

Family and Country: accounting for fractured connections under colonization in Victoria, Australia

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Introduction

This paper discusses the historical context of the Koori Health Research Database, which reconstitutes the Aboriginal population of Victoria, Australia, under colonisation from the 1840s to 1985. It explores our changing understanding of the data, based on recent enhancement of the data and new research by other scholars, and the light this sheds on the official strategies of alienation from country and family and their demographic consequences. The paper draws new conclusions about the role

of the state and the consequences of its intervention in the process of colonisation and forced assimilation.

When the British colonists arrived in Australia with their convicts and their livestock, the Aboriginal world they encountered embodied one of the longest uninterrupted human cultures on earth. The archeological record stretches back perhaps 70,000 years, during which time over two billion people were born and died in the continent now known as Australia (Smith 2002). The sudden ecological, social and health impact of British settler colonisation from 1788 was catastrophic. Introduced diseases, animals, plants and humans tore traditional societies apart, killed hundreds of thousands and shattered the cornerstones of Aboriginal society and economy: connection to land and connection to kin. Subsequent colonial administrations continued the assault on those connections, but they survived the onslaught, and despite many remaining problems, their resurgence is now everywhere to be seen.

Historical background: colonisation and depopulation

In 1770, when the English navigator James Cook first sighted and mapped the eastern coast of Australia and claimed the land for the British, there were probably around 60,000 people living in what is now the state of Victoria. Along the northern border on the Murray River, they lived in such densities that their health and life expectancy probably matched those of Neolithic farmers; and on the rich volcanic soils of western Victoria they had constructed complex eel farms and substantial stone dwellings. Each language group occupied a defined geographical and ecological niche; each culture was the result of reciprocity between human life and the natural world that had been built over thousands of years (Webb 1995, Lourandos 1997, Smith 2011).

A smallpox epidemic shattered the native population around Sydney Cove some months after the first British colonists landed in Australia in 1788. It has been argued, controversially, that this was a fateful historical co-incidence unrelated to the British arrival, and that smallpox had been moving slowly down the continent from the tropical north, where it was introduced by contact with Indonesian fishermen.

Whatever its origin, before long the epidemic reached the dense populations along the Murray River and then into central and western Victoria (Campbell 2002). With no herd animals and a dispersed human population, Australia had no exposure to infectious diseases, and it is believed that the first impact of smallpox on the immunologically naïve population reduced the Victorian Aboriginal population by half. A second smallpox epidemic swept through eastern Australia in the late 1820s and early 1830s, just before permanent white settlement began in Victoria, and it is believed that the remaining Aboriginal population was cut by half again, so that when European settlement began in 1835, the estimated surviving population was just 15,000 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Victorian Aboriginal Population, 1780-2001 (Smith 2011)

Within a decade, it had fallen to 2000 according to government sources, and where once there had been 60,000 Aborigines, there were now 60,000 white people and six and a half million sheep (Broome 2005, Smith 2011).

The Pastoralists, Frontier War and the Protectorate

The Australian continent was colonised by the British from a number of separate beachheads between 1788 and the 1840s, and by 1888 there were six separate self-governing colonies. Four were established as penal colonies, based on forced convict labour; only two, South Australia and Victoria, were fully free settlements. Victoria was not settled until the mid 1830s and remained a pastoral outpost, with limited assisted immigration, until the discovery of gold in 1851. Throughout the colony, ‘squatters’ (individuals with capital and connections) were permitted to take possession of huge tracts of land and establish extensive pastoral holdings.

The advance of the squatters and their millions of sheep from the mid-1830s was disastrous for the Aboriginal people who were still reeling from the smallpox epidemics. They lost access to water and hunting lands. If they killed sheep for food, if they disputed access to water, if they fought back, or if they tried to protect their women, they were killed (Kiddle 1961, Critchett 1990). Using a new methodology, Lyndall Ryan now estimates that settler massacres accounted for the loss of 11 per cent of the known Aboriginal population in 1836 alone (Ryan, 2011). In the nineteenth century, the frontier took its greatest toll on Aboriginal women of reproductive age who became infertile, died prematurely or simply ‘disappeared’ (Critchett 1990). By 1853 the frontier violence had diminished and the survivors were finding ways to maintain their connections to country and kin, often by working for the pastoralists, tracking lost people and stock, and trading (Cahir 2012).

With the onset of the 1850s gold rush, the small pastoral colony was over-run by half-a-million fortune seekers. Waterholes and creeks that had escaped pollution and depletion by the earlier invasion of sheep and cattle were now taken over for mining

activity. Native animals and plants disappeared and starvation threatened, so that Aboriginal people increasingly needed to participate in the colonisers' economy to survive (McGowan, 2001; Cahir 2012). The destruction of traditional Aboriginal society also fatally interrupted the systematic burning of the bush to clear it for game and to reduce bush fires (Gammage, 2013). Catastrophic bush fires ever since have savaged Victoria and the first recorded colony-wide disasters in 1851 and 1869 took untold lives, both indigenous and white. Most of all, hundreds of thousands of gold diggers and their retinue of grog-sellers, prostitutes, thieves, merchants and hangers-on, threw Aboriginal people into ever more intimacy with the invaders. Fred Cahir's new history of Aborigines on the Victorian goldfields reveals a complex story of relationships both co-operative and destructive. Aboriginal people took advantage of new opportunities and relationships were formed, many enduring and supportive, enabling Aboriginal women to start new families with white male protectors. Other relationships ended in venereal disease, violence and alcohol addiction (Cahir 2012). By the end of the decade, the census would reveal that the Aboriginal population known to the authorities primarily comprised people in the Wimmera and other parts that had not yet been taken over by pastoral settlement (Smith 2011). The destruction of Aboriginal Victoria between 1835 and 1885 must rate as one of the most rapid and catastrophic colonial dispossessions of the nineteenth century (Broome 2005, Smith 2011).

Native Administration

At the same time, paradoxically, the state was officially committed to a 'civilizing mission' to the people whose lands and lives it was permitting to be stolen. All the mainland colonies were investigating how to manage native labour and resistance, but

Victoria led the way in the administration of 'native affairs' (Mitchell and Curthoys 2015). It was the first to establish a protectorate and initially this process was driven by the imperial government, which in 1839, just four years after official British settlement, insisted on the appointment of a Victorian Protector of Aborigines, in the hope of preventing the disastrous slaughter and dislocation that had already occurred in the nearby island colony of Van Diemen's Land. The protectorate, which was opposed by the pastoralists and ineffective in halting the population decline, was wound down in 1849, and by 1856, with the granting of responsible government, the responsibility for native welfare moved to the new colonial administration.

In 1859, the now prosperous and progressive self-governing colony had elected its first parliament with full adult male suffrage. The Aboriginal population had by then fallen to 2,000, and a select committee was established by the colony's new Legislative Council to inquire into the conditions of the Aborigines and recommend on 'the best means of alleviating their absolute wants'. The committee was unequivocal in its conclusion that the 'responsibility of the condition to which the Aborigines have been reduced rests with the colonists, as the Home Authorities have endeavored to ameliorate their condition, but without much success' (VPP 1859-60). It recommended the formation of a Central Board to Watch Over the Interests of Aborigines, and by 1862 this Board superintended seven reserves and twenty-three small camping places, providing refuge from the invading population of gold miners and settlers (VPP 1862-3).

The 1869 Victorian Aborigines Protection Act, which formalised reserves as refuges for the rapidly declining population, became the model for legislation in the rest of the

country for two generations. New scholarship is producing a richer and more nuanced understanding of the colonial state's motivations in establishing a legislated system of administration in the name of protection. In his superb essay on the 1869 Aborigines Protection Act, Leigh Boucher argues that the act emerged from 'a set of subtle but important adjustments to extant evangelical vocabularies' so that the notion of protection 'was adopted and reworked by the Board into a strategy of liberal governance' (Boucher 2015:92). But as scholars advance our understanding and interpret the growth of the state in modern terms, they overlook the traditional notions of responsibility and reciprocity that colonial settlers brought with them from the Old Poor Law that was still functioning in rural England (Snell 2006). Patricia Crawford, the distinguished Early Modern social historian, was first to detect continuity between native administration in the Australian colonies and the assumption of 'civic parenthood' for orphaned, abandoned or bastard children under the Old Poor Law (Crawford 2008). If the parish protected destitute against famine and homelessness, it also insulated society against vagabondage and roguery. The language of the Victorian debates is revealing: the relief of 'absolute want' was the stated aim of the Legislative Council; to build a 'happy England' in the words of Thomas McCombie (Mitchell and Curthoys 2015). Though 'paternalistic,' care was at least given as an entitlement rather than a spiritual whim, and it was better than no care at all as was more common on the American frontier. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, scientific racism hardened the discourse. Nonetheless it could be argued that the reserves, acting as a substitute 'country' for dispossessed people, had initially provided a place of 'settlement' that entitled them to care from the state.

Even so, the expectation was that in time Aboriginal society would melt away in the face of a superior culture, and that the financial charge on the state for the care of the

remnants of Aboriginal Victoria would decline in concert with the ‘dying of the race’. They were ‘indeed helpless children’, opined the Board in 1862, ‘whose state was deplorable enough when this country was their own; but it is now worse that they have adopted all the vices of the superior race, and gained nothing from the exhibition of its virtues’. The Board’s first responsibility was to provide food, shelter and ‘protect them as far as possible from contact with the debased amongst our own people’. They had a duty to educate the children, both ‘black and half-caste’, however; ‘If the Aboriginal is destitute of the qualities required for a higher position amongst his fellow men, his race will soon disappear; and the burden will grow lighter year by year’ (VPP 1862-3, pp. 14-15).

The Fate of Aboriginal Victorians under the Board

Separation from country

The Protection Board’s reports almost casually build a picture of what was happening to Aboriginal Victorians between 1861 and 1886, the critical period of the emergence of the reserves as the new focal point of Aboriginal life. The Select Committee of the colonial Legislative Council investigating the condition of the Aborigines in 1858-59 was charged, inter alia, with enquiring as to the extent of the ‘union of the races’. It received inconsistent evidence. Some witnesses reported that this was virtually unknown, while another averred that the ‘way in which the union of the white and aboriginal races is displayed, is by the numbers of half-breeds running about.’ In its report to the government, the Committee insisted that those of full and mixed descent were equally deserving of the protection and assistance of the colonial authorities (VPP 1859-60).

However, over the next three decades, a very different view emerged. Although the Board was established to protect the people living on reserves, it was apparently unable to protect Aboriginal women and girls from relationships with the settlers. No sooner were Aboriginal family groups collected together in permanent locations under the Board's 'protection' than there was a rapid increase in the number of children on the reserves with white fathers, adding to the Board's 'fiscal burden'.

As was the case throughout the country, the Board sub-contracted the control of many reserves to Christian groups. Around Ebenezer Reserve in the west, run by the Moravians, people moved on and off the reserve, in large part because the reserve did not carry sufficient stock to provide adequate rations. At Coranderrk in the centre, the Presbyterian lay preacher John Green built a more settled community and established hop-growing and general farming that provided more food and work. At Framlingham in the south-west, William Goodall, the son of former Tasmanian convicts who had grown up with Aboriginal people near Warrnambool, enticed Aboriginal groups on to the reserve by offering food, care and education for their children. At Ramahyuck in the east, a reserve population was settling; at Lake Tyers, further east, the reserve sat on the boundary between two Aboriginal nations in the hope of tempting both to come in, but with little success. Small groups, dominated by men, preferred to stay in the bush where they were free, but in the eyes of missionaries and guardians, were vulnerable to immoral whites who plied them with strong liquor in the hope of getting to the women. Some reserve managers, like Goodall, encouraged people periodically to leave the reserves, especially young men seeking work, as a means of obtaining income and slowly making their way into the wider society (VPP 1877-8).

Therefore, from the earliest days, the colonial authorities were attracted to the idea of collecting Aboriginal people together and moving them to a small number of large reserves. This proposal was repeatedly put to the witnesses at the Select Committee and the Royal Commission, and those witnesses with day-to-day contact with the Aborigines repeatedly rejected it as both unworkable and destructive. Yet so determined were the authorities to sever the connection between the people and their land that it remained a continuing theme of native administration for almost a century, culminating in the Board's concentration policy of the 1920s, where the residual groups remaining on reserves scattered across the state were moved hundreds of kilometers into a few larger reserves (Broome 2005).

Separation from family

The Board took the view that the increasing numbers of children of mixed descent 'were not Aborigines', and that on reaching adulthood they 'should not be permitted to stay on the reserves or receive government assistance' but should be 'merged with the general population'. It persuaded the government to legislate to that effect in what became known as the 'half-caste Act' of 1886 (Broome 2005). Under that Act, 'part-Aboriginal' people were forced to leave the reserves, live apart from their 'full-blood' relatives and make their own way in white society as 'legal whites'. Lacking skills, family support, land and capital, and never recognized as 'white' by white society, these 'fractional Aborigines' were caught in a twilight zone between two systems of entitlements: a psychologically and economically corrosive limbo that endured until the 1960s: too 'white' to be 'black' and too 'black' to be 'white' (Broome 2005, Smith 2011). 'Part-Aboriginal' children were the target of child removal, to cut their connections with mothers and family who were 'really black'. And in Victoria as

elsewhere, marriage was policed lest the 'colour be strengthened' by 'marrying back' (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, Rowse 2004, Broome 2005).

These divisive policies continued after the colonies formed a federation in 1901. The new federal government progressively introduced entitlements to pensions, child support, returned soldiers' land grants and medical care, and family support. All these entitlements either overtly or covertly excluded those Aboriginal people who were defined as 'legally black' under the states' and territories' jurisdictions. But applications for pensions, land and the rights of citizenship by 'part-Aborigines' were often also explicitly denied on the grounds that they were 'not white enough' (Commonwealth of Australia 2006).

Many people of mixed descent still managed to maintain family connections even though they were forced off the reserves and lived on the margins of the white world. From 1910 the prohibition of part-Aboriginal family members from the reserves was suspended so that by 1929 merely 50 of the 280 residents at Lake Tyers were 'full blood' (*Gippsland Times*, 7 February 1929). Meanwhile others were absorbed into the general community, in many cases by being taken from their mothers as children and adopted or fostered by white families. Some have subsequently found it difficult to be recognized by the wider Aboriginal community, and this has sometimes led to unfortunate divisions.

Accounting for visible and invisible Aborigines

Protection and control required that the colonial state account for individuals: name and count them in censuses, report on them in reports to the Board from the managers

of the reserves, comment on their welfare and behaviour. The Protectorate also inspired a significant body of ethnographic studies (Boucher and Russell 2015). Annual reports were tabled in parliament, births, deaths and marriages were certified on the reserves using the same procedures as for non-indigenous people, and Aborigines were included in the colonial censuses. The colony was thoroughly modern in its bureaucratic gaze, instituting the most advanced vital registration regime in the Anglophone world (Hopper 1986). Aboriginal births, deaths and marriages in Victoria were recorded in exactly the same way as the colonists', provided that they occurred within the view of the state.

The historical information available to document the Victorian Aborigines is extensive, but necessarily biased towards those who came on to the reserves and remained 'visible' to the state as Aboriginal, rather than those who remained living in the bush, interacting with colonial society and its institutions only sporadically, if at all. Others came from neighbouring colonies, especially during the gold rush, either by their own volition or under colonial direction, and married into Victorian Aboriginal and white families, adding to the indigenous population. And still others became absorbed into white families and cut all connection with their indigenous heritage, so that two groups of people emerged: Aborigines visible to the State through the administration of the reserves, and those who over time became invisible within the wider community. Genealogy, using vital registration of births, deaths and marriages, can restore many, but not all of the invisible Aborigines to the population. The traumatic and destructive process of colonisation cannot be completely captured by the historical record, which inevitably creates problems for population

reconstitution and demographic analysis.

The Koori Health Research Database (KHRD)

In 1999, work began in a partnership between the University of Melbourne and the Bunjilaka Centre at Museum Victoria to build a genealogical database of the Aboriginal population of Victoria since colonisation. Sandra Smith from Bunjilaka had been working on this for some years as a means of identifying people in the Museum's pictorial collection. She also provided a service for members of the Aboriginal community who wanted to research their family trees and identify lost connections. This genealogical database became the foundation of the Koori Health Research Database (KHRD).

Inevitably the database was biased towards lineages at the expense of solitaries who left no discoverable descendants. Aboriginal Victorians had survived the onslaught of colonisation by preserving a detailed oral record of family connections, particularly those families that maintained connections with kin through the reserves. This oral record was augmented by the work of anthropologists, in particular Norman Tindale and Dianne Barwick. Tindale, who principally worked in South Australia, did a brief study on the Victorian reserves in the 1930s (Tindale, SA Museum). Barwick began working with the various Victorian Aboriginal communities in the early 1960s, building an extraordinary archive of field notes and genealogies that are now kept in the State Library of Victoria (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2007). It was her work that transferred the oral tradition into a written record and drew the various communities around Victoria into a common narrative. To link the oral tradition with the historical record, careful genealogical research was undertaken by Sandra Smith and later

university researchers funded by the Australian Research Council. This research funding over three major grants enabled the finding and purchase of death certificates. Rarely after the early colonial period were Aboriginal people specifically identified in vital registrations as Aboriginal: hence their lineages had to be reconstructed to establish their membership of the communities and families. The advantage of doing this is that colonisation is inscribed in vital registrations by key events, in particular by family formation and age and causes of death.

Limitations

The limitations of the population sample are obvious. First, the core is provided by the rapidly dwindling number of people deemed 'aboriginal' by the state to the point that the last 'full-blood' Aboriginal person, Mary Angeline Morgan, died in 1983. The population growth was entirely amongst those of mixed Aboriginal descent, many of whom, because they were related to people still on the reserves, were regarded and stigmatized as 'black' even though their legal status after 1886 was 'white'.

Therefore, historically, the lived experience of being 'black' continued down generations who increasingly began to 'look white'. You might have one Aboriginal great-grandparent, but that made you 'black' not 'white' in the eyes of the wider community. This attitude continues to the present day: various conservative commentators have attempted to vilify prominent Aboriginal activists as 'inauthentic Aborigines' who could pass for white if they so chose and should not identify as Aboriginal nor obtain cultural and financial benefits that might be available to Indigenous Australians. This has cruelly ignored family histories, the shared experience of discrimination over generations and today, the familial experience of premature death, exclusion and poverty.

The second limitation of the KHRD is that while the core of historically-identified Aboriginal families is visible, the boundaries of that population were porous and became increasingly so until it became safer from the 1970s—because of changed census methodology as well as political and social changes—for people to acknowledge and celebrate their Aboriginal heritage. From the beginning of European settlement in the 1830s, Aboriginal people from Tasmania, New South Wales, even Queensland and Western Australia, were coming—or were transported—to Victoria where they married into the Victorian communities. It is a population with very porous boundaries, and while many families intermarried, others obviously did not and not all births can be captured reliably.

Figure 2: Comparison of various official estimates of the Aboriginal Population and the KHRD

Figure 2 compares the population estimated from the KHRD with the official population estimates from the censuses and the Board. By the time the 1877 Act was passed, the census and the board agreed that the population had declined to about 750, of whom around 500 were under the Board's control on reserves. By the time of federation in 1901, the census, the Board, and the KHRD all agree that that there were only about 600 Aboriginal people in the state. However, by declaring 'half-caste' people not to be Aborigines, the Board was able to almost halve the number for which it was responsible. Most of those people were living on reserves.

From 1901, the number of people under the Board's control and on reserves continued to decline as older people died and younger people of mixed descent were forced to leave. But the rapid growth of the 'half-caste' population continued, and this had several effects. Faced with larger numbers of people living in poor conditions around the reserves, the Board in 1910 relented and allowed some families to remain intact on the reserves, and some of those excluded were allowed to return. But the KHRD reveals that the policy of assimilation had begun to succeed: from 1901 a gap opens up between the number of people of Aboriginal descent documented by the KHRD and the total number of Aborigines as estimated not only by the Board but also by the censuses. It appears that many people of mixed descent were not only declared not to be Aborigines by the Board, but were not even described as Aborigines at the censuses.

This apparent impact of the assimilation policy continues throughout the 1920s. The KHRD probably underestimates the total numbers, since it becomes increasingly difficult to access official birth records in the latter half of that decade. Subsequently, people of mixed descent began to re-identify in the censuses, but the Board continued to put the total numbers below even the census figures right through to the 1960s, when under a more enlightened regime it belatedly recognised its responsibility for the excluded people of mixed descent.

The Problem with Families

The KHRD is an almost complete record of the families that re-formed and survived, and of the rebuilding of the Aboriginal population of Victoria, but inevitably it

privileges fecund survivors and obscures solitaries. This bias conceals one critical aspect of the impact of colonisation: the disintegration of families, clans and tribes.

We know of this disintegration not only from the statistical record, but also from references to individuals with no discoverable descendants living free on the fringes of the white world, remaining in the forests, or even attached to white households by marriage, concubinage or service. Scattered throughout the annual reports of the Protection Board and the reserves are fleeting references to people—‘Archie’, ‘Jimmy Barlow (Kar-arn)’ (Church of England Mission Reports 1863)—who disappear without trace from the historical record thereafter. The reserves also became a dying place for Aboriginal people living free who came for care and connection in their last days. There is often a death certificate with a European given or nickname, an estimated age and a cause of death, but we have no idea of the real dates of birth or family connections of these people, let alone their country and history, and reconstructing even fragments of their life history and survival is difficult or impossible. They are just names that float in and out the historical record.

These limitations of the KHRD are not unique: it is a record of a founder population, and like other documented founder populations, such as in Quebec, the male and female founders are a fraction of the original or colonising group (Charbonneau 2000). Even though the database only gives us part of the story of the demographic impact of colonisation, it sheds valuable light on the colonising process in action in people’s lives, its impact on those lives, the new lineages emerging under colonisation and their founders both Aboriginal and white, and on fertility and family formation, infant mortality and survival.

Revealing the invisible Aborigines

The reconstitution has added a new population of previously statistically invisible Aborigines to the enumerations of Aboriginal people by the colonial, state and federal censuses. The results are surprising: the half of the population who remained outside the Board's control from the 1870s appears to have disappeared without leaving any visible descendants. The present-day Koori community of Victoria (almost 40,000 people at the last census) appears to be largely descended from that half of the population taken under the Board's 'protection' on to the reserves in the 1870s. Those who remained outside the Board's control were too isolated and weakened to be able to resist, regroup and rebuild as recognisable communities (Smith 2011). If they survived, they did so with their history and heritage concealed and sometimes lost.

Genocide?

There has been much debate in the Australian literature over the relative contributions of disease, settler violence and resource expropriation to the population decline. This unfortunately has been grist to the so-called culture wars, in which nationalist commentators and politicians have accused scholars of the depopulation of undermining the national narrative of triumph and progress (High Court of Australia 2002). What is certain is that the smallpox epidemics alone could not have caused permanent population decline. Clearly they must have caused massive loss of life as they spread throughout the continent: although no comprehensive surveys have been undertaken, a limited number of mass burial sites have been identified which seem to confirm this. But in Victoria it was the settlement and dispossession following hard on the heels of the epidemics which made population recovery impossible: many

groups completely disappeared, or were left as a few scattered individuals.

The broad effect of colonisation and dispossession is obvious for all to see, but did the destruction of Victorian Aboriginal people and society constitute genocide? The international crime of genocide did not exist at the time, but would it constitute genocide if it had occurred in the post-Nürnberg era? From a strict legal reading, probably not, since there was never an official policy of mass destruction: far from it, as we have seen, the imperial authorities were concerned—however unrealistically—to ensure that the interests of the native inhabitants were protected. On the other hand, it is certainly arguable that the colonial administrations themselves were complicit in a sort of surreptitious genocide by ignoring the imperial edicts and permitting the destruction of Aboriginal society by the settlers, as the Select Committee concluded in 1859 (VPP 1858-9). Broome and others have argued that the policies put in place in 1886 that were dedicated to the disappearance of the native race by absorption into the general population would today be considered a form of cultural genocide (Moses 2004, Broome 2005). Certainly, the reserves enabled people to retain their distinctiveness and identity, at the terrible price of continuing stigma and discrimination that shortened and blighted their lives for generation after generation. But it was these visible aborigines who kept memories of language and kin alive and who defeated the colonisers' determination that assimilation on white terms was the only path forward.

In recovering under the gaze of the colonial white state, Aboriginal Victorians used colonial institutions to regroup and rebuild a new basis for 'country' and family. The Board and its large number of corresponding guardians documented the collapse of

traditional connections and the formation of new ones. While some groups clung to their independence until sickness or hunger forced them to seek rations and shelter, in all the reserves there was a core of people who accepted the administration and learned to work with the new regime. People who had been moved hundreds of miles, severing their ties with their country, found themselves living with people from once warring tribes on the same reserve. Here a new solidarity emerged, focused on the reserve as the 'new country' and people identified with the reserve as place and as foundation for their new collective identity (VPP 1877-8).

Likewise, dislocation and population collapse fractured traditional marriage law, which had regulated consanguinity more strictly than in European societies. It was abandoned once the pool of eligible marriage partners became too small. People of mixed descent inter-married, and the surviving families became even more strongly interconnected by family ties. These complex family ties were treasured and provided powerful bonding capital (VPP 1877-8). At the same time, poverty meant that many men did not have the means to establish a secure household: they remained unmarried but had serial relationships and children. Discrimination and extreme poverty destroyed the traditional family identities and structures, and created a legacy of strong grandmothers providing the core security for extended families, often where parents were unable to participate fully in family life because of illness and destitution. In the period since the abolition of the Board in the 1960s, out-marriage has become the dominant feature of Aboriginal Victorian relationships. At the 2011 census an astonishing 80 percent of Indigenous people in partnerships had non-Indigenous partners.

In a final cruel irony, the century-long process of dispossession and relocation was later to be used against the people when they attempted to re-establish their title to their traditional lands. In the absence of national legislation confirming Indigenous land ownership; it has been left to the courts to establish 'native title', based on a demonstrated continuing connection to land. In 2002, Australia's highest court ruled that the Yorta-Yorta people of central northern Victoria had lost that right because their connection with their country had been 'washed away by the tide of history'. However the people have fought on, holding on to their identity and culture through genealogy, and have succeeded in obtaining a form of limited control through negotiation with the state government (High Court of Australia 2002).

Conclusion

The mechanisms put in place by the colonising state to manipulate the connections to land and family have had a profound impact on the social, economic, demographic and epidemiological evolution of Aboriginal Victorians, not only during the consolidation of dispossession, but in the modern resurgence of the Indigenous population.

In recent decades, Victoria's census Indigenous population has manifested astounding growth, increasing six-fold in a single generation (ABS 2012). Family connections lie behind the change, but not through fertility, which if anything has been falling slightly. Several factors are involved: improvements in census procedures (especially in the estimating of people missed); people newly identified as Aboriginal; and an explosion of out-marriage (ABS 2013). As long ago as the 1970s it was clear that people from the reservoir of 'invisible Aborigines' which had built up over the

assimilation era were increasingly being identified in the censuses, and that these new Aborigines were not isolated individuals but typically families with young children. Recent studies have demonstrated that this is a life-cycle effect, with parents, especially in mixed marriages, often not identifying their children until they reach school age, and the children themselves often not being identified during the teenage years, re-emerging in the statistics as they themselves have children who reach school age.

Aboriginal Victorians have spectacularly survived the colonial onslaught, but they still have many problems. Australia is a rich, developed nation that enjoys sixth place on the World Development Index of life expectancy, but Indigenous Australians match those poor countries that rank around 143 out of 171 (United Nations Development Program 2014). They do worse than do the average inhabitants of India or Pakistan and still suffer the lowest life expectancy of any 'fourth world' people living within a first-world society. This has been the terrible price paid by the visible Aborigines whose time on the reserves intensified their exclusion and disadvantage, while paradoxically enabling them to preserve their oral traditions and identity.

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Fig. 1

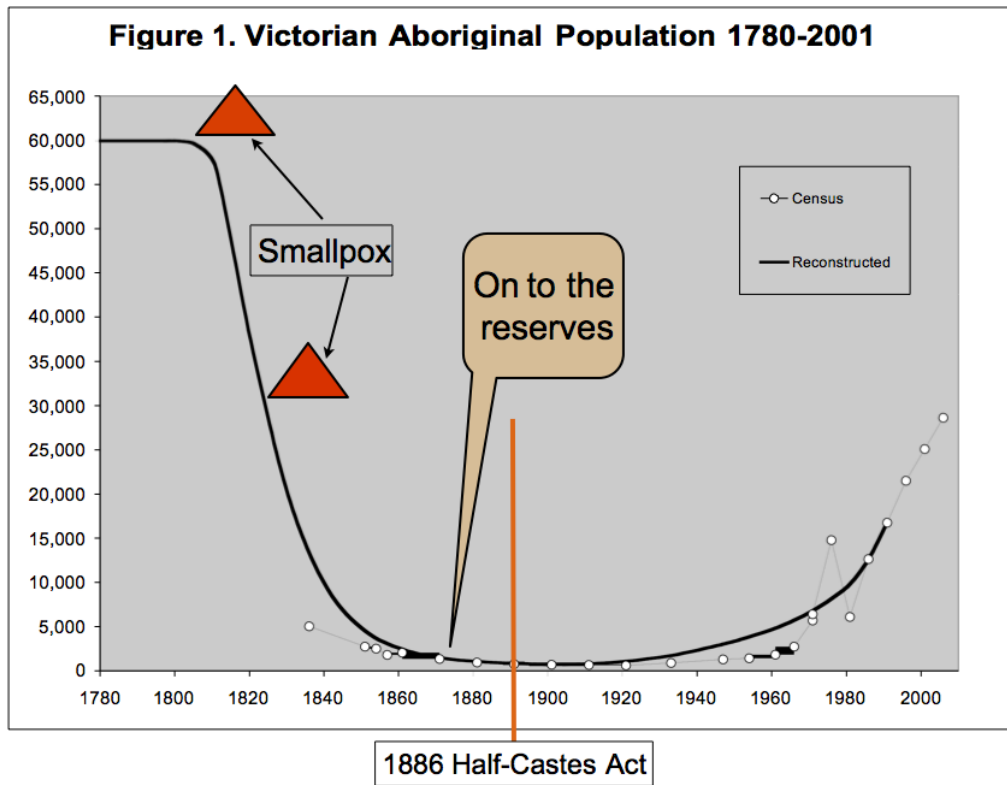


Fig. 2

