

»Who are the Aborigines?«

The Western Images of Indigenous Australians

Given the number of talks which directly address the ›Intervention‹ and its deployment and cultural nexus, my talk concentrates on the (re)production of European images of Indigenous Australians, starting even before the first ›white‹ settlement of the continent.

These images continue to subliminally determine the discussions about ›who are the Aborigines‹ and are still available to contemporary politicians who refer to these old patterns of discrimination. Take, for example, ex-prime minister Tony Abbott, who claimed that Australia, before 1788, was »nothing but bush« and had been »unsettled or scarcely settled«. ¹ This is nothing else than putting ›terra nullius‹ (land belonging to no one) in other words and conjuring up the image of the Aborigines as a nomadic people. Usually, the traditional patterns of discrimination do not need to be addressed this explicitly: they are firmly anchored in the societal knowledge archives.

In particular four types of European representation can be discerned in the encounters with the indigenous population: the Aborigines as ›Australian negroes‹, as ›poorest objects of the habitable globe‹, as ›Black Caucasians‹, and as ›Indigenous Australians‹. ²

Outlining these four images is not an attempt at recounting the entire history of European-Australian relations. The »dialectical process of making the Aborigines and their making of themselves« ³ can hardly be fully investigated in this context. My talk therefore leaves aside most of the intricate question of Aboriginal agency and resistance during the colonization of Australia – and focusses on the Europeans portraying the Aborigines.

Further, though these images did emerge chronologically, they do not constitute clearly distinguishable time periods. Rather, they represent overlapping discourses which, like the ›doomed race‹ and ›assimilation as way to happiness‹, are not confined to one point in time but – social change is slow – are a concomitant phenomenon of European-Australian relations.

By way of conclusion, I will address a topic that aggregates elements from all the images and remains a persistent topic of discussion, from the early encounters to the self-declara-

¹ Tony Abbott cited in ›Prime Minister Tony Abbott describes Sydney as ›nothing but bush‹ before First Fleet arrived in 1788‹, [ABC News](#), 14.11.2014; ›Tony Abbott says Australia was ›unsettled‹ before British arrived‹, in: [The Guardian](#), 4.7.2014. {{{see also [Utube](#)}}}

² Firstly, after oscillating between ›noble‹ and ›ignoble savages‹, the Aborigines were located at the bottom of the ›scale of humanity‹ and classified as ›*Australian negroes*‹. Their apparent disappearance, accounted for by their alleged inferiority, was eventually backed up by Social Darwinism. Secondly, as ›*poorest objects of the habitable globe*‹, the Aborigines were transferred to assigned areas, where the European missionaries, teachers and government agents pursued their ›civilizing mission‹. Thirdly, the race sciences discussed the Aborigines as ›*Black Caucasians*‹ and negotiated possibilities of ›incorporating‹ parts of the aboriginal population into the ›white‹ mainstream society. Lastly, the last century saw an increase in political organization of the *Indigenous Australians* that paved the way to self-determination and expansion of indigenous rights as well as their social inclusion in the Australian society.

³ Bain Attwood: *The Making of the Aborigines*. Sydney, Boston: Allen & Unwin 1989, p. 150.

tion of the Northern Territory Emergency Response to today's media reports on the Indigenous Australians – their alleged susceptibility to the ›vices‹ of civilization, namely alcohol.

›Australian Negroes‹

Eighty-three thousand one hundred and sixty seven [83.167] days ago, the First Fleet's arrival in Port Jackson heralded the start of British settlement of the Australian continent. At this time, the question ›who are the Aborigines‹ had yet to be answered unambiguously. The earlier discovery journeys had identified two contrasting pictures: William Dampier, at the end of the 17th century, described them as »differ[ing] but little from brutes« and being the »miserablest People in the World«; a century later, James Cook stated that in their presumed state of ›not knowing‹ and ›not having‹, they were »far more happier than we Europeans«.⁴

Accordingly, early pictorial representation of the Aborigines around Sydney Cove recorded the diversity of notions prevailing amongst the first settlers that were interested in indigenous life and activities but also discussed their allegedly inferior state.

Some depictions studied the everyday business of the Aborigines and took no account of skin colours. Often they were well-nigh glorified as ›noble savages‹ and immortalized in positions which likened them to characters from Antiquity. In Jean Piron's ›Fishing Scene‹



fig. 1

(1790, fig. 1), depicting Tasmanian natives, one female native even adopts the contrapposto position – including the ›engaged leg – free leg‹ pose – that was characteristic for Greek and other antique statues.

⁴ William Dampier: A New Voyage Round the World. London 1699, p. 464; James Cook (c1770) cited in Glyndwr Williams: ›Far more happier than we Europeans‹. Reactions to the Australian aborigines on cook's voyage, in: Historical Studies, 19, 2008, 77, pp. 499-512, p. 499.

Interest in a reflective portraiture of the Aborigines did continue, for example, in Alexander Schramm's ›Civilisation vs. Nature‹ (1859, fig. 2). The artist contemplates the relations between the Aborigines and the Europeans and emphasizes the element of ›al-



fig. 2

ienation‹. The European is shown in an act of hard physical labour, while the result from his labour remains hidden from view. The futility of his work seems to puzzle the Aborigines. But the ›civilized‹ observer knows that breaking the stones represents the starting point of the ›white‹ brick-built civilization. In the philosophical discourse, this ›alienation‹ emerged as a ›conditio humana‹ – a precondition for self-development. But it was a concept said to be foreign to the people of the pre-civil society. In the present scenario, the passive ›noble savage‹ is thus portrayed in contrast to the ›alienated‹ white.

Thinking about the ›noble savage‹ as a figure of ›white‹ thought brings us back to the very the first drawings of Australian Aborigines – which were comparatively favourable depictions. The initial rough sketches were made by Sydney Parkinson (1770, fig. 3) who noted in his journal: ›they threw two of their lances at us; one of which fell between my feet‹.⁵ The later engraving by Thomas Chambers (1780, fig. 4) shows them ›advancing to combat‹, with their spears raised in the air. These spears are pre-contact weapons. They are not made for resistance against European invaders – but are used in so-called ›inter-tribal wars‹.

In his ›Leviathan‹, Thomas Hobbes described this ›state of nature‹ as ›a time of war where every man is enemy to every man [...] there is no place for industry [...], and consequently no culture of the earth, [...] no commodious building, [...] no knowledge of the

⁵ Sydney Parkinson, 28.4.1770, cited in Bernard Smith: *Imagining the Pacific. In the Wake of the Cook Voyages*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1992, p. 91.

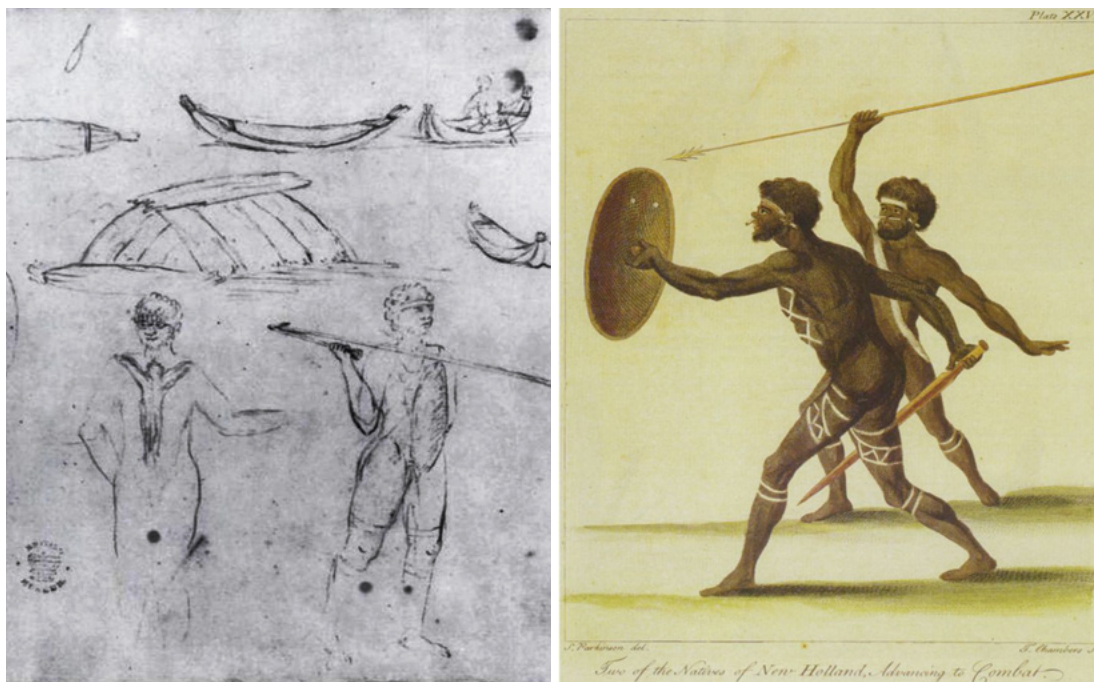


fig. 3 & 4

face of the earth; no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short». ⁶ Hence, while the visual picture drawn of the natives was similar to the way in which Greek heroes (with sword and shield) were depicted, it is the adjunct of ›combat‹, and their described attack, that gives away the true meaning: the ›savage‹ might be ›noble‹ – but the bottom line is that he is a savage; he is situated at a pre-stage of civilization which the Europeans had long left for the sake of the ›social contract‹ that established the ›civil society‹.

The other side of the depiction was then the ›ignoble savage‹. Many of the First Fleeters commented on the Aborigines as being »the most wretched of the human race«, »the most miserable of God's creatures«, and »the most miserable of the human form under heaven«; ⁷ portrayals of the Aborigines as ›violent warriors‹ showed their ›wretched‹ traits. With the northward expansion of ›white‹ settlement and the continued expropriation of the Aborigines, their visual representation was increasingly focussed on documenting transgressional activities, showing the Aborigines as thieves and murderers. Here a drawing published in a newspaper of the mid-1860s (fig. 5) tells of the attack of indigenous men on a shepherd's hut, another painting (fig. 6) documents the killing of a shepherd and the theft of sheep by Aborigines. The Aborigines were portrayed as instigators, who were to blame for their

⁶ »Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war where every man is enemy to every man, the same is consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.« – Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan, Of the Natural Condition of Mankind As Concerning Their Felicity, and Misery*, chapter XIII.

⁷ Cited in Stuart Banner: *Possessing the Pacific. Land, Settlers, and Indigenous People from Australia to Alaska*. Cambridge [et al.]: Harvard University Press 2007, p. 20.



fig. 5 & 6

own punishment. Retaliation for offences like these was effected immediately and more often than not ended in the massacring of whole groups of local Aborigines, which were then justified as means of punishment (fig. 7).⁸



fig. 7

These were, more or less, ›spontaneous‹ local reactions to situations on the colonial frontier and were by no means officially endorsed by the metropolis. However, over the years this image of the ›wretched, violent savage‹ was complemented by the race sciences. Their teachings were initially imported into the new colonies but were soon supplemented and specified by local medical professionals, ethnologists and anthropologists. Located at the bottom of the ›scale of humanity‹, the scientific discourse declared the indigenous inhabitants to be ›Australian Negroes‹.⁹

⁸ This ›extinctionist‹ stage was far from over after the mid-19th century, as demonstrated not least by the tremendous events at the turn of the 20th century in Western Australia which led to this period being called ›the killing times‹ – Bain Attwood: *The Making of the Aborigines*, p. x.

⁹ See Kay Anderson, Colin Perrin: ›The Miserablest People in the World‹, *Race, Humanism and the Australian Aborigine*, in: *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 18, 2007, 1, pp. 18-39; ›Poetry‹, in: *Sydney Gazette*

This description contained the entire history of transatlantic slavery and of the modern race theories, in which those labelled ›negroes‹ were not by accident placed at the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy and in close proximity to apes. The Australian Aborigines were even worse of: they were suspected to be the ›missing link‹ between humans and apes.¹⁰ Described as being »lowest in intellect«, »lowest samples of the human race«, and »the lowest grade of barbarity«,¹¹ the Aborigines were no longer considered as living in the Rousseauian ›Golden Age‹. Prevailing during these first decades was the idea that the Aborigines would rather sooner than later succumb to their inferiority: as a ›doomed race‹ they would disappear and give way to the ›white‹ settler society.

›Poorest Objects of the Habitable Globe‹

Albeit, the pessimistic view of a disappearance of the Aborigines was not shared by all settlers. The increasing arrival of missionaries in the colonies gave raise to campaigns which, according to European standards, should ›educate‹ the indigenous inhabitants by providing them with basic education and religious values.¹²

The first initiative for institutionalizing the so-called ›improvement‹ of the Aboriginal Australians had been made by the governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie, who, »having long viewed with Sentiments of Commiseration the very wretched State of the Aborigines of this Country«, decided on measures to »improve the Energies of this innocent, destitute, and unoffending Race«. ¹³ His school for the »Civilization of the Aborigines of both Sexes« was supposed to qualify them for manual labour and housework respectively. The adult Aborigines were supposed to learn the art of agriculture on governmentally assigned pieces of land, while all of the indigenous inhabitants were to be examined as to »their Progress in Civilization, Education and Morals« as well as »their Diet, Health, and Cleanliness«.

These »poorest objects of the habitable globe«, ¹⁴ as a missionary referred to them, were considered dependent on the help of Europeans. Relegating the Aborigines to the status

and New South Wales Advertiser, 3.2.1825 (›negro‹); ›Colonial Statistics‹, in: Colonist, 24.3.1838 (›Australian Negroes‹).

¹⁰ Cf. Deidre F. Jordan: Aboriginal Identity. Uses of the past, problems for the future?, in: Past and Present. The Construction of Aboriginality, ed. by Jeremy R. Beckett, p. 125.

¹¹ E. Leigh: Reconnoitring Voyages, Travels and Adventures in the New Colonies of SA etc., London 1839, p. 159; W. Westgarth: Australia Felix, Edinburgh 1848, p. 159; R. Helms: Anthropology, 1893, p. 237 – all cited in Laurence Goldman: The Anthropology of Cannibalism. Westport: Bergin & Garvey 1999, p. 63.

¹² Cf. Richard Broome: Aboriginal Australians. Black Responses to White Dominance 1788 - 2001. 3rd ed. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin 2001, p. 35 f.

¹³ »His Excellency the Governor having long viewed with sentiments of Commiseration the very wretched State of the Aborigines of this Country; and having resolved in his Mind the most probable and promising means of ameliorating their condition, has now taken the Resolution to adopt such measures as appear to him best calculated to effect that Object, and improve the Energies of this innocent, destitute and unoffending Race«. In order to »ascertain how far the Condition of the Natives may be improved«, Macquarie considered the Aborigines »in some Degree entitled« since »the British Settlement in this Country, though necessarily excluding the Native from many of the natural Advantages they had previously derived from the animal and other Productions of this Part of the Territory, has never met with any serious or determined Hostility from them«; ›General and Government Orders‹, in: Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, 10.12.1814. There also the following quotes.

¹⁴ George Clarke, Native Institute at Blacktown, 1823, cited in Richard Broome: Aboriginal Australians, p. 34.

of pupils, the missionaries undertook their work with the proviso of ›Civilizing and Christianising‹.

This made the Aborigines part of a world-spanning ›civilizing mission‹ conducted by the ›white race‹ that targeted all ›savages‹. Rudyard Kipling's poem ›White Man's Burden‹ (1899) addressed the already in-progress global politics of the same name – which saw it necessary to educate and proselytize the ›natives‹ of non-European countries.¹⁵ »Take up the White Man's burden, send forth the best ye breed | Go bind your sons to exile, to serve your captives' need | To wait in heavy harness, on fluttered folk and wild | Your new-caught, sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child«, the first stanza reads (fig. 8).



fig. 8

The ›half-devil, half-child‹ image was surely transferable to the Australian indigenous people who were considered to be living without religion, though, at the same time, they were showing basic developmental potentialities. In contrast to Kipling's ›white man's burden‹, which was a colonial policy, in Australia, this was a matter of internal policy. Most of the campaigns included the transferring of Aborigines to assigned areas.¹⁶ They were, forcibly or voluntarily, taken to missionaries or governmentally-run reserves. Not only did

¹⁵ The cartoon – published in the ›Judge‹, 1.4.1899 – depicts John Bull and Uncle Sam carrying men from China, India, Cuba, Hawaii, Samoa, and the Philippines to overcome, i.e., ›barbarism‹, ›superstition‹, ›brutality‹, and ›ignorance‹ to reach the peak, ›civilization‹, eventually granting ›education‹ and ›liberty‹.

¹⁶ Some had already been displaced from their traditional hunting grounds had settled at the fringes of the cities or had been confined to camps out of town and had become a resource for ›cheap labour‹, e.g. in livestock farming and the sugar industry. See Henry Reynolds: *With the White People*. Ringwood: Penguin Books 1990; Ann McGrath: ›Born in the Cattle‹. *Aborigines in Cattle Country*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1988; Stefanie Affeldt: *Consuming Whiteness. Australian Racism and the ›White Sugar‹ Campaign*. (Chapter 3.2 – ›None Suitable for Plantations. Aborigines and the Proliferation of Sugar). Berlin: Lit 2014.

it concentrate the Aborigines on a small piece of land, thus opening up the rest of the land for European settlement. It also meant subduing ›their wandering and unsettled habits‹ that were ›diametrically opposed‹ to the ›civilised life‹ they were supposed to be taught.¹⁷

The political reasoning for the missionaries – supporting the indigenous people in their independence – was at times unmasked as pretence. At the end of the 19th century, the people of Point McLeay in vain petitioned for an expansion of their self-determination and the permission to their complete taking over of the mission in order to benefit from yields.¹⁸



fig. 9

The missions and reserves also became the destination for anthropologists and other scholars, studying the cultures and habits of the ›Australian natives‹, as well as for the Sunday outings of the urban citizens, who took an interest in witnessing the people who had disappeared from the everyday street scene. In the same vein as these quasi-›human zoos‹, it was not uncommon to display extensive tables of the missionaries' inhabitants' portraits at the colonial exhibitions in the cities (fig. 9).

However, the continuously decreasing population numbers seemed to prove right the notion of the Aborigines as being on the verge of extinction. This view continued until well into the 20th century.¹⁹ It was Daisy Bates, who maintained that it was the Europeans'

¹⁷ Cited in Bain Attwood: *The Making of the Aborigines*, p. 2. Not seldom the forced relocation had adverse and lethal consequences for the indigenous groups: as in the case of the Aboriginal Tasmanians at the time of the ›Black War‹ [mid1820s-1832] who were convinced by deceit to consent to their transportation to an aboriginal establishment where diseases and detrimental living conditions caused the death for most of the relocated Aborigines – Cf. Richard Broome: *Aboriginal Australians*, pp. 52 f.

¹⁸ See Bain Attwood, Andrew Markus: *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights. A documentary history*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin 1999, pp. 56 f.; Graham Jenkin: *Conquest of the Ngarrindjeri*. Adelaide: Rigby 1979.

¹⁹ See also Steve Kinnane: *Blood History*, in: *First Australians. An Illustrated History*, ed. by Rachel Perkins, Marcia Langton. Carlton: Miegunyah Press 2008, pp. 227-283, here p. 254.

duty to »smooth the pillow of a dying« race. She explicitly spoke out against the so-called ›interracial breeding‹ and against the training of the Aborigines because »however early they might be taken and trained, with some exceptions, the only good half-caste is a dead one«.²⁰

›Black Caucasians‹

In doing so, Bates argued against a reasoning that dated back to the last decade of the 19th century: the notion that Aborigines were on a very early evolutionary stage – as ›living fossils‹ they were considered precursors of the Europeans. The Aborigines, as so-called »Black Caucasians«,²¹ »came to represent the past of advanced Europeans«.²² Though initially subject of much controversial discussion,²³ by the 20th century it was a widely accepted theory.

Evidence for this is a newspaper article from 1912, with the heading ›Who are the Aborigines?‹²⁴ I have taken the title of this talk from it. It tells of the theory that the Aborigines »were a primitive branch of the Caucasian type, from which the European races are descended«; today they were »at the same stage of development as had been the man of Neanderthal, who lived in Europe from 50 to 100 thousand years ago«, and it was due to the relative isolatedness of the Australian continent that this »was now the only place in the world where the ancient Caucasian type was still found existing«.

The notion that the ›Black Caucasians‹ were of the same ›race‹ as the ›whites‹ allowed for an argumentation that differed from racial debates in other countries – e.g. that in the United States, where the ›one-drop-rule‹ was part and parcel of the ›devaluation discourse‹ based on a contamination of the American racial corpus by ›intermixture‹ with African Americans. In contrast, the Australian ›breeding out the colour‹ emphasized its positive effects by accentuating the up-valuation through ›interracial mixing‹.

The theory was based on the (white-supremacist) logic that the ›primitive Caucasian genes‹ would be raised in their status by the addition of ›developed‹, i.e. ›white‹, ›Caucasian genes‹ over several generations. The ›racial mathematics‹ registered a gradual ›whitening‹,

²⁰ ›Aboriginal Reserves and Women Patrols‹, in: Sunday Times, 2.10.1921.

²¹ The notion of ›black Caucasians‹ was (seemingly) first introduced when John W. Gregory (geologist, geographer and explorer) was attempting to identify the origin of the »intelligence and generosity« of the Aborigines he met at Lake Eyre. »He traced in them a mixture of the negro and the black Caucasian, the combination giving them a character far above what he had expected to find« – ›untitled‹, in: Argus, 25.4.1902. Also the origins of the Aborigines were explained by Australia having been »invaded by a race of black Caucasians, who intermixed with the negroid occupants, and the Australian aborigines were the offspring of this mixture«, ›Antiquity of Man in Victoria‹, in: Border Watch, 6.7.1904. Three decades later, Bates refers to the theory »assumed by some ethnologists that our British ancestors were white Caucasians, and that the Australians are black Caucasians, who, in the long evolution of civilisation, have remained at the ancient culture level of chipped flint, rude club spear and spear thrower, with a boomerang that was probably brought along by the Dravidian or wild hill tribe that the pre-Aryans hunted out of India« – ›My Natives And I‹, in: Advertiser, 23.1.1936.

²² Warwick Anderson: The Cultivation of Whiteness. Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia. Carlton: Melbourne University Press 2005 [2002], p. 199 (›past‹), see also p. 200 for the Aborigines as representing a »form of archaic Caucasian«.

²³ Cf. Russell McGregor: An Aboriginal Caucasian. Some uses for racial kinship in early twentieth century Australia, in: Australian Aboriginal Studies, 1996, 1, pp. 11-20, p. 11.

²⁴ ›Who are the Aborigines?‹, in: Sydney Morning Herald, 25.9.1912, p. 19.

resulting in a nomenclature that identified [i.a.] ›half-castes‹, ›quadroons‹, and ›octoroons‹. The discourse was thus not one of the common reasoning against the contamination of miscegenation, but concerned the improvement of the indigenous ›racial corpus‹ (fig. 10).

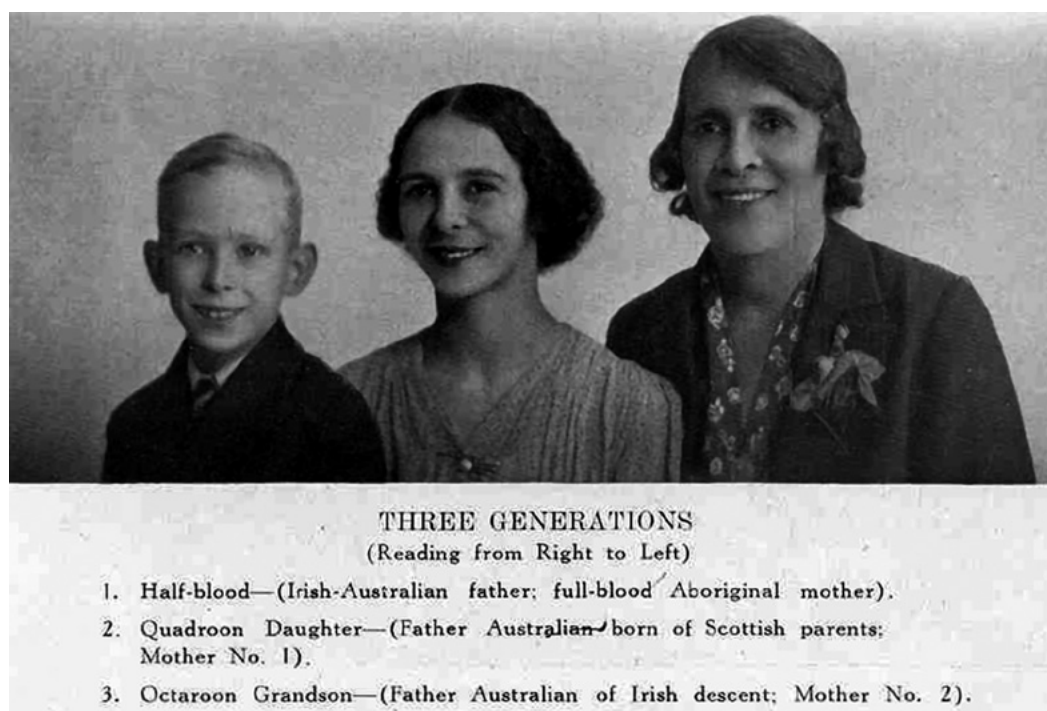


fig. 10

The phenotypical ›whitening‹ of the Aboriginal population that accompanied this process of ›biological elevation‹ comprised the forced disappearance of colour. It became the political basis of the ›breeding out the colour‹ whose target were the so-called ›half-castes‹. They, according to a government official [Cecil Cook], would »in only a few decades [...] equal or exceed in number the white population«.²⁵ This ›biological improvement‹ was then complemented by ›cultural improvement‹, which justified the removal of indigenous children – today known as the ›Stolen Generations‹.

A. O. Neville, one of those at the forefront of the debate, when faced with the increase of the indigenous population, posed the question: »Are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there ever were any Aborigines in Australia?»²⁶

This is actually the crucial point: the race-biological findings regarding the ›Black Caucasians‹ entailed drastic changes in the racism of the time, though it did not in the least lessen it. It took the allegedly ›primitive‹ status of the Aborigines as the basis for their literal disintegration; their so-called ›improvement‹ was nothing else than the guarantor of their disappearance. The deeply racist perspective of this policy intended the complete an-

²⁵ Cecil Cook, cited in Henry Reynolds: *An Indelible Stain? The question of genocide in Australia's history*. Ringwood: Viking 2001, p. 150. See also Tony Austin: Cecil Cook, Scientific Thought and ›Half-Caste‹ in the Northern Territories 1927-1939, in: *Aboriginal History*, 14, 1990, 1, pp. 104-122.

²⁶ Cited in Henry Reynolds: *An Indelible Stain*, p. 153.

nihilation of the Aborigines by ›ultimate absorption‹ into the ›white society‹. The ›Black Caucasian‹ was therefore supposed to be the ›last of his race‹ – to be assimilated not as a ›blood brother‹ but to be extinguished by dissolution.

Indigenous Australians

While the other three images of the ›Australian Aborigine‹ were made entirely by ›whites‹, this last image has been created by the indigenous people themselves. It had to be elaborated in a rather prolonged process during which several obstacles, posed by the ›white society‹, had to be overcome. Though it is nowadays shared by large parts of the mainstream society, it has not yet been completely asserted in the Australian public.

While there has been resistance to the European invasion from the beginning, the history of Aboriginal political protests (after European standards) has its origins in the 1840s. Calling for legislative changes based on their prior occupation of the land, the protest actions comprised petitioning to colonial governments and politicians as well as staging walkouts on missions and reserves (and were predominately concerned with local issues).²⁷

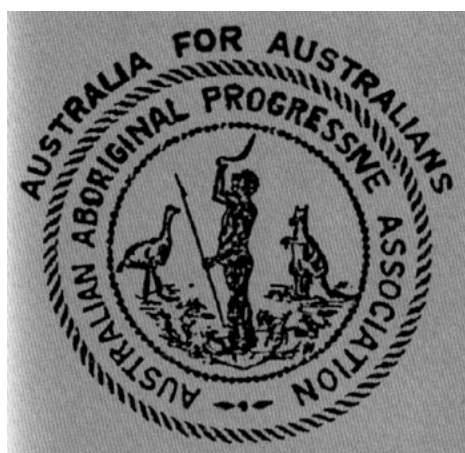


fig. 11 & 12

The first half of the 20th century then saw the broadening of Aboriginal political organising. The Aborigines who arduously created the image of the ›political Indigenous Australian‹ over decades certainly had a difficult time of asserting it. The racist agenda of the time was slow in changing. It was only within the context of a broader range of events that pertained ›First Nations‹ and ›non-whites‹ all over the globe that the claims to rights of self-determination and societal participation gained effectiveness.²⁸

²⁷ Bain Attwood, Markus Andrews: *The Struggle for the Aboriginal Rights*, pp. 9 ff.

²⁸ For movements and campaigns by ›First Nations‹ and colonized people see, for example, Barrie Macdonald: *Britain*, p. 173 (Western Pacific); Spencer D. Segalla: *The Moroccan Soul*, pp. 172 f.; Sunil S. Amrith: *Migration and Diaspora in Modern Asia*, p. 94 f. (Saya San); Frank Füredi: *Colonial Wars and the Politics of the Third World Nationalism*, pp. 22 f.

The establishment of the first indigenous political organization, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association in 1925 in Sydney (fig. 11),²⁹ was followed by the emergence of other organizations, like the Aborigines Progressive Association and the Native Union, which furthered the indigenous assertion of traditional landownership.³⁰ During the subsequent decades the determination ›who are the Aborigines‹ increasingly lay in the hands of the Indigenous Australians themselves. One of the first major accomplishments included the ›Day of Mourning‹ that was established in 1938 and had not only gained broad media attention but also turned the spotlight to the disastrous situation of the original inhabitants of the Australian continent (fig. 12). Its widespread media coverage raised public awareness that was used to campaign in favour of the improvement of the conditions and rights for Aborigines.³¹

Over the course of time, the Aboriginal strikes for equal rights gained the support of the unions (fig. 13). The focussed political action then led to the 1967 referendum to change the constitution: incorporating Indigenous Australians in the census and enabling the government to legislate for them. Campaigns, like the establishment of the Aboriginal Embassy in Canberra in 1972 further underpinned their campaigning for more, political and legal, representation.



fig. 13

Thus, though tediously, the Indigenous Australians increasingly became a part of the Australian society without their Aboriginal status being lost. This was not least achieved with the identification of identity-building possibilities. Here, the Indigenous Australians (retrospectively) created their own folk heroes – some of which are not only acknowledged by the general Australian society but feature prominently in it.

Take for example David Unaipon, a Ngarrindjeri man from South Australia, born in the 1870s. He was the first indigenous person to publish a book on indigenous cultures. His inventions include a shearing machine that was the prototype for modern mechanical shears. But, most strikingly, the present-day 50-Dollar bill bears his image, along with the quote: ›As a full-blooded member of my race I think I may claim to be the first – but, I hope not the last – to produce an enduring record of our customs, beliefs and imaginings‹ (fig. 14).

Of course, there is also Eddie Koiki Mabo who, in a legal process that lasted almost exactly a decade (from 1982 to 1992), addressed the traditional property situation of the Indigenous Australians, and eventually achieved to overturn the legal concept of ›terra

²⁹ See Marcia Langton, Rachel Perkins: *First Australians*, p. 309.

³⁰ Cf. Bain Attwood, Markus Andrews: *The Struggle for the Aboriginal Rights*, p. 10.

³¹ See Marcia Langton, Rachel Perkins: *First Australians*, pp. 311 f.



fig. 14

nullius«, thus opening possibilities for the application of native title in other parts of the continent.

There is also, famously, Cathy Freeman, who as an indigenous sportswoman initially received little encouragement and had to endure all the subtleties of racism. She stated that »When I run at home, I'm always Cathy Freeman, the Aboriginal athlete. Yet when I run overseas, it's always Cathy Freeman, the Australian«. ³² Her success at the Sydney 2000 Olympics made her the »symbol of a multicultural Australia and of reconciliation between Black and White« and (in her words) an »unofficial ambassador [...] for the indigenous people of Australia«. ³³

Besides, the debate about the current image of ›the Aborigine‹ is nowadays, of course, not only facilitated as a political discussion by Indigenous Australians but it is further complemented and supported by an increasing amount of scholars and scientist of indigenous descent.

The fact that the Indigenous Australians are now self-conscious and self-confident members of the Australian society can thus hardly be negated. As a consequence – fortunately! – the traditional stereotypes show signs of erosion.

Take, for instance, Yagan – the Noongar man, who, in the 1830s first mediated negotiations with, then fought against the ›white‹ settlers near Perth. ³⁴ His statue allows for a comparison of the earliest depictions of ›New Holland‹ warriors with this colonial warrior (fig. 15 & 16). It provides starting points for studying a change in perspective over the years. The first portrayals may have been favourable depictions of ›noble savages‹, they nonetheless located the portrayed in a state of nature characterized by lack of culture and civility. Yagan, however, is now remembered with a statue (for whose erection the Noongar community had to lobby for a decade). His burial in the ›Yagan Memorial Park‹ can

³² Cathy Freeman, March 1996, cited in Jennifer Heargraves: *Heroines of Sport. The Politics of Difference and Identity*, pp. 78-128, p. 101.

³³ Ibid., p. 125; Indigenous Australia: Biography Cathy Freeman (›ambassador‹), www.ia.anu.edu.au. See also: Bruce Toni, Emma Wensing: ›She's not one of us‹. Cathy Freeman and the place of Aboriginal people in Australian national culture, in: *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2, 2009, pp. 90-100. Colin Tatz, Daryl Adair: Darkness and a Little Light: ›Race‹ and Sport in Australia, in: *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2, 2009, pp. 1-14; Colin Tatz: Coming to Terms: ›Race‹, Ethnicity, Identity and Aboriginality in Sport, in: *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2, 2009, pp. 15-31.

³⁴ For more information on Yagan, see Cressida Fforde: Yagan, in: *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy, and Practice*, ed. by id., Jane Hubert and Paul Turnbull, London: Routledge 2002, pp. 229-241; Hannah McGlade: Repatriation of Yagan. A Story of Manufacturing Dissent, in: *Law Text Culture*, 4, 1998, pp. 245-255.

be taken as evidence for a broader acknowledgement of him not being one of the earlier (to European standards) ›unpolitical‹ ›savages‹ but a part of the Australian society and its archive of knowledge. No longer a savage terrorist, he is turned into an official – a state-approved, if you will – resistance fighter.



fig. 15 & 16

Conclusion

Nonetheless, the contrasting constructions of the Indigenous Australians as ›noble‹ and ›ignoble savages‹, ›doomed race‹ and ›living fossils‹ stemming from their depiction as ›Australian negroes‹, ›poorest objects‹, and ›Black Caucasians‹ continue to inform the contemporary discourses.

With ›terra nullius‹, the denial of the Indigenous Australians' relationship to their land had – from the first day – driven a wedge between them and their traditional land-based culture. This historic construction of the Aborigines as nomadic people certainly informed the critical voices opposing the ›Intervention‹ based on its forced lease of community land. But, even more, the notion of Aborigines as ›wards of the state‹ – dating back to their disenfranchisement on the missions and reserves and supported by legislation – is being upheld most prominently in the ›Intervention's‹ intrusion in terms of the Indigenous Australians self-determination. Nothing better illustrates this than the ban on alcohol.

The Northern Territory Board report sees alcohol abuse as »a priority« that needs to be »conquered« before any other help can be provided, and the Northern Territory Emergency Response Act states as one of its objects the »enabl[ing] of special measures to be

taken to reduce the alcohol-related harm in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory».³⁵

What is important in this context is not the question of the actual misuse of alcohol but rather the ideological construction of the ›Aboriginal drunkard‹. There is alcohol abuse in the indigenous communities as sure as there is alcohol abuse in the mainstream society. But how do these two differ? Generally, the society antagonizes the misuse of alcohol: there is a legal drinking age, there is – particularly in Australia – a limited access to alcohol (only sold in liquor stores), there are special taxes on alcohol etc. But these are all individual restrictions.

In the case of the Northern Territory alcohol ban, however, the matter is declared a group problem. Or rather it actually becomes a racialized problem since the alcohol abuse is now purportedly racially classifiable. It is the Indigenous Australians who cannot deal responsibly with liquor – consequently, the alcohol ban sanctions all of them (at least in the ›prescribed areas‹).³⁶

The notion that such elements of civilization could be detrimental in particular to the native inhabitants is nothing new. The long-standing (European) suspicion that the ›degrading effects of civilization‹ are harmful first and foremost to ›natives‹ contain suspicions about the incompatibility of indigenous people with the ›achievements‹ of the ›civilized world‹ have been voiced all along.³⁷ From the early pubs in Sydney Cove to Namatjira's arrest to the present day media reports, the European notion of the Aborigines as physically and culturally ›inferior‹ and less ›resilient‹ seems hidden behind a veil of humanitarian concern.

It was acknowledged, as soon as 1818, that the Europeans were giving the Aborigines ›intoxicating liquors‹ and were thus contributing to their ›sinking [...] in the scale of existence‹.³⁸ This drawing from 1830 depicts a group of Aborigines sitting on a Sydney street in front of a hotel (fig. 19).³⁹ Other lithographs were bought and circulated as ›quite amusing‹ scenes amongst the European settlers (fig. 17 & 18).⁴⁰

The story of Albert Namatjira, taking place about a century later, neatly ties into the here outlined European images. Though a ›full-blooded‹ Aborigine, in 1957, Albert

³⁵ »[U]nless alcohol is conquered, there is little point in attending to any of the other worthwhile proposals in this report. It is a priority!«, [Report](#) of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, p. 18. See also [Stronger Futures](#) in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Act 2012. No. 101, 2012. An Act to amend laws, and deal with transitional matters, Stronger Futures in connection with the in the Northern Territory Act 2012, and for related purposes.

³⁶ [Northern Territory Emergency Response Act](#). Act No. 129 of 2007 as amended.

³⁷ See for example ›Wirth's Wild West Show‹, in: Darling Downs Gazette, 3.6.1891; ›Seen and Heard‹, in: Prahan Telegraph, 11.1.1908; ›Escape and Death of Killer‹, in: Adelaide Chronicle, 26.8.1937.

³⁸ ›These, therefore, I can pity‹, in: Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, 7.11.1818.

³⁹ Geoffrey Dutton: White on Black. The Australian Aborigine Portrayed in Art. Melbourne: Macmillan 1974: Augustus Earle: ›Natives of New South Wales, as seen in the streets of Sydney‹ (image no. 27).

⁴⁰ ›Mr. Maklehose of Hunter-street, has brought out a drunken aboriginal scene for the Lithographic press. It is quite amusing and very well executed‹ – ›untitled‹, in: Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, 25.10.1834. In July 1841, the Sydney Herald reported: ›During the present week there has been an extraordinary number of drunken Aborigines in the vicinity of Market street‹, and asked ›Why do not the Police enforce the penalty of £5 against publicans who supply the drink?‹ – ›The Aborigines‹, in: Sydney Herald, 19.7.1841. At the same time, in Queensland, indigenous children were employed in the bêche-de-mer industry, besides a meagre annual monetary payment, they were given alcohol as a daily allowance – Shirleene Robinson: The Unregulated Employment of Aboriginal Children in Queensland, 1843-1902, in: Labour History, 2002, 82, pp. 1-15, here p. 11.



fig. 17 & 18

Namatjira was granted Australian citizenship based on his artistic achievements. He was freed from the restrictions making Indigenous Australians wards of the state. However, a year later he was incarcerated⁴¹ after violating the (WA) law that »any person who has more native blood than a quadroon is not permitted to drink alcoholic liquor«,⁴² when he provided a fellow artist with wine.

Finally – the scenes from the early 19th century catering to ›white‹ sensationalism (fig. 19) seem to be revived in the 2006 report of the Times magazine which published photographs of an indigenous meeting place (fig. 20) and stressed the »[s]taggering quantities of alcohol [that] are consumed in drinking sessions in the bush«.



fig. 19 & 20

This shows that it is in particular the image of the ›Aboriginal drunkard‹, who comprises all suspicions of inferiority and predisposition to self-destruction which found expression in the other types mentioned in this talk, that remains one of the most enduring of the Western images of Indigenous Australians.

⁴¹ ›An Artist's Drink is a Government's Hangover‹, in: Western Mail, 20.1.1955 (›native blood‹). See also Heather Douglas, Mark Finnane: Indigenous Crime and Settler Law. White Sovereignty After Empire. London [et al.]: Palgrave Macmillan 2012, p. 143 ff.; Kaye Price: Knowledge of Life. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press 2015, p. 82 f.

⁴² ›An Artist's Drink is a Government's Hangover‹, in: Western Mail, 20.1.1955 (›native blood‹).