the Kulin were the result of pragmatic calculation. As a former Lands Minister, Grant had interfered with the early efforts of the humanitarians on the early Central Board Appointed to Watch Over the Interests of the Aborigines to secure land on which the Kulin could settle. His sympathies towards the settlers on the Upper Yarra were well known. In March, Hamilton appealed to Chief Secretary Grant for the transfer of control over Coranderrk from the Board to his own church’s Mission Committee. Accusing Hagenauer and the Anglicans of being in league with the ‘despotic’ BPA and of dealing with ‘the natives’ as if ‘they are so many head of cattle ... without claim upon the State and the people who have dispossessed them’, Hamilton pressed Grant to permit these ‘last remnants of a dying race which in a few years will have passed from the continent we have colonised' to pass their remaining days in peace.¹¹¹ Late in May, Bon made a similar tactical about-face when she too appealed to Grant not to abandon Coranderrk, on the grounds that the 'pure blacks' were rapidly dying out and should be left to 'spend the last of their days in peace'. 'They will', she wrote, 'soon be all dead and gone, and then but not till then will Coranderrk legitimately revert to the Crown'.¹¹²

Like Dow's speech, Bon’s appeal undermined the central premise of the Coranderrk Kulin that the land by moral right and by promissory entitlement belonged to

¹¹⁰ Age, Argus, 19 May 1882.
¹¹¹ Hamilton memorials to Grant, 23 March 1882 and 24 March 1882; VPRS 1226 Box 4, items 82/W2872, 82/X2934.
¹¹² Bon to Under Secretary Wilson 29 May 1882; VPRS 1226 Box 4, item 82/X4907.
them and their heirs for ever. In framing these increasingly beleaguered appeals as they did, Bon, Hamilton and Dow undermined the most fundamental claims of Aboriginal identity by implying, as the BPA had since the late 1870s, that the mixed-descent sons and daughters of Coranderrk were not Aborigines at all but illegitimate, disinheritable bastards of immoral white men. With these false strokes, all three placed themselves in uncomfortable alliance with the BPA as, over the ensuing two years, it formulated a new Act of Aboriginal disinheriance based upon the imposition of a synthetic division between 'pure' and 'half-caste'.

Barwick has attributed these crucial acts of betrayal to ‘a prurient concern with sexual morality and a punitive notion of retributive justice, a variety of mercenary ambitions and a wholly mistaken fear that the “half-caste” population of the colony was rapidly increasing’ and to ‘a profound fear [amongst Victorian colonists] of inter-racial marriage and the growth of minorities unable to assimilate’. 113 But while that explanation accounts for the attitude of many Victorian colonists, it hardly accounts for the change in the thinking of Bon and Hamilton, and of Bon’s lieutenant Thomas Embling.

In Bon’s words, and in Robert Hamilton’s, there may have been an element of deliberate special pleading. Aware that Grant was a proponent of the Board’s campaign to close the station and that Punch’s imprisonment and subsequent release had unleashed a tumult of antagonism towards the station folk, both may have calculated that an appeal to the pathos of a dying race and to the shame that history would heap upon the colony should the ‘original occupants of the soil’ be hunted from the last acres of their patrimony, would have more leverage than any appeal that invoked the rights of the much maligned ‘half-castes’ of Coranderrk. In addition, sectarian rivalries perhaps dictated that the Presbyterians adopt a pragmatic approach to the popular call to expel the half-castes in order to wrest control of the station away from the Board, and from the Anglicans.

As the concepts of race, nation and citizenship became increasingly interchangeable and indissoluble in the 1880s, anxieties about ‘miscegenation’ also came more to the fore in all the Australian colonies. Whereas witnesses to the 1877 Royal

Commission had mostly struggled to identify an essential difference in the social, intellectual or physical capacity of ‘pure bloods’ and ‘half-castes’, the Coranderrk ‘half-castes’ were now firmly associated in the public mind with rebelliousness and indiscipline, and were considered far too wily to deserve any entitlement beyond those due to any ordinary citizen. And there was the rub for those who defended the rights of the Kulin to occupy Coranderrk in perpetuity: by now the categories and implications of race had become so overdetermining that any show of civil competence confirmed in the public mind the inauthenticity of the ‘half-castes’ claims. Too competent to be considered truly Aboriginal, they thus forfeited the rights to compensation that colonists reserved for natives pure and simple. Bon’s tactical reiteration, in May 1882, of the duty that colonists had to the last remnants of a dying race, carefully couched in the time-honoured language of philanthropy, recuperated a sentiment that she hoped would preserve Kulin claims as before. But now, conceding ground on the divisive arithmetic of race, she left the Kulin politically stranded.

In April 1882, the BPA ambushed moves by Bon and Embling to take up vacant seats on the Aborigines Board by appointing MLA's Cameron and Officer instead. Both men, observed Page, ‘are well acquainted with the peculiarities of Aboriginal management’. The conservative Presbyterian educator Dr Alexander Morrison was also appointed. The appointment of the young liberal, Alfred Deakin, nominally balanced the register, but he attended few meetings. To forestall public criticism of the Board's operations, a list of improvements were decided upon, but Curr continued to voice his dissent against the expenditure of funds on a station he was adamant should be closed.

In August the Board summoned all its station managers to a conference at which the principal items on the agenda were the amendment of the Aborigines Act of 1869 to enhance the Board's control over its wards, and once again, the reconsideration of the boarding out of the station children. Under pressure from Bon, who continued to advocate for the release of the young women virtually imprisoned in the station boarding house, the government had requested the BPA to reconsider its refusal to allow 'girls from the station to go out to service'. Alone amongst Board members in opposing the

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114 Ibid. BPA Minutes 12 July 1882. Anderson to Grant, 10 April 1882; VPRS 1226 Box 4, item 82/W3548.
boarding out of the station girls, Curr was yet able to convince the station superintendents of the dangers of sending them out as domestic servants and of ‘dispersing’ the adult ‘half-castes’. The stations, said the managers, were 'the proper and most suitable homes' for the close observation, instruction and 'control' of Aboriginal children, and the 'half-castes' were not yet equipped for the freedom the Board's preferred policy would entail. In 'exceptional cases orphanages might be resorted to' as a disciplinary measure. The managers agreed with Curr that 'it is most undesirable to hire out girls' who were 'as a rule ... not able to protect themselves from the advances of a class of white men into whose way their duties may throw them'. There were, in any case, Hagenauer argued, 'not eight or ten girls to be found in the whole colony of Victoria fit to be hired out'. The managers, confident that their own flocks were distinctly more malleable than the troublesome people at Coranderrk, affirmed the principle of training ‘the half-caste to independence’ with a view to their merger into the general population of the colony, safe in the knowledge that on their own stations, with few of mixed descent, it was a distant eventuality. They moved to reinforce their own authority against outside interference by banning 'ex-parte representations', by curtailing the right of Aborigines to defend themselves in court against arbitrary orders, and by affirming that those who left the stations without written permission should be subject to arrest. Goodall, a protégé of Green, recently appointed to replace the despised Strickland at Coranderrk, and sympathetic to the aspirations of the Kulin, was alone in opposing a set of motions which further reduced the civil rights of the colony’s Aborigines.117

The day after these motions were published in the Argus, a letter appeared from ten Coranderrk Kulin who 'complained [that] treatment they were about to receive from the Board under some imaginary new rules would make slaves of them'.118 Cameron was authorised, with no hint of irony, to visit the station and tell them that their fears were 'without foundation' and that 'the Board in future would not tolerate such letters'.119 Compounding their decline from citizens to asylum inmates, Curr suggested that prizes

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115 BPA Minutes 2 August 1882.
116 Ibid.
117 Full report of the Managers' Conference in Argus 19 August 1882, p.10.
118 Argus 31 August 1882
119 BPA Minutes 6 September 1882.
be offered at each station for 'the cleanest and best kept' cottage, garden, fence, for the 'best cared for and cleanest children' and for the 'most proficient scholar'.

Despite persistent appeals from the Chief Secretary at Bon's urging, and despite the opposition of the majority at the Board, Curr continued to block the hiring out of girls, but conceded the apprenticing of 'quadroon' and 'half-caste youths' and agreed that 'half-caste married couples should be encouraged to go out to service'. He remained adamant, however, that the ‘half-caste’ girls should be prevented from leaving the stations, for it was they who would be the conduit for the moral and racial decay of the settler population.

In her efforts to rally Board members to take up the girls’ cause against Curr, Bon now found herself outmanoeuvred and in misalliance with those at the Board who sought to exile the ‘half-castes’ from Coranderrk. For its part, during 1883, with the influential new member Dr Morrisson, Head Master of Melbourne’s Scotch College, emerging as a challenger to Curr, the Board once again invoked the language of paternalism and philanthropy. If one did not look too hard, policies that were intended to eradicate the Aboriginal presence by breaking down their generational continuities and boarding out their children with a view to breeding them out, looked very much like the policies of voluntary inclusion advanced by Bon – policies that represented a continuation of now well-established Kulin relations with the settler economy.

**A Dispute and a Resolution**

As Barwick has recounted in detail, in February 1883 a rift developed between the working men at Coranderrk. While there were some who still held out for the return of Green, others were pleased enough with Goodall, who like Green, worked along side them and regarded them with respect. A dispute arose when Punch Bamfield’s call to his fellows to down tools in opposition to the introduction of piece rates for work done in the hop gardens was ignored by the majority. Left alone the Kulin would have sorted the matter out themselves - as the stalwart Kulin ally Dr. Thomas Embling told Berry: 'The blacks have a rigid code of laws by which they settle such disputes between themselves' -

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120 BPA Minutes 30 August 1882.
121 BPA Minutes 7 February 1883, 7 March 1883, 4 April 1883.
but Goodall parried by withholding rations from Punch and his family.\textsuperscript{122} Punch, in turn, determined to leave the station to seek work at higher rates and was denied a certificate by Goodall. Alerted to the dispute, Page seized the opportunity to raise again the old fabrication of ‘strife between the Blacks and half-castes’ and requested an Order-in-Council to have Punch banished to Lake Tyers station, and, without notice, sent in police to remove him physically.\textsuperscript{123}

The Kulin rallied to Bamfield’s defence, with a delegation of 21 men and women proceeding to Melbourne early in April (1883) to put their case before Berry, once again in government.\textsuperscript{124} During the interview, Alfred Morgan insisted that the dispute between Punch and the other men had nothing to do with any European notion of caste and that the right to expel troublemakers should be reserved to the station residents themselves, to be decided in the customary manner. They had already asked Punch 'to go and not be rebellious', but were incensed that instead of being allowed to ‘leave [the station] as any other gentleman ought to leave it’ to seek work 'on his own “hook” Punch had now been incarcerated at Lake Tyers, in an unknown country. To Morgan's double-edged plea: 'Has not any man a right to earn an honest living if he wishes to do so?', directed perhaps as much at Punch Bamfield as at Berry, the latter responded that 'most people think’ that many of those at Coranderrk, and especially the ‘half-castes who ‘should be more fit than the others', could well live independently of the state. It was left to Goodall to counter that the Coranderrk workers, both ‘full bloods’ and ‘half-castes’, ‘earned all that was given them [and] were not burdens on the state'.\textsuperscript{125}

Berry's assumption that the 'half-castes' were more fit than the 'blacks', an assumption not born out by the death roll, reflected the extent to which social evolutionist dogma underwrote the growing resentment in the colony against these troublesome and audacious people. Berry, a paternalistic but well-intentioned liberal, agreed with Alfred Morgan that the 1869 Act, which had reduced the Aborigines of Victoria to wards and inmates, should be repealed and the Board abolished. But even Berry was persuaded that there was a fundamental, racially-determined difference of mental and physical capacity

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Argus}, 9 April 1883. ‘Trouble at Coranderrk’.
\textsuperscript{123} BPA Minutes 7 March 1883, \textit{Argus} 12 April 1883
\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Argus} 9 April 1883
\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Argus} and \textit{Age} 9 April 1883.
between the ‘blacks’ and the ‘half-castes’. Compared to the racially superior whites, both were child-like and had to be indulged, but while the ‘blacks’ should be left on their stations to die out undisturbed, he agreed with the popular view, and that of most of the station managers, that the ‘half-castes’ were almost white and should be made to earn their own living.\footnote{Argus 9 April 1883. Station managers conference report, Argus, 19 August 1882.}

For now, however, Berry agreed to rescind the order for Punch’s expulsion and instructed superintendent Goodall ‘in future to extend to the blacks the privilege of having a voice in the fate of any erring brother, to give them self-government to some extent’. If the delegates were alarmed as Berry shuttled between supporting the rights of all the Coranderrk people, including the young women in the dormitory, to voluntarily seek off-station work, and allying himself with the increasingly popular push for the forcible expulsion of the ‘half-castes’, they left the interview confident that, with his support, their rights to self-determination might finally be restored.

The members of the Board, including those recently appointed by the conservative Grant, also interpreted Berry’s interview with the Kulin delegation and the rescission of the expulsion order as a ‘studied insult’ with ‘a tendency to destroy all order and discipline’.\footnote{BPA Minutes 11 April 1883, opinion of Alexander Morrison} The offended Board demanded an apology and restitution from Berry and in parliament Cameron denounced Berry’s alliance with the Kulin as one likely to turn Coranderrk into as ‘a breeding station’ at which ‘male blacks’ left their wives and children as they ‘roam about the country’.\footnote{Parliamentary report in Argus, 12 April 1883.} Curr was so angered by Berry’s undermining of the Board’s authority in the matter of Punch’s expulsion that he resigned shortly afterwards.\footnote{Curr resigned 1 August 1883, BPA Minutes.}

As Morgan argued, the dispute between Punch and the other men was such as might occur in any large group of workers, unleashed, in this case, by the Board’s decision to pay piece rates that favoured the young and healthy over the debilitated. But Punch’s expulsion, subsequently enforced by the Coranderrk council, released latent animosities that were inevitably present, Diane Barwick argues, in a community of
related but traditionally independent clans forced together by colonial contingencies.\textsuperscript{130} While the disputes had nothing to do with caste, a fact later attested to by superintendent Goodall,\textsuperscript{131} they nevertheless fuelled the Board’s campaign to expel the ‘half-castes’. In addition, Thomas Embling and Anne Bon, the latter of whom considered herself honour-bound to support Bamfield, unwittingly encouraged the continuation of the dispute by urging Bamfield’s allies, Jenny Rowan and Annie Manton, to complain to the Board about Goodall’s treatment of them.\textsuperscript{132} In doing so, Bon and Embling alienated themselves from some of the Kulin and from this point onwards Bon focused her activities on campaigning for the release of the senior dormitory girls to ‘service’.\textsuperscript{133} In doing so, she unintentionally lent her support to the Board’s determination to forcibly expel the ‘half-castes’.

By 1884, Berry too was resolved that ‘the half-castes should be made to shift for themselves’. Campaigning in the Healesville district in March, he expressed his support for the Board’s revived plan to ‘merge’ the ‘half-castes’ and to send the girls to service, and observed that the station had taken on ‘too much the appearance of permanency’.\textsuperscript{134}

When the new Board member Dr. Alexander Morrison visited Coranderrk late in January 1884, to investigate ‘the charges made against Mr. Goodall by the two or three discontents’, he dismissed them as ‘puerile’. The ‘inmates’, wrote Morrison, ‘were pampered and ... too much was done for them so much so ... as to destroy all self reliance and necessity for exertion’. ‘I was struck with the large number of half-castes', reported Morrison,

\begin{quote}
many of them nearly white, and it occurred to me that the question may have to be reconsidered whether it is desirable to continue such in the aboriginal station at the expense of the state.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

On the 5\textsuperscript{th} March, 1884, after he had consulted with a former Board Secretary MacBain, and with Hagenauer, John Green and the Healesville magistrate and pastoralist De Pury, Morrison moved, and the Board resolved, that station managers be again asked to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} Barwick, \textit{Rebellion at Coranderrk} (1998) pp.262-8.
\item \textsuperscript{131} \textit{Argus} 9 January 1884
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Thomas Dunolly memorial to Board, 21 January 1884, criticising Bon and Embling in \textit{Argus}, 9 February 1884, p.7. Also see \textit{Argus}, 9 January 1884, ‘Coranderrk Aboriginal Station’.
\item \textsuperscript{134} \textit{The Evelyn Observer}, 7 March 1884.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Morrison to Page 28 January 1884; AAV B313,Box 13, item 213, letter 6-7A. \textit{Argus} 9 February 1884
\end{itemize}
consider the ‘general effect on the morals and welfare of the half-castes’ of the
‘immediate adoption of the policy advocated by the Board in June 1881,

viz: that able-bodied half-castes capable of earning their own living should not be kept at the
Aboriginal Stations but should be merged as soon as practicable in the general population of the
Colony. 136

In deference to the station managers’ apprehensions that the moral training instilled into
their dormitory girls would fail when they met the ‘advances of white men’ when hired
out as servants, the managers were instructed to furnish the Board with statistics on the
number of ‘half-caste or Aboriginal boys capable of being apprenticed or boarded out’,
but not girls. 137 Aware that Berry favoured a policy of persuading the ‘half-castes’ to
merge with the white community, rather than one couched in the language of enforced
exile, in April the Board again considered the merits of ‘merging the native with the white
population’ and of ‘allowing those natives who desired to do so to quit the reserves with
their wives and children to seek a livelihood independently of the protection board’. 138
Morrison’s motion, in fact, called for a policy that allowed ‘such pure Aborigines as can
be merged with the white population’ to also quit the stations, but when the detailed
scheme for the enactment of the policy, prepared by Page and Hagenauer, was presented
at the next meeting, the scheme was directed at ‘half-castes’ alone, and any semblance of
choice had been extracted from the plan. 139 In addition, the plan now reprised Page and
Le Souef’s original intention to enforce the hiring out to service of the dormitory girls as
well. Amidst the confusions and manoeuvrings of philanthropists, paternalists and ardent
racialists, the demand of the Kulin that they be allowed to live as free and independent
men and women at Coranderrk was repudiated.

On the 7 May, 1884, Morrison’s scheme for the dispersal of the Aborigines of
Victoria was adopted unanimously by the Board. From the first of January, 1885, all
'able-bodied half-castes ... under the age of thirty-five years' were to be instructed 'to look
for employment, or seek settlement elsewhere'. They were to have access to rations for
three years, to blankets for seven, and to be assisted to select land. The outer stations

136 Alexander Morrison Diary, 17 January 1884, 1 March 1884, 19 April 1884, 22 April 1884, Melbourne
University Archives. BPA Minutes, 5 March 1884.
137 BPA Minutes 18 August 1882, Report of Manager’s Conference. BPA Minutes 5 March 1884.
138 Argus ‘Aborigines Board’ report 10 April 1884
139 BPA Minutes 9 April 1884.
were little affected because they had few ‘half-castes’ amongst their populations, but for Coranderrk it sounded a death knell. While the Board presented the policy as the culmination of the civilising mission begun in 1860, such that the Aborigines were henceforth to ‘be accounted in all respects free and equal citizens of the colony’, from the Kulin perspective it signalled the dispersal of their clans, the incarceration of their children, and predicted their ultimate dispossession from the last of their ancestral homelands. The motion endorsed the merging of the 'half-castes', the apprenticing or licensing to service of youths and girls above the age of thirteen years, and the removal of younger children, arbitrarily declared to be orphaned or neglected, to orphanages and industrial schools from where they would be boarded out as servants in order that from the earliest period of their recollections they may be accustomed to regard themselves as members of the community at large, and may not be constrained to carry with them through life the impressions of the indolent habits and manners of their original black friends.

In the chilling words of the motion itself, the new order would bring 'finality' (the italicised emphasis is in the original) to the problem of the Aboriginal presence in the colony and erase any further claims on the colony’s moral sentiments, its territory, or on its coffers. A week later the plan was approved by Berry. As the Board noted, the new policy would require the repeal of the 1869 Act which had deemed those of mixed descent and their children, to be ‘Aboriginals’. Now they were to be summarily reclassified as white.

Henceforth, only ‘full bloods’ would be considered ‘Aboriginal’. Those whom Howitt (now a regular contributor of papers to Huxley’s Anthropological Institute) reified as the most primitive race of mankind, were to be maintained on the stations until they passed into extinction. Their kin, newly promoted on the racial scale, were to be exiled from their homes and prevented from having social congress with ‘full blood’ to inhibit the reproduction of ‘Aborigines’. Through deliberate social engineering, those already of ‘caste’ were to be made progressively whiter with each generation until they were indistinguishable from the settler population. This utilitarian bifurcation of the Kulin clans – for the new scheme was principally directed at the Coranderrk rebels – wedded

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140 BPA Minutes 13 May 1884.
141 Ibid. Age 15 May 1884.
142 Age, 15 May 1884; Report of BPA delegation to Berry.
the comfortable rhetoric of liberal philanthropy with the most modern scientific formulations of social evolutionist anthropology. In particular, Topinard’s revival of the theory that the Australians had Caucasian origins and could be restored to whiteness by the judicious control of their ‘breeding’ had quietly taken root in colonial consciousness. It was a theory thoroughly commensurate with local political expediency. Finally, Page and the envious settlers on the upper Yarra had succeeded in bringing down the rebels.

It was not that Topinard’s thesis was cited by the Board’s administrators. Their mission required no scientific warrant. Observation alone indicated that the Kulin were, in general, as intelligent, competent and civil as many other colonial citizens, and more forthright in defence of their own rights than most, and envious settlers conceded them no favours. Topinard’s thesis occupied a place in the undercurrent of ideas about Aborigines, any of which could be freely adapted and combined to support predetermined administrative operations. Topinard’s theory about the Caucasian origins of the Australians, heavy with implications about zoological adaptation and breeding regimes, must have been well known to Albert Le Souef, who, as noted, combined membership of the BPA with his roles as Director of the Melbourne Zoo and Secretary of the Acclimatisation Society. But it also offered colonists still troubled by the treatment meted out to the Aborigines since 1835, the consolation that, through the Board, they were restoring these people to their original evolutionary trajectory: to an original Caucasian purity and superiority.

Representing the measure as an act of liberality and largess, the Argus pronounced it time for these ‘semi-whites’ to be released from ‘semi-captivity’. Many were ‘desirous of taking up land, and it should be a pleasure to give these lads a helping hand’. Those ‘idlers’, less eager to leave the stations, ‘should understand that they have to go’. But predicting the continued surveillance to which these ostensibly ‘free citizens’ would continue to be subjected by the Board, and the prejudice they would suffer as ‘white’ settlers reinforced their own privilege against people who were merely ‘non-Aboriginal’, it warned that particular care would have to be taken with people ‘weak in

143 For an indication of how much interest there was in the origins of the Australians and their near neighbours, the Tasmanians, see H.Ling Roth The Aborigines of Tasmania (Halifax, England: F. King & Sons, 1899) pp.221-228. Note Roth’s references to Dravidian connection. See also BPA Minutes, 23
moral character’. Embling wrote to the Argus to challenge the imputation of ‘moral weakness’ and to express his satisfaction that finally the senior girls who had ‘vegetate[d] in detention’ in the Coranderrk dormitory would be permitted to go out to service. Indeed they would, but many who preferred to remain on the station with their kin would be sent away against their will. The full implications of his own abandonment of the Kulin seemed to have escaped Embling.

Berry gave the plan his full approval when the Board presented the new policy on the 14 May, 1884. He assured settlers that the station would soon be theirs as this ‘decreasing race’ died out. He was sure, he told the Board members and the assembled press, that the colony’s ladies would willingly adopt children who were 'so white that it was a shame to keep them [on an Aboriginal station]'. At the interview Hagenauer reminded Berry that there was a precedent for what was proposed, in the Queensland Industrial and Reformatories Schools Act of 1865, which permitted all ‘half-caste’ children to be placed in ‘orphan houses’. He admitted that he had already 'on several occasions strained the law' by sending mixed descent children out to service and on to orphanages when the law designated them as Aborigines and required them to be domiciled with the blacks.

Whiteness and Exclusion
At Coranderrk John Charles, Thomas Dunolly, Robert Wandin and Alfred Davis, all of mixed descent, were 'greatly alarmed' by Berry’s acquiescence to the Board’s plan. They immediately approached Goodall for permission to take their case before the Chief Secretary to request an alteration to the age at which married half-castes should be exiled. 'Some of them', wrote Goodall, 'think that after such a long residence here at this station which they have been taught to look upon as their home, to turn them away would be to

November 1887, for Le Soeuf’s organisation of the Zoological and Acclimatisation Society’s ‘Native Encampment’ at Royal Park as part of the 1888 Centennial Exhibition.
144 Argus 10 May 1884
145 Argus 14 May 1884.
146 Age 14 May 1884, 15 May 1884

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them a great hardship'. On the 27 May, Goodall and the four men confronted Berry in the presence of Board members Officer, Cameron and Morrison, arguing that the measure would cause 'very great hardship'. Berry offered them little reassurance. He endorsed the policy and expressed his determination to carry it through, but argued that there was no intention to administer it 'either harshly or inconsiderately'. In words that echoed Bon’s addendum to the Coranderrk enquiry, Berry assured them in an avuncular manner that the Board would continue to care for them, and they would always be at liberty to return to Coranderrk in times of sickness or misfortune, but 'the able-bodied half-castes must take outside situations ... and earn their own living'. They would, he told them in answer to an anxious question, always have 'preference before outsiders when any work was required to be done at Coranderrk'. Instead of 'the pure blacks [being] elbowed out, and the place turned into a nursery for half-castes', it was, he told them, ‘the bona fide intention of the Board to apply Coranderrk to the legitimate purpose for which it had been established', which was 'to allow the blacks full liberty to roam about as they pleased in accordance with their natural instincts'.

Here, indeed, were primitive men, reinvented in conformity with the templates of social evolutionary anthropology, and free to return to their (fenced in) forests until they died out. The people who inhabited Berry’s imagination little resembled the mission and station educated, Christian, farmers of Coranderrk. For their kin-made-(nearly)-white, and modern, by administrative fiat, and soon to be exiled from their homes and families, there was immediate dispossession. But instead of freedom, they were to be subjected to a continuing regime of intrusive surveillance and regulation as befitted any ‘problem populations’ in the colony.

From Coranderrk, Goodall informed the Board of the distress the proposed measure had caused. ‘The Blacks’ he wrote, interposing again imagined moieties of caste, ‘are … dissatisfied and express regret that they have made so many complaints regarding them and are anxious for them to remain on the station and would if they

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148 Goodall to Page, 19 May 1884; BPA In Letters, AAV B313, Box 13, item 214, letter 30. Argus, 28 May 1884.

149 Argus 28 May 1884.

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thought it would be of any use intercede in their behalf. At the Framlingham station, in the south-west of the colony, the policy was also roundly denounced. Twelve men - all of them 'pure black' noted local guardian James Dawson - insisted that they too would leave the station if their kin were forced off, and that they would not stay 'to be made slaves of'.

Within weeks of Berry's endorsement of the new policy, the dismemberment of Coranderrk began. Amongst those who left the station in the winter of 1884 were Tommy Arnot who returned to Ramahyuck following the death of his daughter (and Punch’s niece) in March and Alfred Davis, who headed north to the lower Murray. Two families immediately left the station to forestall the Board’s removal of their children. Johnny Logan took his small child away despite Goodall's recriminations, and Alick Campbell took his wife and six children to the Murray, back to 'where I was brought up when I was a boy' he told Page, and where, he had been told, there was a school for the children. Though the Board had promised to supply rations of flour, tea, sugar and clothing for three years, Campbell pleaded with Page that what he received was 'barely sufficient for two'. Even with his two eldest children working, Campbell was 'barely making a living'. In November Mrs. Campbell was forced to request rail passes from Page to return to Coranderrk. She was disappointed that the school they had been lured away with was too far for the children to walk to and with a new baby due the hot climate was distressing. She made no mention of the bare subsistence of their diet, too proud perhaps, but it was an ignominious return that would mean the loss of her children.

In June, Embling and Punch willfully bypassed Page by making a private agreement for the former to employ Punch’s son David as a stable hand and personal

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152 Goodall’s Monthly Report to Page, 8 July 1884.
153 Goodall to Page, 30 June 1884 and Alick Campbell to Page, 21 May 1884, both in AAV B313, Box 3, item 214; letters No.42 and 43.
154 Alexander Cormack to Page 19 July 1884; AAV B313, Box 3 item 215, letter 5. Alick Campbell to Page, 18 August 1884; AAV B313 Box 3 item 215, letter 22. Alick (Alex) Campbell to Page, 3 September 1884, AAV B313, item 219, out of date sequence, with letters 15-19.
155 Mrs. Campbell to Page 11 November 1884; Cormack to Page, 10 November 1884; AAV B313 item 217, letters 12 and 13.
servant at 10/- per week at his home in Hawthorn.\textsuperscript{156} In September Page hit back by refusing to issue certificates to Punch and '3 or 4 others' to go shearing at Bon's Wappan Station. With able workers already departing, and with Robert Wandin gravely ill with rheumatic fever and John Charles in hospital following a shooting accident, Page insisted that their labour was required on the station.\textsuperscript{157} Ironically, Page's victory in the hard-fought campaign to expel the 'half-castes' had reduced the earnings that the Board syphoned from the Coranderrk hop plantation.

By November 1884, when the Board announced, with unintended irony, that Coranderrk had finally been 'permanently reserved' in line with Berry's promise to the 'blacks' that he would provide them with land on which to live out the last of their days, only nine children remained under the control of Miss Persse in the dormitory, where as many as forty-five had once dwelt. Dormitory girls were in demand as servants. One Alice Bruce of Cathkin Station, Molesworth, had heard that the Board 'now wish to have the half-castes at Coranderrk provided with suitable homes' and applied to have Mary Ann McLellan, for whose freedom Bon had publicly campaigned, as her domestic servant, guaranteeing to provide her with 'a good and comfortable home and be thoroughly trained in every branch of work'.\textsuperscript{158} In practice, girls who were sent out to service often experienced harsh treatment. Sophia Dedrich, once the trusted and respected servant of the Rev. Robert Hamilton, wrote to Page in September 1884 to request him to intercede with her new employer 'and get my letter for me from Mrs. Brown as she has not right with my letters'.\textsuperscript{159} Sophie had become pregnant and died in December after a difficult confinement at the Lying In Hospital in Flemington. Sophie expressed a dying wish for herself and the baby to be returned to the station but instead

\textsuperscript{156} Goodall to Page 20 June 1884; AAV B313 item 214, letters and attachments 33, 33A and 34
\textsuperscript{157} Shaw to Page, 13 September 1884; AAV B313 item 216 letter 26. Page to Cameron, 17 September 1884; B313 item 216 letter 27. Cameron to Page, 17 September 1884; B313 item 216, letter 28. Under Secretary Wilson to Page, 10 October 1884, AAV B313 item 217 letter 5.
\textsuperscript{158} Alice Bruce to Page, 18 September 1884; B313 item 216 letter 30.
\textsuperscript{159} Sophia Dedrich to Page, 22 September 1884; B313 item 216 letter 31.
the child was sent to the Industrial School.\textsuperscript{160} Other children from both the dormitory and the village had left with their exiled parents.\textsuperscript{161}

As a result of the new policy, Aborigines across the colony were on the move, so many in fact that the station master at Echuca suggested that the Board supply him with passes to be used at his own discretion.\textsuperscript{162} Louisa and Jack Briggs, she once the matron of the dormitory before Duffy called for her to be replaced by a ‘white woman’ and he acknowledged as the most valuable worker at Coranderrk, headed for the NSW station at Maloga, as did Robert Wandin. Leonard Kerr and his family and young William Briggs found work at Deniliquin.\textsuperscript{163} In previous years those who went shearing had most often left their wives and children behind but now the Board insisted that they either take them along or send back money for their support, at rates that left them with little or nothing to set up independently.\textsuperscript{164} The children who remained on the station were to be confined in the dormitory from where the domineering Mrs. Goodall, newly married and unhappily domiciled at the station, poached them for her house servants. Early in 1885 she had Mary Briggs, nine years of age, and Sarah Edmond, 13, as her kitchen hands, Mary Ann McLellan to do her laundry and boys to clean the boots and chop firewood. It was known to all that Mrs. Goodall repeatedly flogged the children under her 'care'.\textsuperscript{165}

In May 1885, not for the first time, Louisa Briggs was refused permission to remove her children from the dormitory, with Page insisting that they be kept there ‘for their benefit’.\textsuperscript{166} Later, in December 1885, young Mary Briggs, the 9 year old daughter of the late George Briggs, was requested for service by W.F. Beggs for his station near Beaufort.\textsuperscript{167} She being too young, her cousin Caroline, aged 13, was sent in her stead.

\textsuperscript{160} Jessie Ferguson to Page, 3 December 1884 and following undated letter; B313 item 218, letters 26 and 27. Page to Ferguson, 9 December 1884; ibid. letter 28. Ferguson to Page 9 December 1884; ibid. letter 29.
\textsuperscript{161} Goodall to Page, 2 October 1884; B313 item 217 letter 2. BPA Minutes 1 October 1884, 5 November 1884. School Inspector’s Report, 11 December 1884; B313 item 218 letters 31-32.
\textsuperscript{162} Mathews to Page, 6 September 1884; B313 item 216 letter 13
\textsuperscript{163} William Briggs to Page, 5 March 1885; B313 item 219 letter 7.
\textsuperscript{164} BPA Minutes 3 September 1884. Goodall to Page, 10 December 1884; B313 item 218, letter 24. Page to Goodall, 4 May 1885; Page to Shaw 16 October 1885; Board Out Correspondence, B329 Vol.6 item 4 (reel 5).
\textsuperscript{165} Persse to Page, n.d. probably November 1884; B313, item 218, letter 4.
\textsuperscript{166} Page to L. Briggs, 11 May 1885; B329, Vol.6, item 4, (reel5). Permission had also been refused in July 1883. See Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, ed., \textit{Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867-1926} (Melbourne: The History Department, The University of Melbourne., 2002),p.27.
\textsuperscript{167} Crawford Pascoe, of the Industrial and Reformatory Schools Department, to Page, 10 December 1885; B313, item 219, letter 30.
and there she was joined by her brother William. One month later, William wrote to Page to request that Caroline, now ill, be put under the care of her mother, Louisa Briggs, at Echuca. William Briggs’ letter to Page records the determination felt by those who left the stations to be free of the Board and the shame he felt in having to appeal for alms. ‘I am’, he wrote,

quite ashamed to ask but it is a matter of necessity....I am going to get a sort of home for Mother and Sisters up here and would you try and assist me. I mean could they get like their rations just for Mother, Caroline and Polly if all well because I shall always be with Mr. Beggs.\textsuperscript{168}

Page refused William’s request for rations and refused to allow Louisa Briggs and her sick child to return to Coranderrk. Despite the Board's published intention to supply those cast out from the station with rations, clothing, blankets and other necessary assistance to set up independently, Page now castigated the Briggs. ‘If it is done in one case it would have to be done in other cases’, he wrote. ‘You can well imagine what a mess everything would (become?) if all outlying Aborigines were supplied with rations whenever they went away from the stations’.\textsuperscript{169}

Those who left in search of work were provided with the most meagre of rations and rail passes and little else.\textsuperscript{170} Frequently this resulted in destitution. While James Dawson's request for permission to supply those on the move through the western district with rations was refused, lest it also encourage the ‘blacks’ to leave, Page was determined that the ‘half-castes’ should become independent of the Board as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{171} ‘If these half-castes think they have always a place to go to when they feel lazy they will never settle down to work’, he wrote to the missionary Daniel Matthews in July 1885, to whose station at Maloga, on the NSW side of the Murray River, many repaired as they struggled to survive without resources or income.\textsuperscript{172} Thomas Bamfield’s suggestion that those at Wangaratta should have a house supplied for them was rejected, as was the request of Frederick Stewart for supplies to set himself up on his new selection.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{168} William Briggs to Page, 25 January 1886; B313, item 220, letter 2.  
\textsuperscript{169} Page to Louisa Briggs, 2 March 1886; B329, Vol.6, item 4 (reel 5).  
\textsuperscript{170} Page to Goodall, 19 June 1885; B329 Vol.6, item 4 (reel 5).  
\textsuperscript{171} Page to Dawson, 3 July 1885; B329 ibid. BPA Minutes 1 July 1885  
\textsuperscript{172} Page to Matthews, 3 July 1885; B329 ibid.  
\textsuperscript{173} BPA Minutes 6 May 1885
latter was instructed that if he was destitute he could return his children to the station dormitory. 174

By the middle of 1885 there were too few able-bodied folk at Coranderrk to run the station, as Goodall complained when Sir William Clarke offered, through the Chief Secretary, to employ Sam Rowan and his wife, Jeannie. Goodall's concerns, however, were overruled by Berry who insisted that the clearing of the station must proceed. 175 Goodall was ordered to cut costs. When Thomas Bamfield requested eggs and butter for his consumptive family in August he was refused. By September both his son and daughter were dead. 176 A month later Bamfield applied for passes to take his wife and remaining children to Mrs. Bon's for the shearing. A contrite Page issued the certificates and the family left for the Goulburn Valley where, in January, Mrs. Eliza Bamfield died of the same consumptive lung disease. 177 When the members of the Board visited the station in November 1885 they noted that the hop grounds looked 'backward' and Cameron lamented that the men had been 'granted permission to go'. 178 Only fifteen able-bodied men now remained at the station, the lowest number in the history of the station. 179

For those classified as 'Black', Captain Page had other plans. Thomas Green, who had left Lake Condah without a certificate, was ordered to return. When he refused, steps were to be taken to seize his children. Such harsh enforcement of the new directives, not yet sanctioned by law, prompted Berry to counsel moderation. Belatedly he had recognized the vindictiveness of Page’s administration and the importance the ‘Aborigines’ attached to the continued occupation of the station by all their kin. He directed Page and the BPA to show some ‘indulgence’ towards Green and suggested that he and other ‘blacks’ be allowed to leave the stations ‘to which they nominally belonged and that if with a little help they can get their own living outside it would be the wisest

174 Page to Goodall, 4 May 1885; B329, Vol.6, item 4 (reel 5).
175 Berry to BPA in BPA Minutes 28/5/85
176 Page to Goodall, 8 August 1885; Page to Chief Secretary, 12 September 1885; B329, Vol.6, item 4 (reel 5).
177 Page to Shaw, 16 October 1885; Page to Chief Secretary, 7 January 1886; B329, ibid.; E.H.Cameron to Page, 13 October 1885, B313, item 219, letter 26.
178 BPA Minutes 1 December 1885
policy to give them help than to enforce their return’. But Page would have none of it, and Berry submissively signed an order-in-council to intern Green.\textsuperscript{180}

While the Board was determined to reduce the ‘Aboriginal’ population of the colony by classifying the ‘half-castes’ as white, it was not averse to exploiting those who remained to garner imperial kudos. In November 1885 the Board sent two boys from Ramahyuck to London for exhibition at the Indian and Colonial Exhibition.\textsuperscript{181} In March 1886 Page and Le Souef also choreographed a life-size wax panorama of a native camp for which Shaw, who had recently replaced Goodall as superintendent at Coranderrk, was instructed to send down ‘pure blacks and good samples …: three \textit{pure} black men, two women and small child (infant) and a boy about 13 years of age to be in town on Saturday evening’. The figures were arrayed with baskets, weapons, bark strips for the ‘wurley’, a possum and a kangaroo rat, before being photographed.\textsuperscript{182}

In the same month, March 1886, the Kulin came to Melbourne of their own volition to formally farewell the retiring Berry, who had gazetted Coranderrk as a ‘permanent reserve’ late in 1884, and had defended them, a little at least, against the Board.\textsuperscript{183} At the time of his retirement, he had delayed in putting the Board's proposed amendment to the 1869 Act to the parliament, and the Kulin perhaps still hoped that the dissolution of their community might be avoided. Nine Kulin men - Berry had declined to receive women - presented him with gifts and a formal address under their customary names: Barak, Bertdrak (Bamfield), Wyerdermn (Dick Richards), Katawarmin, Worteelum, Ngiaqueon, Punagoorn, Triabil, and Derranil.\textsuperscript{184}

Attired in traditional dress, these men were \textit{like} the anthropologists’ imagining of the near-extinct primitive, like those in the panorama that Le Souef and Page had prepared for the Indian and Colonial Exhibition, yet not. These were men practiced in oratory and masters of carefully crafted symbolics and theirs was a performance that

\textsuperscript{180} BPA Minutes, 12 August 1885, 8 September 1885, 18 November 1885. Page to T. Green 28 August 1885; B329, Vol.6, item 4 (reel 5).
\textsuperscript{182} Page to Shaw, 12 November 1885; Page to (illegible), 22or 23 March 1886; B329, Vol.6, item 4 (reel 5). \textit{Illustrated Australian News} 3 March 1886, p.42 and photograph.
\textsuperscript{183} BPA Minutes, 5 November 1884
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Argus}, 25 March 1886; Barwick, \textit{Rebellion at Coranderrk}(1998), index.
deliberately signified Aboriginal presence and continuity. Barak thanked Berry for giving 'us the land for our own as long as we live'. Mrs. Bon, who accompanied this diplomatic embassy assembled to send a departing dignitary ‘home’, drew Berry’s attention to the similarity of this meeting, which, in its diplomatic formality restated the priority of Aboriginal right, and that which had addressed Governor Barkly in May 1863. There and then she called upon Alfred Deakin, the new Chief Secretary, to relieve Coranderrk from the onerous rule of the Board.  

But Deakin was unmoved. On 8 June 1886 Deakin introduced a Bill drawn up by the Board into the parliament, for its first reading. There it sat until December. The delay allowed time for Aboriginal communities to regroup and there was much movement between stations. Cameron, the local member for Healesville and now Vice Chairman of the Board, repimanded Page for being too ready to issue passes because, ‘too much visiting from station to station’ led to ‘disturbance and prevent[ed] any discipline or contentment’. He refused rail passes to Punch's ally John Friday and his wife, and to Caroline Morgan and Louisa Briggs who wished to return to Coranderrk. In October, a Melbourne tourist guide editor was given short shrift when he requested information for 'intending visitors to Coranderrk'. Page, only too aware that the Kulin might take the opportunity to disabuse white visitors of any illusions about their situation, indicated that 'visitors [were] … not invited'.

On 15 December, on the last day of sitting for the year, The Aborigines Protection Law Amendment Bill passed through both Houses with almost no debate. Where the 1869 Act had defined all those of mixed descent as 'Aboriginal', now those of ‘castes’ under thirty-five years of age were officially redefined into a liminal category which designated them neither Aboriginal nor fully white, and exiled from the stations in the hope that they 'would gradually cease to be a burthen upon the State'. People who had worked without pay for years and whose best efforts to make themselves into a
community of self-sufficient citizens had been stymied by Board interference and maladministration, were now to be cast out from their homes without resources or capital and divided from their kin. The Act provided for ‘half-caste infants’ to be ‘licensed or apprenticed’ to anyone who applied to the Board, and for ‘half-caste orphans’ to be transferred to institutions for neglected children. In neither case was a statutory age for their removal specified.  

Deakin insisted that it was his government’s intention that the exiles should be considered free men and women, but the legislation ensured that the Board continued to exercise its intrusive powers of surveillance and regulation over their lives. With the majority of the younger generations classed as ‘not Aboriginal’, the nominal extinction of the race was now inevitable. Deakin, clearly uneasy about the implications of the Bill for those whom he had once supported, disingenuously distanced himself from it, saying that it was the Board’s Bill and not his own; but he endorsed the Board’s plan and launched it as 'the unanimous wish of the people of the country with regard to the half-castes'.

A draconian clause which ordered that 'Aborigines' could be exiled without rations or allowances for 'breaches of discipline' was struck out on the second reading. Another to the effect that any ‘half-caste’ found in the company of any Aborigine without due cause could be imprisoned, was also struck out. As would soon become clear, that clause was intended above all to prevent sexual relations that would, as the Rev. Alex Mackie had put it in 1881, ‘increase the number of Aborigines’. With no voice raised in defense of Aboriginal aspiration, the Act became law the following day.

The Board now set about enforcing what rapidly became known as ‘the Half-castes Act’. In March, 1887, the Board ordered station managers to display its provisions in prominent places so that those under 35 years of age 'and not pure black may

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Section 8 of the 1886 Act which is appended to the 23rd. Report of the BPA, 1887, Paper No. 116. Victorian Parliamentary Papers, Session 1887, Vol.2. p.25. A subsequent restatement of the regulations in the Aborigines Act 1890 reiterated that the BPA had absolute control over males 14 years and under and females 18 years and under and could ‘license or apprentice’ children over fourteen years of age as it saw fit. If a child ‘absconded’ from an institution or employer the regulations required the police to be notified so that they could take ‘immediate steps to recover and return the child’. Aborigines Act 1890 Regulations are appended to 26th Report of the BPA, 1890, in Victorian Parliamentary Papers, Session 1890, Vol.4.

thoroughly understand their position'. The Board had already ordered that no new cottages be built there and, despite the continuing high rate of illness and death, that medical attention be withheld except in the direst of emergencies. The stations, after all, were now home only to the members of a dying race and the quicker the process of eradication was brought to an end the better.

By May, Page was able to report that the ‘half-castes’ were 'striking out for themselves'. Some had joined the Shearers Union, and apparently unaffected by its ‘white Australia’ resolution passed the previous year, were shearing at wages the equal of white shearers. At Ramahyuck, Frederick Stewart and George Middleton had selected land, with the Board providing a plough to the former, but most were cut adrift without assistance: 'if ... they are employed by a white man he should find their rations or pay them higher wages', Page instructed Hagenauer. By the end of 1887, some 60 residents from all the stations had been exiled. It was, said the Board, 'the beginning of the end' for the Aborigines of Victoria. Relatively few, however, had left Coranderrk. Belatedly aware that his own actions had reduced the station’s productivity, Page now refused the ‘half-caste’ youths William Edmonds, Abel Terrick and Jack Patten permits to leave the station on the grounds that their labour was needed.

Some of the senior dormitory girls left the station early in 1887. Amongst them were Bella Edmond and Agnes Hamilton, two of the young women whose case Bon had taken up. Despite his earlier support for the merger project, Page was scathing of Bon’s proteges, and of those who hired them with philanthropic intent. 'It is of no use entering into any long engagement.' he told Shaw. 'The girl can go for a month and I think it likely enough that both parties will have had enough of each other. Miss Dixon who

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192 Page to Station Managers, Circular 25 March 1887, Memo 1 April 1887; B329, Vol.6, item 4,(reel 6).
193 BPA Minutes 4 January 1887
195 Page to Hagenauer 7 May 1887; B329, Vol.6, item 4,(reel 6). BPA Minutes 7 September 1887.
197 Ibid. Appendix 1, Shaw's Coranderrk report, dated 1 July 1887. BPA Minutes 6 June 1888
seems a very nice lady does not know the Blacks and Bella will find that work is not so easy away from home'.

October 1887 saw the publication of new regulations for the boarding out and apprenticing of half-caste children and ‘infants’. ‘Orphans’ now came under the jurisdiction of the Department of Neglected Children, but the designation of children as orphans remained, as always, an arbitrary imposition that cut across Kulin kinship obligations. Some were to be sent directly to whites who applied to the Board; others were to be sent to the orphan asylum, pending indenture. Seven year old Billy Rankin was sent to the Melbourne Orphan Asylum in November. At Lake Condah station there was a belated attempt, backed by the station’s missionary superintendent Stahle, to prevent the break up of families entailed in expulsions and in the boarding out of children. Stahle recognised that the intention behind sending the girls out to service was ‘to prevent [them] from marrying after their own choice’ and the eradication of the Aborigines. But the damage was done. The Board simply stated that it was bound by an Act of Parliament and while it 'had no wish to be harsh or to unduly interfere with family ties ... the Act had to be carried out.'

The ethnocidal intent of the new Act is perhaps best summed up by an entry in the Board minutes of 6 June 1888 which recorded the ‘strong’ opinion of those present ‘that intermarrying between blacks and half-castes should be discouraged as much as possible'. In the annual report that year Alex Morrison observed that ‘[a]s many of these girls are almost white, and have been well brought up, they will probably find husbands among the white population’. By 1890, twenty-eight ‘half-caste girls’ had been sent from the Board’s stations to ‘service with approved families’ and ‘six little orphans’ had been transferred to orphanages and industrial schools. By 1891, 224 ‘half-castes’ had ‘merged’ into the settler populace, forty of them from Coranderrk.

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198 Page to Goodall, 11 January 1887; B329, Vol.6, item 4, (reel5). Page to Mrs. Mackie, 10 February 1887; B329, Vol.6, item 4 (reel 6).
199 BPA Minutes 3 March 1887, 12 October 1887
200 BPA Minutes 23 November 1887
202 BPA Minutes, 6 June 1888.
The eradicatory effectiveness of the new regulations can also be measured in the Board’s reporting of Aboriginal deaths in the years following the passage of the Act. In 1890, the Board began to record deaths at the ration depots which had been reconstituted to provision the travelling exiles. In that year four exiles died at depots; the following year, fifteen. Of all the station superintendents, Stahle alone reminded the Board that many were ‘struggling’ to make a living. And for the first time since the late 1850s, the Board recorded an absolute decline in the total population of Aborigines (including the so called ‘half-castes’) in the colony; a decrease of twenty-four in the year 1890, another decrease of sixteen in 1891. Finally, in 1899 the Board abandoned the charade that limited its custodial brief to orphaned or neglected children alone and claimed absolute authority over ‘any Aboriginal child’. It meant that even those who had left the stations in the hope of distancing themselves from the Board – to become ‘white’ as Hagenauer had advised Mrs. Rawlings of Framlingham when she wrote to beg for the return of her daughter from service - could not escape its determination to steal away their children.

In 1891 Howitt delivered the Presidential Address to the Anthropology Section of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. He was, by then, the most eminent anthropologist in the Australian colonies, to Curr’s chagrin, and was much published in the journal of the Anthropological Institute in London. His contributions to that journal included detailed papers on the classificatory system of kinship (1883), Australian religion (1884), initiation rites (1884, 1885), Kurnai and Kulin migrations (1886), songs and songmakers (1887) and on ‘totems’(1889). Desiring to give his listeners at the AAAS a ‘peep … into the inner social life of savages’, Howitt shared with them details of initiation ceremonies unscrupulously gleaned from a network of informants that included William Barak. Through subterfuge, he had persuaded the

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206 Hagenauer to Rawlins, 9 May 1891, in Nelson, Smith, Grimshaw, eds., *Letters From Aboriginal Women*, p.40
Kurnai men at Hagenauer’s Ramahyuck station in Gippsland to perform the sacred Jeraeil ceremony in his presence late in 1886. Like the Board, which suffered the quaint, primitive human specimens that Howitt described, to remain on the stations until they passed beyond time, Howitt had in a sense come to own the people he served up to anthropology. He had appropriated their most sacred ceremonies and filtered their complex social forms through the constraining presuppositions of social evolutionist theory to produce subjects whose evolutionary backwardness fitted hand-in-glove with the European imperial project.

But the trope of the primitive could not accommodate the presence of intelligent, civil and accomplished Aborigines in the Australian colonies. Nor could theories that presupposed an unbreachable chasm of time and physiology between Aborigines and Europeans account for the generations of Aborigines of mixed descent. Undeterred, imperial anthropologists and colonial administrators simply called up another theory and ran the two in tandem, disregarding their evident contradictions.

Topinard’s thesis bridged the chasm between primitive and modern by extracting the race differential from the evolutionary equation. In his scheme, the deficit of time could be caught up in the space of a few generations. Admitting that some might find it ‘improbable or even absurd’ that a race so primitive in physiology and culture could be allied to Europeans, in 1893 Alfred Russel Wallace added his voice to the push to reclassify the Australians as Caucasians, albeit of ‘the lowest and most primitive’ type, lending further scientific weight to the Board’s ‘breeding out’ project. By the early years of the twentieth century this improbable and absurd proposition had achieved the status of orthodoxy. In 1910, William Ramsay Smith, the Permanent Head of the Department of Health of South Australia, declared in an essay in the *Australian Year Book*, that it was ‘established that the aboriginals are a homogeneous race, unmixed in descent [and] of Caucasian stock’ whose undesirable characteristics could be ‘very
quickly “bred out” in crossing with the white”. He called on administrators in all the Commonwealth’s states and territories to adopt the policy. If anthropology had lagged a little in the background while the administrators at the Victorian Board for the Protection of the Aborigines pragmatically brought ‘finality’ to the problem of the Aboriginal presence in the 1880s, the promotion of Topinard’s thesis into scientific orthodoxy in the ensuing decades indicated the extent to which imperial practice and imperial science were locked together in a permissive compact.

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CONCLUSION

‘Yarra, my father’s country’

When, around 1840, the Oxford professor of political economy Herman Merivale defined philanthropy as ‘the fulfilment of certain ceremonies by which the mind relieves itself of the sense of debt’, he succinctly captured the self-conscious reflexiveness of the philanthropic tradition and its role in the colonial project.¹ While the ‘Saints’ of Exeter Hall championed the universal rights of man with evangelical enthusiasm, their rhetoric constituted little more than a performance delivered to a home-based British bourgeois audience. These self-conscious humanitarians traded in the same sort of cant and baubles as had earlier European adventurers: offering up the compensations of an English, Protestant God as restitution for the loss of birthrights in land and autonomy. Across the whole of the nineteenth century philanthropic rhetoric rendered opaque the true motives of the ‘manly’, ungirded adventurism that advanced empire. It was, as W. Morley Punshon put it without hint of irony, around 1880, to the Saints, bearing ‘heroic witness against insolent oppression and wrong’ at home and abroad that Britons owed ‘those wide schemes of philanthropy which have made the name of England blessed’ across the length and breadth of its imperial ‘neighbourhood’. As Britain’s ruling middle classes saw it, theirs was an empire ‘world-wide in its magnificence of charity’.² When they invoked ‘philanthropy’, they basked in their own glorious reflection: white, imperial, condescending, and charitably concerned, but no more, with the welfare of ‘natives’. In truth, like religion in general, the Evangelicals’ catchword ‘philanthropy’ served the cause of empire as ‘anodyne’ and ‘apologist’, and the entrepreneurs who pushed the boundaries of the empire outwards soon tired of its constraining moralism.³

By the time well-intentioned directives had crossed the seas and found their way into the hands of the agents who policed the frontiers of empire, good intentions had, more often than not, been transformed into practical instruments of force, surveillance

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¹ Herman Merivale, Lectures on Colonization and Colonies, Delivered before the University of Oxford in 1839, 1840 and 1841. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), Lecture XVIII, p. 488.
and terror. While Glenelg and Gipps, (the latter chastened by the public dissension that accompanied his determined execution in 1838 of the Myall Creek offenders, in the interests of race-blind justice) issued directives to those down the line to defend the rights of the original occupiers of the continent against unrestrained extension of the frontier, they each in turn conceded to their lieutenants the practical discretion to suspend the rule of law as required. When La Trobe seized on the permissive clause in his own orders from Gipps, to give Major Lettsom’s policing party the authority to employ unlimited means to take Kulin hostages, he acted in accord with the usual modus operandi of empire. If, as Homi Bhabha argues, the warrants on colonial terror did not issue from the Colonial Office with deliberate hypocrisy, those who pronounced policies in the honeyed language of philanthropy and charity could be assured that the manly interests of possession and power would ultimately prevail over the more feminine virtues of love of man and protection of the rights of ‘natives’. When governance meant the endless reiteration of empty gestures, Macaulay’s charge of blatant hypocrisy cannot be discounted.

By the end of the 1830s, the Evangelicals were in eclipse and their missionary enthusiasms widely derided. With their decline, ethnological peculiarities and craniological measurements became the principal medium through which ‘natives’ were interpreted to the metropolitan audience. The Australians became the object of particularly intense scientific gaze. No longer lapsed ‘brothers’ to be redeemed again by the Word of God, under scientific scrutiny they were first rapidly reconfigured as lesser ‘types’ of mankind, culturally pre-empted, relative and subordinate creatures who had not attained the cultural minima that would have secured them entry to liberalism’s universal union of mankind, and then revealed as lacking in even the ‘anthropological minimum’ that would place them within the same zoological class as Europeans. In 1847, in the face of a growing barrage of spurious, but authoritative, ethnographic evidence that reduced natives around the world, but none more than the Australians, to a state of animal inferiority to Europeans, Prichard admitted the possibility that the ‘types’ of mankind

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might well represent different species. His concession signalled a radical break between the original brief of ethnology – to chart the post-diluvian diaspora and degenerations of the sons of Noah - and the preoccupations of the emerging science of anthropology with race. Prichardian ethnology held the unity of mankind as a basic tenet. It was thus antiracialist in the sense that its categories of discrimination measured the relative occlusion of its objects of study from the word of God. Inseparably allied with the missionary project, ethnologists of Prichard’s ilk believed that the degenerate ‘types’ of mankind could be rehabilitated by missionary endeavour. In contrast, anthropology was from the outset a discipline framed by racialist commitments, and its proponents were preoccupied with identifying the material line that separated the higher races of man from their ‘lesser’ ‘zoological allies’. Strzelecki’s attribution of what he saw as the impending extinction of the Australians to a mysterious inability of Aboriginal women to conceive after ‘connection’ with European men, noted somewhat reticently by Prichard and his colleagues in the late 1840s, was seized upon in the 1860s by anthropologists such as Broca, Nott and Gliddon (and pondered over by Huxley) as the vital proof of human speciation. Despite his declared philanthropic intentions towards the Australians, Strzelecki never gainsaid a theory that brought him considerable repute and underwrote a growing body of scientific opinion that the Australians were less than human.

Huxley, much influenced by the general disdain of Australian settlers for the Aborigines during his naval tour of duty in New South Wales, entertained the possibility that the Australians were a species apart with some degree of relish, but opted instead for their placement on the very lowest rung of the human evolutionary ladder, human but closer in brain size to the highest apes than to the highest forms of mankind. Darwin’s thesis collapsed the perceived need to posit differences of species between the types of mankind. Instead, it opened up vistas of evolutionary time and process in which the empire’s primitives co-existed in a temporal panorama with the most advanced of imperial men, in a sort of tableau that indicated where the higher orders of men had come from and foretold the inevitable disappearance of superseded types from the face of the earth. Social evolutionists led by McLennan, Morgan and Tylor, fed with colonial

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3 Uday S. Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," in Tensions of Empire : Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press,
intelligence, naturalised both the demise of primitive men and women and the colonisation of the globe by Europeans.

The colonial intelligence upon which members of the imperial academies erected such self-serving theories was, however, produced within a global exchange of preconceptions and misconceptions. As I have argued, from the outset colonists struggled to interpret Aboriginal practices. Missionary William Watson, primed to see his wards as godless savages habituated to the most inhuman acts imaginable, misinterpreted traditional post-natal and mortuary practices and, with an array of evidence that pointed to other explanations, attributed the diminution in the number of live births amongst the women who sought succour at his outpost, to willful acts of infanticide. That desperate women, caught up in the conflagration of violence, venereal disease and dispossession that marked the progress of the frontier, would have performed infanticide on diseased or deformed newborns is likely, and we would be naïve to discount it. But Watson’s diary, closely read, describes events that are clearly other than maternal infanticide. Indeed, Watson’s diary illustrates how colonists preconceptions led them to project savageries onto the colonised. It is not the discovery of Aboriginal savagery, but its absence, which produces the confusion in the text.

Watson’s confusions, selectively edited by leaders of the Church Missionary Society to imbue them with the authority and certainty required by the missionary cause, wonderfully instance the transformative process identified by Homi Bhabha by which ‘specific colonial temporality and textuality’ is transformed during the passage between ‘enunciation and address’ on the imperial circuit into the warrant for colonisation and governance. Since Malthus, infanticide had become a necessary item to be ticked off by those who observed Aborigines. In a circularity of effect, instantiating infanticide betokened authority and it rapidly gravitated from a contingent response to disaster into a cultural habit that denoted primal savagery. Certainly, if one wanted to market the Aborigines, as did the creative and cash-strapped editor of Buckley’s adventures, tales of infanticide and associated cannibalism were mandatory.

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By the 1860s infanticide was so embedded into the syntax of primitivity that the social evolutionist McLennan promoted it as the animating cause, the first principle, of all of human culture. At one end of the social evolutionists’ continuum of human development sat the Australians, at the other, imperial Europeans. While Morgan rejected the theory, his chief Australian informant, Howitt, could not resist the temptation to milk that margin of authority that knowing about infanticide added. Despite the caution of his confidante Fison and the denials of his own Aboriginal informants, and in spite of his own inability to bear personal witness to any instances during his long association with the Kurnai of East Gippsland, he posited its habitual occurrence on the basis of a few hearsay accounts from his correspondents and on John Morgan’s *Life and Adventures of Buckley*. The colonial phantasms he and others conjured up have, as noted, had a lasting ill-effect on Aboriginal lives.

As W.H.Flower, President of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, observed in 1884, the practical importance of anthropology’s ‘discrimination and description of race characteristics’ for ‘the statesman who would govern successfully’ could ‘scarcely be over-estimated in an empire’. When the governed were as different from the optimal human condition as were the Australians from the English - differences Flower analogised as ‘disease’- good governance might be unable to avert, and thus by implication warranted, ‘the extermination’ of the one by the other. In Greater Britain’s antipodean regions, anthropology’s self-interested racial credos are lastingly implicated in the ‘logic of elimination’.

But just as colonial economic imperatives were frequently at odds with those of the metropolitan powers, constructions of race also responded to local imperatives. Racial categories, in Victoria as elsewhere, were always a product of specific political economies. If the philanthropic gestures of Rusden and McCombie were somewhat empty by 1858, because the surviving Aborigines constituted no threat to colonists’ material welfare, and because such gestures were so patently employed with one eye on the effect they would have ‘at home’, they also reflected the egalitarian tendencies of a colony peopled largely by artisan Dissenters and Irish refugees. By 1858, most of the

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7 Flower, Presidential Address, *Transactions of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1884, pp.492-3
able-bodied Aborigines who survived in the colony were employed in the pastoral industry in the same intermittent fashion as many a white colonist and their labour was in high demand. Discriminations of ‘race’, while always available, were beside the point when labour was everywhere in short supply.

Of more concern to the respectable citizens of Victoria in the second half of the century were questions of moral hygiene. The round-up of Aboriginal children in the 1860s was posited not on the segregation of Aborigines as such but on the construction of a moral cordon around ‘half-caste’ girls whose allegedly embodied moral laxity was underscored by their racial ambiguity. As I have argued, the Board’s racial categorisation of such girls was highly ambiguous, unstable, and circumstantial throughout much of the period from the 1850s to the 1880s. Sometimes it considered them white, sometimes black, sometimes it sought to separate them from white men, sometimes from black. Always, however, it claimed a right of in loco parentis over them in connection with their moral rehabilitation and civil training.

In Green’s time, the celebration of marriage in the Presbyterian mode marked the attainment by the dormitory girls of moral and civil proficiency. In that way, most graduated to join the Kulin on the outer station. For the boys, the end of schooling in the asylum meant inclusion in the labouring fraternity on the station and residence in the single men’s quarters. Until 1869, at least, the Kulin on the outer station were legally free citizens: free to come and go at will, to work for wages and, as Hagenauer realised, free to vote like other citizens in this radically democratic colony. With Green’s assistance, the Coranderrk Kulin almost achieved self-sufficiency at the end of the 1860s, and the station might well have emerged as the star in Brough Smyth’s firmament, as exemplar of what model governance of natives could produce, had the latter not aroused the ire of the Kulin by imposing a new labour regime on them in order to raise the Board’s revenues through the production of hops. In doing so it reversed the advance towards independence and instead imposed failure on the Kulin.

To the members of the Board, including its secretary Brough Smyth, residence in an institution and the receipt of rations identified the Kulin as wards of state, the profit of whose on-station labour ought to be returned to the state’s coffers, and over whom the exercise of invasive and reformatory techniques of surveillance, regimentation and
punishment was requisite. The increasing salience of racial ideologies across the whole of the empire during the 1860s was rehearsed on the local stage by the passage of the 1869 Act which effectively reduced the Aborigines of Victoria from citizens to wards of state. In the view of some at the Board, Coranderrk had never been other than a government training institution for Aborigines wherein they ought to be subjected to a racially inflected version of ‘less eligibility’ and be made to feel the affliction of race.  

That opinion was compounded when E.M.Curr, keenly interested in the ideas of the social evolutionists, was appointed to the Board in 1875. In his mind, ‘race’ spoke of miscreance and an infecting degeneration which inherently invited punitive governance, close surveillance and segregation. When the Kulin responded to the Board’s plan to sell the increasingly valuable Coranderrk lands by conducting an audacious defence of the last of their homelands, the Board’s new strong man equated their rebelliousness with biologically-determined truculence, disorder and incapacity.

Curr and Page clashed over the method by which the Kulin should be dispossessed of Coranderrk, but they were each determined that the rebels be brought to book and the colony’s Aboriginal problem be brought to ‘finality’. While the former favoured the segregation unto extinction of the people and the removal of the whole station to non-Kulin lands on the Murray, the latter favoured the imposition on the Kulin of an alien calculus of ‘caste’ designed to strip them of any moral claim to lands reserved for ‘Aborigines’, and a forcible husbanding of their young women with white men in order to breed them out.

By the early 1880s the Kulin found themselves tangled in a matrix of economic and racialist agendas in which even their erstwhile allies cut across their defence lines. John Dow and Anne Bon both made false moves that fatally undermined the Kulin and gave succour to the Board. Race had become so overdetermined that both misread the causes of antagonism within the Coranderrk community as a matter of caste. Bon’s determined campaign for the release of the dormitory girls to service, while directed against Curr’s segregationist program, threw her, for want any longer of a non-racial third way, into seeming alliance with the Board’s ‘breeding out’ project. When Curr quit the

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Board, opposition in its ranks to the final elimination of the Aborigines by the separation of those considered ‘real’ Aborigines - dying, redundant, deserving of sentimental philanthropy - from those considered as malingerers and imposters, at last collapsed. Between 1884 and 1886 Alexander Morrison, Page, Hagenauer, Berry, and the latter’s liberal successor Alfred Deakin, united in an attempt to bring ‘finality’ to the problem of the Aboriginal presence by instituting policies that accorded with Topinard’s timely and progressive rewriting of the calculus of race. As always, science acted as the hand-maiden of empire. No more philanthropic gesture could be extended to the lesser races than to make them white. That the Board’s deliberate attempt to eradicate the rebellious Kulin failed is due entirely to the unending courage and endurance of the Kulin people.
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