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Homesickness for a foreign country: nostalgia and colonisation

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> '[T]he other is the phantasm of historiography, the object that it seeks, honors and buries. A labor of separation concerning this uncanny and fascinating proximity is effected . . . Alphonse Dupront has said, "The sole historical quest for 'meaning' remains indeed a quest for the Other, but however contradictory it may be, this project aims at 'understanding' and, through 'meaning' at hiding the alterity of this foreigner; or, in what amounts to the same thing, it aims at calming the dead who still haunt the present, and at offering them scriptural tombs".' (De Certeau, 1998, p. 2)

Introduction: first contact and the 'rights' of dispossession

In the early eighteenth century, Jeanne-Pierre Purry, a sometime employee of the Dutch East India Company, composed a series of documents to the senior management of the Company arguing a case for the colonisation of two territories known to be inhabited by 'primitives', and of interest to Dutch traders for the resources and agricultural potential they were presumed to contain. In the first of these tracts, addressed to the Assembly of the Seventeen, the board that controlled the Dutch East India Company, Purry tried to convince the Governor of the Company either to colonise Kafirland (today's South Africa) or, alternatively, the Land of Nuyts (today's western coast of Australia). In his second *Mémoire*, dated 1 September 1718, Purry made a strong case for the colonisation of the Land of Nuyts, and replied to the objections raised by his opponents in the following terms:

> '[S]avage and rustic people love above all things a lazy existence and . . . the more a people is simple and vulgar the less it is given to work, while a life of abundance and pleasure requires a great deal of care and trouble. In addition, the countries inhabited by these sorts of savage and lazy people are never very populous. Thus one has every reason to believe that far from harming the inhabitants of the Land of Nuyts—and one is not obliged to displace them—the establishment of a good European Colony would provide for them all sorts of benefits and advantages, as much because theirs would be a civilized life as because of the arts and sciences they would be taught.' (Purry, cited in Ginzburg, 2005, p. 667)

This memorandum is a stark evocation of the prevailing attitudes of the time towards the indigenous inhabitants of Australia and southern Africa, and a moral argument as to the imperative nature of 'rescuing' such 'savage and rustic peoples' from their 'wayward condition'. The apparent lack of industriousness of such peoples made the establishment of a new 'homeland' in this faraway place not only advantageous but, to all intents and purposes, imperative in bringing civilisation in the form of 'art and sciences' to the indigenous inhabitants of these lands, and thereby rescuing them from their 'savage and lazy' condition. Such colonisation was, according to Purry's logic, not appropriation of land or a displacement of peoples, but rather a 'mission' to imbue the value of industriousness amongst such native peoples, and thereby to introduce them to the benefits of a 'civilized' life.

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In respect to Purry's reasoning, Ginzburg observes that he takes a 'modern' position towards 'strangers'. Rather than following the Old Testament strictures in respect to one's obligations to strangers he takes the more 'modern' position that there is no inherent wrong in displacing them from their lands in the service of 'progress':

> '[E]verybody was a stranger to everybody else. This common shared condition did not, in Purry's global perspective, elicit the compassion that inspired Exodus 23, 9: "thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." When everybody can "in turn, claim the privilege of the first occupant after a fashion" ("d'une maniere ou d'autre"), when each individual is tacitly entitled "to take this or that piece," natural law turns (we might conclude) into a law of mutual pillage. Might becomes right.' (Ginzburg, 2005, p. 673)

Such a view in respect to one's obligations (or lack of) to 'strangers' enabled settlers in Australia (the Land of Nuyts) and South Africa (Kafirland) to feel little moral dilemma regarding developing the untapped agricultural and industrial potential of these newly colonised places, even if such development impacted profoundly on indigenous Australians and/or South Africans. The 'law of mutual pillage' made such interventions morally defensible in the minds of these colonisers.

In later correspondence to the Governor of the Dutch East India Company than that referred to above, Purry continued to assert the merits of the Company sending immigrants to either South Africa or Australia. At this point in his correspondence an 'imaginary opponent' is invoked to suggest what might be seen as a serious impediment to such proposals in respect to European settlement of these already inhabited lands:

> '[I]t will be objected that in this case justice and equity will bar us from setting ourselves up in the Land of Nuyts and lording it over those who have been there, father and son, for as long as several thousand years, and will also bar us from evicting from their land people who have never done us any harm.' (Ginzburg, 2005, p. 671)

In Purry's view there was a clear response to this imaginary objector's concerns as to the displacement of indigenous populations. There was no injustice in this, according to Purry, who stated:

> '[A]s the Earth belongs to God in perpetuity, and we have but the use of it, something like the father who has a dish set before his children or his servants: he does not assign a portion to each, but rather that which each fairly seizes for himself belongs to him, though before that he had no greater right to it than the others, and though they did not grant him permission to take this or that piece.' (Ginzburg, 2005, p. 671)

The then evolving notion of *terra nullius* in international law in the late seventeenth century was also particularly disadvantageous to indigenous Australians. On the basis of those Aborigines that Captain Cook encountered in his expedition to the east coast of Australia it was assumed that all Australian Aborigines were nomadic, and did not engage in any form of agriculture. It was also assumed by Cook (based on little 'hard' evidence) that there was only a small population of indigenous Australians inhabiting the continent, when in fact there were somewhere between 300,000 to 1 million inhabitants at the time of Cook's arrival.

Cook's report, which included his views of the evident lack of agriculture practised by indigenous Australians, their seeming lack of fixed abodes and his assumptions (based on little real evidence) as to their 'small numbers' at the time of his 'discovery' all added to the claims of Britain to the territory without any 'legal' obligation to compensate these first Australians for their displacement and loss of territory under the then prevailing 'international law':

> '[I]n the late eighteenth century, many believed that a society without agriculture was therefore a society without property rights in land. The most familiar statement of this view was again from

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> Vattel, who held that non-agricultural peoples "unsettled habitation in these immense regions cannot be accounted a true and legal possession" and that European farmers accordingly might lawfully settle on their land.' (Banner, 2005, p. 102).

This was in essence an application of Purry's starker formulation in which what he called 'lazy and unindustrious peoples' had in his view no claim to those territories that they occupied. These doctrines were based, of course, on a particular, culturally bound notion of the nature of one's relationship to land as proof of 'ownership'. The colonial powers of the time took no cognisance of, or interest in, the possibility that other cultures may have had entirely different and even more profound relationships to the land they inhabited than the simplistic utilitarian view of one's relationship to 'territory' as articulated in the 'international law' of the time, which proclaimed that a society without agriculture was a society without property rights in land (Hulme, 1993, p. 34).

Australian Aborigines relationship to their homeland was indeed a deeper, more complex and profound relationship to the 'land' than could be envisaged by these 'new arrivals', or by the doctrines they brought with them to determine 'ownership'. As one of the major figures of Australian anthropology, Professor William (Bill) Stanner, stated in his Boyer Lectures in 1968:

> '[N]o English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word "home", warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the aboriginal word that may mean "camp", "hearth", "country", "everlasting home", "totem place", "life source", "spirit centre" and much else all in one. Our word "land" is too spare and meager. We can now scarcely use it except with economic overtones unless we happen to be poets . . . When we took what we called "land" we took what to them meant hearth, home, the source and locus of life, and everlastingness of spirit. At the same time it left each local band bereft of an essential constant that made their plan and code of living intelligible. What I describe as "homelessness", then means that the *aborigines faced a kind of vertigo in living*. They had no stable base of life; every personal affiliation was lamed; every group structure was put out of kilter; no social network had a point of fixture left.' (Stanner, 1968/1972, pp. 44–45, my emphasis)

This incommensurability between then prevailing Western conceptions of the meaning of 'land' and 'law' and that of Australian indigenes was such that Western 'law' refused to accept the legitimacy of the claims of such 'primitive' peoples on the grounds that their relationship to land and the beliefs which adhered to that relationship were founded on 'irrational beliefs', rather than on 'reason'.

Boaventura De Santos Sousa has referred to this inability to recognise or give due recognition to different modes of knowledge as 'abyssal thinking':

> '[T]he colonial zone is, par excellence, the realm of incomprehensible beliefs and behaviours which in no way can be considered knowledge, whether true or false . . . On the basis of their refined conceptions of humanity and human dignity, the humanists reached the conclusion that the savages were sub-human. Do the Indians have a soul? was the question. When Pope Paul III answered affirmatively in his bull Sublimis Deus of 1537, he did so by conceiving of the indigenous people's soul as an empty receptacle, an anima nullius, very much like the terra nullius.' (De Santos Sousa, 2007a, p. 3)

This view of certain races as being *anima nullius* was one that dismissed peoples such as Australian Aborigines and their beliefs as 'sub-human', and consequently of no value – they were literally regarded as empty spiritual vessels awaiting the sustenance of reason. The manner of their attachment to land was thereby disregarded as being 'without reason' and therefore of no account. Purry

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considered the taking of the lands of such people permissible considering these indigenous inhabitants' failure to utilise such lands in any apparently productive manner. Purry nonetheless considered that Europeans colonising territories such as the Land of Nuyts and Kafirland had a moral obligation to civilise and educate the indigenous populations of those lands – an obligation to literally fill their 'empty souls' (Darwin, 1845/1997, p. 196).

However, in De Santos Sousa's view there were more sinister implications in this view of certain indigenous populations as 'empty souls', far beyond simply providing sustenance to the notion that expropriation of the territory of these 'primitives' without compensation was morally permissible. According to De Santos Sousa 'the colonial' neither represents the legal or illegal, but rather represents the lawless. Certainly in Australia there were, by the early nineteenth century, many who saw it as no sin to remove or drive out Aborigines from tribal lands without compensation. Nor was it considered by many settlers that the killing or 'dispersing' of Aborigines was sinful. Rather it was a considered necessary to 'civilise' this 'new' land, but not necessarily the indigenous population, who were seen by many as beyond redemption by way of education or conversion. As a consequence, by the early nineteenth century the enclosure of traditional lands by European settlers for the pasturing of sheep and cattle had driven many Aborigines off their tribal lands and into encampments for want of traditional food sources. Continuing expansion of European settlement and land clearances for agriculture along with the sequestrating of water sources for livestock made remaining in tribal areas difficult, if not impossible, for most indigenous Australians. Introduced diseases, such as smallpox, had also ravaged much of the indigenous population, as also had systematic killings of Aborigines. The fabric of indigenous society was, as a result, under constant threat, and in many cases destroyed irreparably.

Also, during this period, a new unanimity amongst the settlers took hold, this being that Australian Aborigines had no claims to the land then being enclosed or turned over to grazing as they had simply 'roamed over' that land prior to colonisation, rather than having settled these lands or made productive use of them. Under this new interpretation there were no longer any legal impediments to European settlers expropriating territory from the indigenous inhabitants of Australia. Indeed, it was asserted at this time that there was a moral and a 'legal' claim to these lands on the part of the settlers as a consequence of the past 'improvidence' of Australian Aborigines in having failed to harness the resources at their disposal. The claims of the indigenous population to any rights over the land or the resources of this land were thereby now regarded as non-existent.

At this time many colonists similarly began to portray Aborigines in general as lazy, thoughtless, erratic and doomed. These colonists included religious dignitaries in colonial society, such as the Anglican leader Samuel Marsden, who described Aborigines in 1826 as incapable of industry, reflection or future planning, roaming the bush 'like the fowls of the air or the beasts of the field' (Gunson, 1974, p. 347). Others who expressed adverse views on Aborigines at the time included members of the Border Police, one of whom suggested in an official report that Aborigines' 'wandering, wild life' made their improvement unlikely. The then leading colonial newspaper, the *Australian*, described them in 1840 as 'totally destitute . . . of industry and ingenuity . . . wretchedly inattentive to the very means of subsistence', and another leading newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette*, had described them as 'a very erratic and wandering race', possessing 'a vagrancy of mind that bears a strict analogy to their vagrancy of body'.[1] Such remarks and others of a similar nature denied the relevance and endurance of Aboriginal relationships to land (Mitchell, 2004). Australian Aborigines' relationship to their homeland was, however, as we now know, a far more complex and profound relationship to the 'land' than could be envisaged or imagined by these 'new arrivals'.

1 *Australian*, 26 December 1840; *Sydney Gazette*, 24 June 1804 and 23 August 1822.

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'We were never able to form any connections with them': the problem of the unwanted gift

Captain Cook remarked in his Journal entry for 30 April 1770, in respect to an encounter on that day with indigenous Australians:

> '[M]onday, 30th April 1770 As soon as the wooders and wateres were come on board to dinner 10 or 12 of the natives came to the watering place and took away their canoes that lay there but did not offer to touch any one of our Casks that had been left ashore and in the after noon 16 or 18 of them came boldly up to within 100 yards of our people at the watering place and there made a stand – Mr. Hicks who was the officer ashore did all in his power to entice them to him by offering them presents & Ca but it was to no purpose ***all they seem'd to want was for us to be gone***.' (http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/c/cook/james/c77j/chapter8.html; my emphasis)

In addition to his and others' opinion that Australian Aborigines simply 'roamed over' the land, rather than using it productively, another objection arising from Cook's report in regard to recognising indigenous Australians' possible claims and entitlement to compensation for their coming displacement by European settlers was as to their apparent reluctance to engage in any form of exchange or trade:

> '[T]he Cook voyages brought back one final piece of information about the Aborigines that also played a role in setting land policy. Members of the expeditions tried to engage the Aborigines in trade, but reported no success. Unlike other peoples the British had encountered, the Aborigines seemed to show no interest in British manufactures.' (Banner, 2005, p. 103).

The conclusions made by Cook and Banks[2] on the basis of their contact with only a small number of indigenous Australians from the Gweagal tribe of the Tharawal (or Dharawal) clan in respect to the apparent 'backwardness' of these 'natives' as to the basics of trade and agriculture, and therefore their lack of any claim to the territory they inhabited, informed the British decision to establish a penal colony in Australia, rather than in West Africa, where they had originally intended to do so (Pybus, 2008; Keneally, 2005). There is, of course, an important difference between knowing nothing of trade and refusing to engage in trade. Indigenous Australians' 'ownership' of land was, as we have noted above, of a nature that was not freely negotiable. The idea of 'trading' this relationship to 'country' for some cheap, and not particularly useful, 'goods' with strangers would not have occurred to the first Australians. It was simply unthinkable.

The nature of these gifts and the context in which they were offered were almost certain to excite distrust and suspicion on the part of the intended recipients. It is not that the first Australians whom Captain Cook and his party encountered did not understand the nature of gifts and reciprocation. It was rather that they *consciously refused* these offerings for quite rational reasons. They were no doubt rightfully suspicious of accepting these offerings without an understanding of the nature of the reciprocation sought. The purposes attached to the giving of gifts and the nature of reciprocation implicit in such 'altruism' by total strangers was unknown, and thus

2 Sir Joseph Banks was the botanist who accompanied Captain Cook on the voyage of *The Endeavour* between 1768 and 1771. Collections and observations were made by Banks during this voyage at Rio de Janeiro, Tierra del Fuego, Tahiti and during the survey of New Zealand and the landings on the eastern coast of Australia in 1770 and at Endeavour River. Banks recorded his general impressions of the Australian east coast, noting plants, insects, molluscs, reptiles, birds, fish, quadrupeds, etc. as well as Aboriginal customs. Further observations were made on the New Guinea coast and the island of Savu on the way to Batavia. For further information on this journey and Sir Joseph Banks's role see the entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography at: http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010051b.htm.

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the 'gift' was quite properly rejected until information on the nature of the expected reciprocation was forthcoming.

In his classic study of the gift, Marcel Mauss notes in respect to 'kula trade' in the Trobriand Islands how 'the act of giving itself assumes very solemn forms: the thing received is disclaimed and mistrusted; it is only taken for a moment, after it has been cast at one's feet' (Mauss, 1922/1990. p. 23). What is clear is that at least in such trade the nature of the object or objects being traded are significant, either spiritually or otherwise, and the manner in which the traded item is given and received is crucial to the success of the transaction. It was not a lack of understanding on the part of the Aborigines of the principles of exchange which led to the failure of Cook and Phillip's[3] attempts at gift giving. Rather it was the clumsy and inappropriate way in which they went about these attempted exchanges. Amongst indigenous Australians themselves there was a strong tradition of gift exchange when different groups encountered each other or came together for major ceremonial occasions. Such exchanges sometimes served the practical function of allowing for the exchange of items of scarcity in particular regions for those which were scarce in another. Items such as ochre and specific woods used in making weapons were exchanged on such occasions. However, such exchanges were not in the nature of 'trade', at least in the sense understood by European cultures at the time of Cook's or the First Fleet's landing. In such exchanges amongst indigenous Australians the act of giving was always more important than the gift itself. It was often the case that objects that were essentially identical in their utilitarian form (e.g. shield for shield, spear for spear, etc.) were exchanged on such occasions for the symbolic value of the 'transaction', rather than serving any utilitarian purpose or need (Nicholson, 2007, pp. 16–17).

Meetings of different tribes in large corroborees also, of course, performed the purpose of allowing for the exchange of less tangible gifts – such as the 'gift' of a story or a song. In such exchange relationships:

> '[E]conomic activity was not for personal profit or economic gain. The important thing was not the economic value of the gift given, or the relative value of the gifts in an exchange, but the act of giving and receiving which reinforced social bonds. If Aborigines gave things away, it was not because they did not value things or the rights of private ownership (for they personally owned all their tools and weapons), but that they placed a higher value on fulfilling kinship obligations.' (Broome, 1982, pp. 16–17; see also Berndt and Berndt, 1985, pp. 117, 122–34)

Intangibles such as dreamtime stories were also part of a limited exchange between different groups. However, only certain aspects of dreamtime stories could be told to those belonging to other groups. Even then these stories could only be 'exchanged' as between particular ritual leaders of rank, and even then only in very specific circumstances. The right to show (yurtininpa – to 'reveal' or 'make visible') a ceremony was in the hands of those who in Western notions of territory might be called the 'owners' of that country (especially those from that Dreaming) and their relatives (Myers, 2002, p. 39):

> '[I]t was also the case that in some parts of Australia Aboriginals accepted gifts from "foreigners" in exchange for something in return, generally permission to "visit" Aboriginal lands and

3 Captain Arthur Phillip was the Commander of the First Fleet, of eleven ships, sent to establish a new colony in Botany Bay, near modern-day Sydney. The leading ship, *HMS Supply*, reached Botany Bay on 18 January 1788. Phillip, who had also been appointed governor of the new colony, soon decided that this site, chosen on the recommendation of Sir Joseph Banks, who had accompanied James Cook in 1770, was not suitable, since it had poor soil, no secure anchorage and no reliable water source. After some exploration Phillip decided to go on to Port Jackson, and on 26 January the marines and convicts were landed at Sydney Cove, which Phillip named after Lord Sydney. See the entry for Phillip in the Australian Dictionary of Biography at: http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A020292b.htm.

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> to net fish or engage in *trepanging* in traditional Aboriginal fishing areas. Prior to European arrival on the shores of Australia one of the most highly valued "gifts" from "strangers" were the metal pipes traded by Macassan fisherman with indigenous Australians in the north-east coast in return for being permitted to annually visit and fish in the area. These pipes were used to smoke tobacco, which was also traded by the Macassans, or pituri, a local intoxicant. These pipes and tobacco were greatly prized and were traded amongst indigenous Australians themselves. Pipes so traded were found from the far north of Australia where the trade originated to as far south as the surrounds of what is now Sydney prior to European settlement.' (Nelson, 2008, p. 20)

The circumstances of these gift exchanges with Macassans and amongst indigenous Australians were, however, vastly different from those attempted by Cook and his party upon their arrival in Botany Bay or by Phillip when he arrived with the First Fleet. In the case of the Macassans these items were traded in return for being permitted by the local indigenes to visit peaceably Australian shores on an annual basis to engage in trepanging. These visitors made no permanent claim to settlement, but rather engaged in trade to secure annual visiting rights.

These Maccassans, unlike Cook and his party, *acknowledged* the ownership of the land by the local populace. Nor did they seek to make permanent settlements in the area of their annual visits. There was also apparently some degree of 'intermarriage' between the visitors and local women. It also appears that the visiting Macassan trepangers may even possibly have converted a number of Australian aborigines to Islam during their annual visits, though whether such conversions occurred in the period prior to European colonisation is controversial (Berndt and Berndt, 1949: MacKnight, 1976; Nelson, 2008). Further, during this period before European colonisation, there were significant exchanges of religious and ceremonial practices between 'Marege' (the Sulawesian's name for the parts of northern Arnhem land which they regularly visited) and those of Sulawesi, resulting in strong religious and ceremonial ties between 'Marege' and Sulawesi, which were first outlined in the Berndts' anthropological work of the 1930s and 1940s (Berndt and Berndt, 1949).

Donaldson has remarked in respect to these exchanges with other cultures prior to the Europeans' arrival in Australia the following:

> 'The coastal peoples in Arnhem Land incorporated visits from Sulawesi into their seasonal cycle, perhaps as long as 1000 years ago, certainly before the Portugese and Dutch intrusions, and regularly at least a century before Cook's arrival in 1788. They obtained cloth, knives, glass, pipes for smoking tobacco and pottery, new maritime technology and skills and rituals from fishermen who came annually to harvest trepang (beche-de-mer) with the assistance of their hosts. Some travelled on Praus to Macassar (Ujung Pandang) . . . as late as 1876 there were still 17 Aborigines recorded in the Macassarese census.' (Donaldson, 1996, pp. 190–91)

We might conclude from the above that in order for gifts to be meaningful they must have some practical or symbolic import for their intended recipients, and that the expected nature of reciprocation be clearly understood. In the case of Cook, Phillip and other European visitors neither was the case. The goods offered held no interest to indigenous Australians either symbolically or for their utility. Also, the nature of the expected reciprocation was unclear to them. Amongst indigenous Australians in their trade with the Macassans there was a series of rituals surrounding the acceptance of a gift and agreement to the expected reciprocation. There was, however, no apparent ritual attached to the attempted gift-giving by the Europeans, which would no doubt have puzzled the intended recipients.

As we now can see, Captain Cook's puzzlement at the locals' reluctance to engage in trade was, of course, based on a particular notion of human engagement premised on exchange, whereas

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indigenous Australians almost certainly saw this attempted engagement by these uninvited arrivals in a very different light. There were a number of quite rational reasons why they wanted these arrivals gone, and why they did not wish to touch any of the items left out by Cook and his crew. Doreen Mellor, in a paper on indigenous impressions of Cook and his party, has remarked:

> 'We have no Eora record of their impressions of the intruders, but it's not hard to construe from Cook's words their general attitude towards the expedition as one of suspicion and annoyance at being disturbed, providing a glimpse of another frame of reference altogether . . . They were (later) polite enough to accept gifts of clothes and beads though, as Banks describes, "without showing enthusiasm", evidenced by Banks finding all the items in a discarded heap some days later.' (Mellor, 2006, n.p.)

It is also revealing to consider the way in which Captain Cook has been woven into indigenous narratives subsequent to his party's arrival in Botany Bay two and a bit centuries ago. In the film *Too Many Captain Cooks*, the narrative turns on the indigenous view that, in following in the 'footsteps' of the original Captain Cook, white settlers (who the indigenous characters in the film refer to collectively as 'Captain Cooks') and their descendants had 'a choice' in their acceptance or rejection of indigenous knowledge, the **ultimate gift** that might be bestowed by Aboriginal Australians. In the dreaming story of Captain Cook told by Paddy Wainburranga, an elder of the Rembarranga people, it is thus not the 'first' Captain Cook who committed a wrong, but rather those 'Captain Cooks' who subsequently arrived on Australian shores:

> 'I'm talking now of the new Captain Cooks. When the old Captain Cook died, other people started thinking they could make Captain Cook another way. New People. Maybe all his sons. They started shooting people then. New Captain Cook people. They were the ones who have been stealing all the women and killing people. They have made war. Warmakers, those new Captain Cooks. They all fought the wars . . . All the new people wanted anything they could get. They could marry black women or white women. They could shoot people. New Captain Cook mob.' (cited in Healy, 1997b, pp. 66–67).

Mapping and exploring the continent

In *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad's character, Marlowe, remarks that:

> 'Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps (and) would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map—I would put my finger on it and say, when I grow up I will go there.' (Conrad, 1978, p. 15)

Jeanne van Eeden, in an article on the 'colonial gaze', remarks in a similar vein on the manner in which European explorers and settlers considered the 'empty areas' on the maps prepared by European cartographers as devoid of civilisation and 'ripe for the taking', irrespective of whether empirical observation proved this prior assumption wrong:

> '[T]he colonial gaze postulated the white mythology of an empty land, which reified "space as a blank text, ready to be inscribed by the impending colonial process" . . . European imperial maps usually perpetuated the notion of the emptiness of the land, which not only hinted at its availability, but also the supposed lack of a history. Indeed, many early maps of South Africa virtually obliterated "the presence of indigenous people . . . from the landscape".' (van Eeden, 2004, p. 32)

In 1867, my great-great-grandfather, Frederick John Byerley, the then government Engineer for Roads for the Northern Division, Queensland, edited a narrative of the first major expedition of

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European settlers into northwestern Queensland. This was a journey into one of the apparently 'blank spaces' so desired by Marlowe and remarked upon by van Eeden as constitutive of 'space as a blank text' which, by its unnamed cartographic character, obliterated the presence of indigenous people in the actual 'place' being represented. This expedition into northwestern Queensland was led by the Jardine brothers to search for land suitable for pastoral purposes, and to chart the location of sources of fresh water in this vast territory. In the course of this 'expedition', over a hundred 'hostile natives' were killed. The description of this journey is unsettling in many ways. One of the most perturbing aspects of this narrative is the manner in which it describes encounters with and killing of indigenous inhabitants in the areas being traversed as both 'necessary' and 'valorous'.

Rather than asking permission to cross this territory, or to exchange gifts with the local inhabitants, or enquire where areas of spiritual significance might be located so as not to disrupt or desecrate these areas, the brothers Jardine and their party seemed to prefer shooting the local inhabitants on sight in their search for water and suitable pastoral land. Frederick Byerley intones the 'daring and bravery' of the brothers Jardine in surviving their 'ordeals' during this expedition, and the 'service they rendered' in paving the way for the subsequent opening up of the lands they had traversed for commercial exploitation:

> 'Starting from the then farthest out-station of Northern Queensland with a small herd of cattle, these hardy young bushmen met with and successfully combated, almost every "accident by flood and field" that could well occur in an expedition . . . Added to this, and running through the whole journey, was the incessant and determined, although unprovoked, hostility of the natives, which, but for the unceasing vigilence [sic] and prompt and daring action of the Brothers, might have eventually compassed the annihilation of the whole party.' (Byerley, 1867, p. i)

Instead of admiring the resilience and knowledge of the indigenous population of the area in which they were travelling, and their ability to thrive in such an apparently harsh environment, the Jardine brothers and their party instead chose to ignore the benefits which this local 'bush knowledge' might have provided them in their 'quest'. They also appear to have shown little appreciation of the reasons for the 'hostility' of the 'natives' to their presence. However, as they made no effort to engage meaningfully with the indigenous 'owners' of this territory, in what way was this resistance really 'unprovoked', or even understood as such by the Jardines?

In Byerley's account of the so-called 'Battle of Mitchell', we can observe the nature of the encounters of these 'explorers' with the indigenous population of the areas they were passing through on their journey of 'discovery':

> '[T]he Brothers and Eulah, taking axes with them, to clear the scrub, went down to find a safe crossing. At about a-mile-and-a-half they came on to a number of blacks fishing . . . The horsemen seeing they were in for another row, now cantered forward towards the camp, determined this time to give their assailants a severe lesson . . . The natives at first stood up courageously, but either by accident or through fear, despair or stupidity, they got huddled in a heap, in, and at the margin of the water, when ten carbines poured volley after volley into them from all directions, killing and wounding with every shot with very little return, nearly all of their spears having been expended in the pursuit of the horsemen. About thirty being killed, the Leader thought it prudent to hold his hand, and let the rest escape. Many more must have been wounded and probably drowned, for fifty nine rounds were counted as discharged . . . It is probable that they will long remember the "Battle of Mitchell".' (Byerley, 1867, p. 35)

The notion that the long-term inhabitants of this space might be rightfully defending their territory from 'invaders', or that there might be something morally 'wrong' in the wholesale slaughter of the inhabitants of this territory did not, however, apparently trouble the Jardine brothers and their party.

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They seemingly considered that they had an *entitlement* to pass through this territory unmolested by 'savages' and to kill at will those who resisted their passage:

> '[T]he black tribes which dogged the steps of each expedition, and amongst whom, probably, were the slayers of Kennedy and Gilbert, *met at the hands of the Brothers the treatment they deserved*. If the lessons were severe, they were in every case of the native's own seeking, and were administered in fair and open combat, in which few of the white party were without having narrow escapes to record; but a providential good fortune seemed to attend them, for every member got through the journey without accident.' (Byerley, 1867, p. i, original emphasis)

Whilst the Jardine brothers' expedition was perhaps exceptional in its savagery in dealing with indigenous Australians encountered en route, it nonetheless exposes the thin veneer of legality attendant to the 'settlement' of much of northern Queensland. Aboriginal inhabitants during the period the Jardine expedition blundered its way northwards were not simply the original inhabitants of the territory, but were also 'British subjects', supposedly entitled to the same protections as white settlers. However, despite this status and the protection it theoretically provided:

> 'Between 1824 and 1908 approximately 10,000 Aborigines were murdered in the Colony of Queensland. "Considered 'wild animals', 'vermin', 'scarcely human', 'hideous to humanity', 'loathsome' and a 'nuisance', they were fair game for white sportsmen."' (Tatz, 1999, n.p.)

The upshot of this indiscriminate slaughter was the appointment by the Government of Queensland in 1896 of Archbishop Archibald Meston as Royal Commissioner. In his *Report on the Aborigines of North Queensland* he wrote: 'The treatment of the Cape York people was a shame to our common humanity.' He continued: 'Their manifest joy at assurances of safety is pathetic beyond expression. God knows they were in need of it.' Aboriginal people met him 'like hunted wild beasts, having lived for years in a state of absolute terror' (Meston, 1896, pp. 1–4).

Tim Flannery has, in the introduction to his compilation of material on and by Australian explorers of the colonial period, noted the following regarding the Jardine brothers' expedition:

> 'If in Mitchell, and before him Banks and Tench, we meet men of the enlightenment, by the middle of the nineteenth century we are encountering men of the frontier. All too often they were rough men, ill-educated and prejudiced. Some were bragging, self-confessed murderers. Abominations, such as the Jardine brothers' account of the "Battle of Mitchell" form some of the blackest pages in our history.' (Flannery, 2000, p. 287)

One might question in respect of such instances of murder and cruelty to indigenous Australians the apparent absence of 'the law'. We have observed earlier the manner in which Aboriginal Australians who had resisted white authority and led resistance actions against the incursions into traditional lands of white settlers were hunted down and killed as murderers or outlaws. However, in the case of parties of whites, such as the Jardines, who killed Aborigines indiscriminately, there was rarely or ever any consequences attached to their actions by the legal system. One might possibly understand this in the early years of the colonies in Australia as a consequence of the scarcity in remote regions of any representatives of 'the law'. However, the 'Wild Time', in which killings of indigenous Australians occurred unpunished, continued well into the twentieth century, far beyond the period in which the 'excuse' of 'remoteness' could credibly be invoked to explain the failure of the legal system to deal with those who killed or brutalised indigenous Australians:

> 'The "Wild Time" is thought of by many present day Aborigines in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria region as being a period in their peoples history from before the European invasion

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> of their lands up until the cessation of hostilities with whites. The "Wild Time" had no uniform date of termination but phased itself out over many years dependent as to place and circumstance . . . As an example, the "Wild Time" ended for some Aborigines on Bentinck Island (a mere 45 miles north of Burketown) as recently as 1948!' (Dymock, 1982, p. 53)

Aborigines have themselves documented these atrocities and passed them on as stories from generation to generation. Art has, more recently, provided an outlet for a number of these stories. In talking of her work, 'Mistake Creek', Charlene Carrington, one of the 'new wave' of indigenous artists in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, describes the story which lay behind her painting:

> 'This painting is about Mistake Creek. Somewhere in the 1920s my ancestors were shot and burnt here by mistake. They were women and children and they were having a picnic near a big boab tree. They were cooking the kangaroo they had caught. The manager from the old Warmun post office thought they were cooking the cow he was missing. He had them wind up around the tree and shot by two Aboriginal stockmen from the south. Then they burnt the bodies. Not long after, his cow came back.' (Kranenbarg, 2004, p. 26)

Other Aboriginal artists, many of whom are not generally regarded as overtly political painters, have also incorporated similar atrocities against indigenous Australians into their works. Ngamarliny (Freddie Timms) was another prominent Aboriginal artist from a traditional background who sought, on occasion, to make political statements in his work. After his passing, at an event in commemoration of his artistic contributions, Dirrmingali (his sister) said to the (predominantly white) audience:

> '"[W]e want you to know what white people did to black people in the past". The audience responded with silence. Dirrmingali continued, "We hope there can be real peace and friendship between black and white". The audience clapped again, and Dirrmingali and her family smiled and waved back to them. Everybody had shared a "hard story".' (http://museumvictoria.com.au/treasures/colldetails.aspx?pid=22)

Whilst at one level these artists and others want their work to act as a literal record of atrocities committed in the past, there is also a deeper level to much of this work in recording the psychic disruption of indigenous life brought about by European colonisation. These artists therefore reflect in their work interpretations of the 'vertigo in living', which Bill Stanner referred to in his essay on 'The Dreaming'. What he was referring to was not solely the killing of Aborigines, which certainly occurred all over the continent, but also the attempted annihilation of a way of life, and the consequent spiritual vacuum left in its wake. What is indeed remarkable is the resilience of indigenous Australians in the face of this reign of terror.

From the middle of the nineteenth century there was no longer any serious suggestion that one of the aims of colonisation in Australia was to imbue a sense of industriousness amongst the indigenous population; this was now replaced by an assertion of 'the right' to expropriate the land from the indigenous inhabitants of Australia on the basis of their 'improvidence' in failing to harness the resources at their disposal. The claims of the indigenous population to any rights over the land or the resources of this land were now regarded as non-existent. Boaventura De Santos Sousa has observed in regard to this non-recognition of the claims of native populations to their lands and their traditional ways of living that:

> '[W]estern modernity, rather than meaning the abandonment of the state of nature and the passage to civil society, means the coexistence of both civil society and the state of nature, separated by an abyssal line whereby the hegemonic eye, located in civil society, ceases to see and indeed declares as nonexistent the state of nature . . . Therefore, the fact that the legal principles

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> in force in civil society, on this side of the line, do not apply on the other side of the line does not in any way compromise their universality.' (De Santos Sousa, 2007a, p. 3)

Whether considering the indigenes of Australia as being *anima nullius*, or relying on the later 'scientific assessment' of Darwin that races such as the Fuegians and the Australian Aborigines were the backward remnants of a prior developmental stage of civilisation doomed to extinction, there appears little such peoples might have done to prevent the appropriation of their land without compensation. International law of the period simply did not recognise the claims of such peoples to the lands which they inhabited. The merits of the adaptivity of such peoples to a harsh environment such as that in Australia, which they had managed to tend for millennia before the arrival of Europeans, went unrecognised. So did the very appropriateness of their social organisation to the conditions applying in Australia. The aridity of much of the landscape, the vagaries of the climate, and the need to be mobile so as to shift in accord with seasonal sources of food meant that indigenous Australians organised their culture around small bands of twenty to thirty people, which for important ceremonial events would come together with other bands to engage in festivals, fights and rites.

William Stanner notes the incredible 'efficiency' of indigenous society with a holistic balance between the demands of material and social welfare. Stanner also notes the ingenuity of the implements utilised by Australian Aborigines for hunting, pared back in their simplicity and thus allowing for the maximum mobility in Australia's arid and difficult terrain, where excess weight and complexity was not a virtue. Stanner continues:

> '[A] single implement – the spear thrower – was developed with great ingenuity, to serve multiple purposes. It could be used as a container for liquids, as part of a fire-saw, as a scraper or adze or chisel, as a shield and even a musical instrument . . . A perfected invention thus economized weight, mechanical complexity and effort so as to increase a hunter's mobility, range and striking force.' (Stanner, 2009, pp. 89–90)

The simplicity of indigenous Australians' equipment and the balance in their lives between the social and the material needs of life were, however, not seen by Cook and later arrivals as a virtue, but rather as proof of their primitivity, and later as a rationale for denying their 'rights' to compensation for the loss of their lands, and perhaps even more importantly, in denying moral responsibility for the destruction of their traditional way of life.

By the early nineteenth century there was a hardening of opinion in favour of the view that Australian Aborigines had no rights to compensation for their displacement as, so the argument went, they in essence had never 'occupied' the land as such, as they hadn't inhabited it, but simply had 'ranged over it'. Richard Windeyer, a prominent Sydney barrister of the period, asserted in a public lecture in 1842 on the 'rights of the Aborigine of Australia' that indigenous Australians 'never tilled the soil, or enclosed it, or cleared any portion of it, or planted a single tree, or grain or root' and thus could not claim any ownership of the land they had inhabited. Aboriginal occupation, according to Windeyer, did not, 'by the law of nature, establish any title to the substance of the soil' (Reynolds, 1998, pp. 20–21).

In his final short book, *The Other*, the great Polish journalist and travel writer Ryzard Kapuściński extols the importance of our encounters with 'The Other' in arriving at our own Selfhood (Kapuściński, 2008). Drawing principally on the philosophical writings of Emmanuel Lévinas and Jósef Tischner, Kapuściński observes that the important, indeed crucial, aspect of such an encounter is in engaging in dialogue:

> '[I]n Tischner's final texts certain phrases keep recurring, such as "dialogical openness", dialogical perspective, dialogical awareness, dialogical plane etc. As Lévinas defines it: "man is creature that talks". And so we have dialogue. The aim of this dialogue is meant to be mutual understanding, while the aim of this understanding is to come closer to each other, and this understanding and

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> coming closer are achieved by way of getting to know each other. What is the preliminary condition for this entire process, this equation? It is the *will* to become acquainted, the desire, the act of turning towards the Other, coming out to meet him, entering into conversation with him.' (2008, pp. 72–73)

What is striking about Australian colonisation is the initial preparedness to broach a dialogue, to engage in attempts to reach an understanding of 'the other', followed afterwards by a total breakdown in this, upon which attempts at dialogue largely ceased. Whilst some members of Captain Cook's party, such as Watkin Tench (who also was later a member of the First Fleet), were clearly at pains to understand the Aboriginal languages they encountered, to strike up a dialogue with the native population and to cultivate an understanding between the new arrivals and the first Australians, this concern to understand the 'other' was not, however, shared by other early European arrivals in Australia. Dialogue began to falter, and then collapsed pretty much in its entirety after the arrival of the First Fleet. A dialogical abyss was thereby formed between Native Australians and the ever-growing numbers of European arrivals.

Homesickness for a foreign country

The rupture in Aboriginal society in Australia caused by European colonisation was profound. However, the impulse that drove European settlers to affect this rupture was not simply economic. It also had a more metaphysical dimension. This drive to shape the colonisation of Australia in particular ways was driven by a need amongst these settlers from Great Britain and other parts of Europe to reassert the bond between land and self that had been ruptured in the 'old country'. This impulse to try and 'start anew' and rebuild the 'homeland' which had been lost elsewhere was, however, particularly in the case of Australia, combined with a darker impulse, one which drew strongly on the sort of sado-masochistic fantasy world described by Octave Mirbeau in *Le Jardin des supplices* ('The Torture Garden') in which life in the colonies gave much freer reign to one's innate savagery, one's elemental self, than was possible at 'home'.

Renato Rosaldo, in his exploration of imperialist nostalgia, notes the following as to the manner in which the release of this pent-up 'desire' in the colonies is coupled with a 'mission' to 'civilise' these new lands and their inhabitants. However, such a release of desire and innate savagery wreaks destruction on the indigenous peoples of these colonised lands, which, in turn, gives rise to nostalgia for what is now an irrecoverable past and the stability it provided:

> 'Imperialist nostalgia occurs alongside a peculiar sense of mission, "the white man's burden", where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones . . . *Nostalgia is a particularly appropriate emotion to invoke in attempting to establish ones' innocence and at the same time talk about what one has destroyed.* Don't most people feel nostalgic about childhood memories? Aren't these memories genuinely innocent? Indeed much of imperialist nostalgia's force resides in its association with (indeed its disguise as) more genuinely innocent tender recollections of what is at once an earlier epoch and a previous phase of life.' (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 68, my emphasis)

In her recent examination of some of these issues, Jennifer Wenzel has noted how this longing on the part of 'agents of colonialism' described by Rosaldo for 'the very forms of life they intentionally altered', is a desire that performs the strange double movement of transforming change experienced by another into one's own loss, whilst at the same time obscuring one's own complicity in that change (Wenzel, 2006, p. 7).

Similarly, in John Zilcosky's examination of Franz Kafka's peculiar fascination with travel, the manner in which colonisation and travel are constituted by a nostalgic longing for an imagined lost homeland is explored. Reclaiming a space in which the utopian promise of the homeland can be

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resuscitated is, according to Zilcosky, a core characteristic of colonisation. However, the difficulty with this process of reinvention of an idealised homeland in colonised space is that, as Rosaldo has noted: 'imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox . . . somebody deliberately alters a form of life, and then regrets things are not as they were before intervention' (Zilcosky, 2003, pp. 34–36).

Whilst Jeanne Pierre Purry had declared the right of 'civilised' colonists to take the lands of 'savages', his suggestion was that this would also be of benefit to the dispossessed insofar as 'the establishment of a good European Colony would provide for them all sorts of benefits and advantages' (Magliazzo, 2002, p. 27). This, however, is made nonsensical in the context of Australian settlement. In these early years of European settlement the indigenous population were treated by many as little more than 'vermin', rather than as reasoning human beings (Collingwood-Whittick, 2000). Henry Reynolds cites a certain 'Fidelis', a recurring correspondent to the *Sydney Gazette* in these early years of settlement, who stated in a letter to the paper that any attempt to 'reason' with indigenous Australians as to the dispossession of their lands was pointless since such negotiation 'would be attended with as much success as would the application of eloquence to subdue or command any kind of undomesticated cattle' (Reynolds, 1998. p. 4).

Writing in the early 1840s, explorer Edward John Eyre commented that European settlers attempting to expel indigenous people from their ancestral lands regarded Aborigines as 'intruders in their own country . . . vermin that infest the land' (Eyre, 1845, p. 171). When defending their position, many colonists asserted that Aborigines had no legal or moral claim to the land, since they had never owned or used it productively. The *Sydney Gazette* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, for example, claimed that Aborigines were merely 'wanderers', who 'bestowed no labour on the land' and had no real property sense – 'This vast country was to them a common' (Mitchell, 2004).

By the middle of the nineteenth century there was a general consensus amongst the colonial population that the Australian Aborigines were a dying race. Many saw their continued presence on tribal lands as an impediment to further development, and as a consequence vast numbers of people were moved off their ancestral lands into camps and settlements in areas that had little connection with their tribal origins. The 'classic' Australian text that most strongly articulates the contradictory nostalgic impulse referred to above is Daisy Bates's *The Passing of the Aborigines* (1938). Not only is there expressed in this text a yearning for a 'past' that has been irretrievably altered, but also an accompanying denial that the majority of the living descendants of the original inhabitants of Australia were any longer 'aboriginal' in the 'true sense' of the word. They were now regarded by Bates and many others as a 'doomed race', needing to be protected like infants. The popular phrase of the time was 'soothing the dying pillow' of the Aborigine.

In spite of her fascination with their way of life, and professed knowledge of Aboriginal religious beliefs, Bates nonetheless was convinced that the Australian Aborigines were a 'doomed race' for whom she could do little other than make their final days as a race as comfortable as possible. She therefore considered that a major part of her 'mission' was to record as much as she could about them and their beliefs before they disappeared altogether. However, she had a narrow view of who was to be regarded Aboriginal and who not. She vehemently dismissed people of part Aboriginal descent as 'worthless', and accordingly wrote: 'As to the half-castes, however early they may be taken and trained, with very few exceptions, the only good half-caste is a dead one' (*Perth Sunday Times*, 12 June 1921).

In his 'Introduction' to Daisy Bates's book *The Passing of the Aborigine*, Arthur Mee, a popular children's adventure book writer of the period, appears to suggest that without her 'assistance' and solicitations on their behalf, this 'dying' race (which had apparently managed to both survive and to flourish for 20,000 to 30,000 years before the European settlement of Australia) would be even more abject:

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> '[S]he knows them as they know themselves. She knows their languages, their rituals, their traditions, their capacities and their incapacities, as no white man or woman on the earth knows them. She can talk to them in 188 dialects. They have invited her to ceremonies which their own women may not attend, and have admitted her into their tribes and put their sacred totems in her keeping. *She is a magical figure to them.* She can quell a squabble with a word or a look. They come to her hungry and she feeds them. They come to her naked and she clothes them. They come to her sick and she heals them . . . If we ask what it is that she has had in view through all these years it is the thought that England, with these people in the shelter of the Flag, owes something to them. Their race is bound to disappear – it is about 60,000 strong and does not grow like the proud Maori race of New Zealand. It has been her idea that their lives should be controlled and cared for with that fact in view. They should be left as free as possible, to pass from existence as happily as may be.' (Mee, 1938, pp. xiv–xv, original emphasis)

By the early twentieth century Aboriginal Australians had in many ways lost autonomy over their lives and were indeed in shock, having been consigned to a 'vertigo in living'. They were alternatively being killed by white Australians or infantilised by them. They were also, by the early twentieth century, considered a 'dying race' to be coddled and 'protected'. At the same time as this process of 'protection' was being implemented, their 'rights' and autonomy were being ever more completely stripped away from them, community by community, individual by individual.

Conclusions

In 1938 one writer considered that the difference between Australian Aborigines and white Australians was that between 'Civilisation' and 'Barbarism':

> '[O]n the fringe of the vast island continent of Australia live a few millions of white people; in the vast desert regions far from the coast live a few thousands of black people, the remnant of the first inhabitants of Australia. The race on the fringe of the continent has been there about a hundred years, and stands for Civilization; the race in the interior has been there no man knows how long, and stands for Barbarism.' (Mee, 1938, p. xi)

Given our contemporary knowledge of the actions of both of these peoples after colonisation, one might consider that Arthur Mee, the author of this statement, had in fact muddled up who was to be regarded as 'barbaric' and who 'civilised' during the colonial period of Australian history. The principal savagery of the colonial period appears to have been that of settlers and explorers towards indigenous Australians, rather than the other way around.

Views such as those expressed by Mee were, however, common during the early twentieth century. Official policy towards indigenous Australians was essentially that they were a 'dying race' marked for extinction. The explanation generally offered for this calamity was their unsuitedness for modern life. They now needed to be 'protected' from 'civilisation' so as to 'ease the dying pillow'. The role played by European settlement in their demise was elided and 'half castes' were treated with disdain, as if there was no white complicity in their very existence – state agencies intervened to 'assist' by removing these 'products of degeneracy', in the parlance of the time, from their Aboriginal mothers and placing them in 'training' institutions. In the bizarre logic of colonial society the 'moral blame' for mixed-race births was somehow attributed to Aboriginal moral laxity, rather than the often brutal reality of life for indigenous women during the colonial period.

There was, however, at times official acknowledgement of the role of European settlement in the parlous position of indigenous Australians in their own country. For instance, in 1860 recognition of the decline of the Aboriginal population prompted the Legislative Council of South Australia to appoint a Select Committee to report 'on the present condition of the Natives, and to suggest means

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by which that condition may be ameliorated'. The report importantly stated, 'the whole question of civilized nations in taking possession of territory previously occupied by nomadic and uncivilized tribes, who, despite any questions of law or expediency, had an equitable title to the lands they occupied, and of which they are virtually dispossessed . . . All the evidence goes to prove that they have lost much, and gained little or nothing, by their contact with Europeans.'[4] However, such acknowledgement led to little action. Rather, there was during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century a growing sentimentalisation of Aboriginal Australians, a 'regret' at their passing, accompanied by the view that this however had, regrettably, been 'inevitable' rather than the result of European settlers' 'barbarism'.

One further irony in respect of the legal status of indigenous Australians during these 'killing times' was that during the pre-Federation period in which indigenous Australians were being driven from their lands, killed and marginalised, they were at law regarded as British subjects, and thus 'citizens' of the respective colonies (Tripcony, 1997). However, upon Federation, the Australian Constitution in 1901 effectively excluded Australian Aborigines as citizens, and further clarified their non-status as citizens the following year by passing legislation which excluded them from the right to vote. During World War II they were also specifically excluded from being able to enlist to defend their country. One stated rationale for this was Indigenous Australians' 'unreliability', a reference to their potential to side with the enemy rather than to support the 'Australian war effort'. This fantasised susceptibility of Aboriginal Australians not to support the defence of Australia is later reiterated in one of W. E. Johns's 'Biggles' stories, *Biggles in Australia*, in which Biggles comes to Australia to investigate growing hostility amongst Australian Aborigines to their 'white masters'. The story unfolds that 'various Iron Curtain agents are stirring up the local natives and encouraging them to murder white people' (http://www.biggles.info/Details/52/).

Interestingly, this adventure story was written in 1955, precisely at the time that the Australian Communist Party was organising in Aboriginal communities with respect to issues such as land rights, equal wages for Aboriginal Australians in rural areas and full citizenship. However, in W. E. Johns's rendition all agency on the part of Aboriginal Australians, or the rightfulness of such demands, is elided. Indigenous Australians are yet again reduced by the narrative to a state of 'childishness' rather than rightfully aggrieved traditional owners (Dewar, 1993, pp. 7–8). Much of the damage brought about by the imposition of a 'European fantasy' of a new homeland on the traditional owners of Australia is, of course, irreversible. It is not a past that is recoverable by way of economic reparations, as important as these are. Rather it is a matter which needs a serious re-examination of Australia's historical legacy. Dr Jeannine Purdy, in her introduction to a paper in which she examines the 'colonial nature' of much post-colonial writing, refers to Jean Paul Sartre's preface to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (Sartre in Fanon, 1963, p. 7), in which he wrote: 'In the colonies the truth stood naked, but the citizens of the mother country preferred it with clothes on*: the native had to love them, something in the way mothers are loved*' (Purdy, 1999, p. 203, original emphasis).

This captures the sentiment of much of Australian colonisation – this desire to be loved by those whose culture one had effectively destroyed, and whose existence had been reduced to a vertiginous state. The indigenous population of Australia was seen as doomed and in need of nurture, rather than being invested with rights. This was despite the fact that this apparent helplessness was the result of their wholesale slaughter at the hands of colonists, and their inability to stave off the range of diseases introduced by the colonists to Australia.

Chris Healy has alerted us, in a similar vein to Jeannine Purdy, to the need for white Australians to attend to white social memory as a priority, rather than attempting to write colonial histories for

4 South Australian Memory, Aboriginal Rights, www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=652.

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indigenous Australians (Healy, 1997b, p. 46). Healy and other writers on Australian history, both white and Aboriginal, have also focused their attention on warning us of the potentially 'imperialist' impulse inherent in appropriating another's historical experience as a 'testing ground' for theoretical speculation. Healy notes the contradictory role of 'history' for indigenous Australians. On the one hand 'history' needs to be employed by claimants to land rights, on another this 'history' is painful and often unproductive to recall. History is, of course, one of the key modes in which non-Aboriginal people know 'stories told by former colonists'. Indeed, history has been constituted as a significant field of force because knowledge of and domination of Aboriginal peoples have been so closely intertwined. For this reason 'history' has been regarded as part of the problem by some Aborigines, rather than a solution or as a form of catharsis.

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