

Anne Pattel-Gray

Tiddas Residence

Combating Racism, Patriarchy and Misogyny within Colonial Australia

A Deep Sense of the Sacred

We, Aboriginal peoples of Australia, are profoundly religious in our character. The formalities of our life, the mode of our life and thought, and our every act have spiritual significance. Our most deliberate words and deeds revolve around religious considerations. We have a highly developed sense of the sacred, and our views of ourselves and of the world are pre-eminently religious.

We have always centred our lives in the spiritual-natural world. We are deeply committed to the Creator and our Ancestors and to creation in consciousness and instinct. Only through our spiritual connection to Country and creation can we continue in our own identity. Therefore, we conceive of ourselves in terms of the land. In our view, the earth is sacred. It is a living entity in which other living entities have origin and destiny. It is where our identity comes from, where our spirituality begins. It is the Ancestral Narratives! It is where stewardship begins, and it is where the life source is sustained. We are bound to the land in our spirit. By means of our involvement in the natural world, we can ensure our own well-being.

One of our greatest strengths lies in our ability to communicate with the spiritual world around us. This is manifested in our extensive use of symbolism, in our visionary experiences, in our Spirituality, and in our use of language. These forms of communication and these symbols have clear expressions in our Ancestral Narratives, the initiation ceremonies, the sacred sites, the healing rituals and the ceremonies. They are evident in our oral traditions.¹

Our perception of ourselves and our world – whether it is physical, emotional, or spiritual – is not fragmented. Rather, these elements all co-exist together. The importance of this connection between us and other living forms of creation is expressed through totemism. The ritual performance associated with our totemism influences and ensures the reproduction of both the natural and the human continuation and the natural cycle of seasons.

A Strong Bond with the Environment

Through many thousands of years, Aboriginal Nations have developed an intimate relationship between ourselves, land and our environment. Through our

1 Cf. Anne Pattel-Gray: *Through Aboriginal Eyes*, p. 157.

Spiritual interconnection with the natural world, we do not see ourselves as separate from it but as inextricably bound to it. Our place and survival in this world come as a direct result of this close relationship with our natural environment. Our relationship with our environment is not one of domination or manipulation. We do not erect huge religious cathedrals, churches, or synagogues to highlight the significance of sacred areas. Instead, our Sacred Sites are natural land formations where our Ancestral Spirits interacted with creation and therefore based Aboriginal ownership on our Spiritual identification and association with our lands, water, and sea.

Through the bestowal of land by the Creator Spirit to our Spirit Ancestors, the Aboriginal Nations share in maintaining our interconnections, through shared responsibilities and obligations through our totemic relationships or as custodians of a certain Sacred Site. This is done through rituals and ceremonies continually performed at the exact time each year. These cannot be done by just anyone; they can only be done by those responsible as custodians of that particular site. These may be done, however, by more than one language group. Those who share in these obligations may be custodians of a specific section of the ritual relating to a site through their totemic association and through shared ownership of sacred knowledge. Cooperation or sharing is an important factor in any Aboriginal society, not only between gender but also between clans and tribal language groups. The division of labour is shared amongst the community as well as the responsibilities and obligation of sacred rituals and ceremonies shared between clans and tribes as each may have ownership of a certain section of a particular ritual.

Ancestral Narratives

For Aboriginal Nations, our Ancestral Narratives are the embodiment of truth as they detail the beginning of creation and the life of all living things. It is the basis on which Aboriginal Nations' connection to land, water and sea is associated and through which it is symbolised. Ancestral Narratives are maintained in an oral tradition and told and retold by elders to the next generations and the Ancestral Narratives are recorded within the land, water and sea of the Creator's actions and interactions with our Ancestral Spirits in the creation of our world. They describe the birth of our humanity, the essence of our religious beliefs, laws, ceremonies, and rituals derived from our Ancestral Narratives. They hold time immemorial and are the eternal nexus to our Spirit Creator and Ancestral Spirits to the past, present and future generations.

Ancestral Narratives are the embodiment of truth, and the authenticity is never questioned. They are not written in some books; our lands contain the stories, markings and narratives of the Spirit Creator and Ancestral Beings found in our Ancestral Narratives. Through our ceremonies and rituals, Aboriginal Nations sing and dance the Ancestral Narratives into life, to give praise to the Creator which ensures the rejuvenation of the creation.

The 'Dreaming' Concept

The Ancestral Narratives for Aboriginal Nations are both real and concrete and are the basis upon which Aboriginal people's identity and relationships with the Spirit Creator, Ancestral Spirits, land, water and sea, environment and humanity are established. The 'Dreaming' is a term constructed by White male anthropologists to describe Aboriginal Nations Ancestral Narratives and religious life.

The following are Aboriginal women scholars responding to some of this so-called 'Western scholarship'. Cynthia Rowan highlights a time when

The Dreaming is a term that was pulled apart and psychoanalysed by people like Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1960), and Roheim in *Australia Totemism: A Psycho-Analytic Study in Anthropology* (1971) and *The Eternal Ones of Dream: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Australian Myth and Ritual* (1945). They attempted to define what was 'true' or 'real' in terms of their own cultural perception.²

These fundamental Aboriginal aspects differ greatly from Western concepts of dreaming; all Western preconceptions should be purged from the mind, in order to begin with an openness and a willingness to view our Aboriginal Nations' religious and spiritual world with different eyes and understanding. Christine Morris explains,

In Aboriginal societies such as the *Arrente* of Central Australia, the Dreaming was the time of 'power'. *Arrente* Dreaming stories are told, danced, and sung with the intention of re-creating, and I stress, *re-creating* the Dreaming or power. Every time the Dreaming is re-enacted it is re-created. Or, to put it another way, every time the *Arrente* women re-enact the Honeyant Dreaming they are creating the honeyants and the food supply associated with it.³

Even though historically we have seen many cases where the West has failed in such an attempt to have an open mind, however, we encourage the readers to try and open themselves to the unique spiritual and religious lifeways of the original peoples of Australia. Patrick Dodson describes the Dreaming in the terms of Law,

to offer some understanding of the deeply spiritual nature of Aboriginal people through an explanation of the Dreaming. An understanding of the concepts of the Dreaming is essential to any understanding of the Australian First Nations worldview. The English word 'dreaming' can be misleading because the concepts which it translates are extremely complex, and largely are unrelated to the English meaning of the word. These concepts often are alternatively described as the 'Law'. They are a coherent and all-encapsulating body of truths which govern the whole of life. 'The Dreaming' or 'The Law' includes the past and ongoing activities of creative and life-giving forces which always retain a sense of immanence and transcendence, of the actual potential. Western understanding of time is beautifully confounded by these concepts.⁴

To provide a greater understanding of the historical development of the use of the word Dreaming, and where it came from, requires us to cover the early interactions of White anthropologists and Aboriginal Nations. One of the biggest difficulties confronted by anthropologists was the many languages of the

2 Ibid., p. 14.

3 Ibid., p. 29 (emphasis in original).

4 Patrick Dodson: *The Land Our Mother, the Church Our Mother*, pp. 83-88.

Aboriginal Nations. Spencer and Gillen were amongst the first to begin using the term 'Dreaming' or 'Dreamtime', in describing in English the term referred to by the Aranda people from Central Australia as 'Alchheringa' or 'Altjiranga' in describing the time in which the Creator through the Ancestral Spirits shaped the land and environment and handed down the Law and lifeways, still being followed today by Aboriginal Nations. The Aranda term 'Altjiranga ngambakala' means, 'having originated out of one's own eternity', 'being immortal', and it is this that forms the fundamental basis of the term 'Dreaming'. Also, the Aranda 'Altjirarama', means 'to see or dream eternal things.' Another Aboriginal Nations language group, the Karadjiri people from the Kimberleys at the north of Western Australia, say 'Bugari'.⁵ In Northwest Australia the Ngarinyin people refer to the 'Dreaming' as 'Ungud' and the Yolngu people of Northeastern Arnhem Land speak of it as 'Wongar' and the Pitjantjatjara people refer to it as 'Tjukurpa'.

As a result of linguistic problems encountered by these anthropologists, it was easier for them to use this simple term 'Dreaming' in describing this very Spiritual and religiously complex aspect of Aboriginal Nations tradition. Although the term 'Dreaming' or 'Dreamtime', was the English way to describe Aboriginal Nations' understanding and belief, this reference is now used widely by Aboriginal people right across Australia, when speaking to non-Aboriginal people.

For Aboriginal people, the creative and life-giving forces are still very much alive. The land is full of the Ancestors of all humans, plant and animal life are represented in the landforms. This extends to celestial forms such as the planets and the stars, the moon and the sun. There are stories and songs throughout the land which relate to these things. Sites where events of great significance occurred are holy places-sacred sites. Some places are so important that their story can only be told by the fully initiated people.⁶

The relationship with the Creator and our Spirit Ancestors is of vital importance for Aboriginal Nations as it is the source of our Spirituality and beliefs, the time of the Creator and the beginning of everything: the beginning of time, the creation of life, the birth of humanity and the ordering of all things. It is the remote past of the Spirit Ancestors. This past lives on in ceremonies and rituals that have been passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation for over 110000 years - the time that the Aboriginal people have lived on the land now called 'Australia'.

Creator Beings

The different Aboriginal language groups/Nations have different names for the Creator Spirit that embodied both the masculine and feminine nature of the Creator Spirit, such as the masculine father figure Baiame, Yiirmbal, Bunjil, Paayamu, Biiral, Wandjina, Daramulun or Nurelli and the feminine mother figure Birrahgnooloo, Mutjingga or Imberombera. We embrace both masculine and

5 Max Charlesworth, Howard Morphy, Diane Bell: Religion in Aboriginal Australia, p. 9.

6 Patrick Dodson: The Land Our Mother, the Church Our Mother, p. 22.

feminine identities of the Creator Spirits as our Ancestral Narratives will outline and depict.

This personal view of the Creator Spirit is the primary Creator-beings in Aboriginal religion, and the actions of the Ancestral Spirits played a secondary function in the act of creation. An essential aspect of this understanding for Aboriginal people is that every person incorporates part of the sacred essence of these supreme Creators – masculine/feminine, into their being. It is important to note that this definition is based on Men/Women business.

Baiame, Bunjil, Yiirmbal, Paayamu, Biiral, Wandjina, Daramulun or Nurelli

Throughout Victoria, New South Wales and parts of Queensland Aboriginal Nations held to the belief of a Supreme Being; although referred to by different names such as Baiame, Bunjil, Yiirmbal, Paayamu, Biiral, Wandjina, Daramulun and Nurelli, all is considered by Aboriginal people to be the embodiment of the Creator Spirit, a masculine and creative Sky-Father and paternally related to all men. He is acknowledged as the Creator Spirit, and as having powers beyond those of humanity; it is believed that the Creator Spirit lived on the earth and then ascended to the sky, where he continues to be to this day.

Birrahgnooloo, Mutjingga or Imberombera

Like the Creator Spirit Baiame, Bunjil, Yiirmbal, Paayamu, Biiral, Wandjina, Daramulun and Nurelli, the feminine Supreme Being is given great reverence, and amongst the Murinbata, she is called 'Mutjingga', and she is also referred to as the 'Kale Neki' and by other Aboriginal Nations language groups as 'Birrahgnooloo' and 'Imberombera', 'the mother of us all'.⁷ The All-Mother is one and the same as the All-Father in terms of kinship and is considered by Aboriginal Nations to have the same relationship to all. The All-Father is male, the All-Mother is female, and both lived on the earth, and when the All-Father rose into the sky, the All-Mother descended into the water.

For the Kakadu people and their neighbours in north-west Arnhem Land. Imberombera (All-Mother) landed at Malay Bay after walking through the sea with a stomach full of children and dilly bags filled with yams. As she travelled about the Country, she deposited yams, bamboo and Cyprus bulbs; formed hills, creeks, animals and plants; and left spirit children, whom she instructed in what language to speak. [Accordingly] Imberombera was the original great Ancestress from whom other Spirit Ancestors emanated. They helped to produce and distribute Aborigines and their culture, but their creativity derived from her [Imberombera] and they acted at her [Imberombera] behest [...] Other variants in the All-Mother belief include her portrayal as a pair of sisters or as a mother with daughters. Some of the All-Mother's attributes, especially the snake-like appearance with which she

7 Cf. William E. H. Stanner: *On Aboriginal Religion*, pp. 40 ff.

is sometimes credited and her frequent association with water, are reminiscent of Rainbow Serpents, probably the most important figures in Aboriginal mythology.⁸

In most cases, the sacred rituals and symbolism associated to certain rituals relate equally to women and men. As most of the rituals and ceremonies relate to rejuvenation and reproduction of the life cycle of flora, funaná and humanity, the fertility of life is of great importance. Women's relationship to fertility is considered important, if not dominant, in some areas. In different parts of our Country, Aboriginal Nations' Ancestral Narratives quite often refer to the female Ancestors and their power and authority with reverence and great respect. The understanding of our Ancestral Narratives and belief is not limited to a memory of the past, it is also the reality of the present and the creator of the future. From our cosmogony comes the Laws that the Creator gave our Ancestors and passed on through the rituals and ceremonies, Laws, Spirituality, and culture which are carried out even to this day.

Spirit, Land and People

Our Ancestral Narratives mean the eternal link between the Creator and Ancestral Spirit(s) and Aboriginal humanity, the creation of life and the sustaining of life, the connection to land through totems and sacred places given to us by the Creator through our Ancestors and the relevance of the nexus between the there-and-then to the here-and-now. In this creative period, everything was different to how we view this land today. This was long ago, in the time when everything was being formed when the world was featureless. This is the time of the Creator Spirit that moved into action through our Spirit Ancestors shaping and creating the environment as we see it today.

Often this act of creation came as a result of Spirit Ancestors that may have left a part of themselves in this process of creation, making significant features in the landscape. The Spirit Ancestors, for example, leave a backbone in the form of a ridge or an eye which is marked by a waterhole, and a tail which became a tree. This period of creation is viewed as being very sacred to Aboriginal people. These links between Aboriginal Nations, the Creator and the Spirit Ancestors are embodied within our religious beliefs.

During this time of creation, the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Creator and the land, environment, and the earth and sky, and the Spirit world and the human world - all are intertwined, forging the eternal link which forms the basis of Aboriginal religious belief systems. Also found in the Ancestral Narratives, the creation of some origins of animals are described, for example, the quarrel between two Spirit Beings in which one hit the other with a stone on the back and became the first turtle; or the one in which another Spirit Being is speared and the spears turn into quills; or the first echidna, in which red ochre or pipeclay is found today, as a result of the Spirit Beings spilling blood, milk or semen on the ground during the time of the action and interactions of the Spirit

8 Kenneth Maddock: *How to Do Legal Definitions of Traditional Rights*, pp. 293-308.

Ancestors. A perfect example of a creation narrative that describes the Land. This Ancestral Narrative provides an Aboriginal view and understanding of creation.

Wangarr – The Ancestral Past

The Yolngu Nations of Northeast Arnhem Land make a clear distinction between the time when only Wangarr (Ancestral past) beings existed and the time, up to the present, when the earth has been inhabited by human beings 'Yolngu Yuwalk' (lit. true human beings, to be distinguished from Ancestral beings who took human form). These two periods overlap, so the first 'Yolngu Yuwalk', the founding human ancestors of each clan, interacted with many of the Wangarr beings associated with their clan territory.

In a sense the Ancestral past continues into the present, for although they are no longer seen wandering the earth, the Wangarr beings are still influential. They manifest themselves in the form of sacred objects, designs and power names. Their spiritual power ('Marr' or 'Ganydjarr') is thought to be a vital force in ensuring the continued reproduction of human groups and in maintaining the fertility of the land. In the Ancestral past, before human beings were created, the Wangarr beings, frequently in groups, travelled across north-east Arnhem Land on epic journeys, during which they encountered other Wangarr beings travelling in different directions.

In their journeys the Spirit Ancestors created, through their actions, the form of the landscape. The routes they took became water courses, lines of trees or sandbanks. Where they cut down trees, valleys were formed. Where they dug in the ground, water flowed, and springs were formed. Where they bled, ochre deposits were created. And where they died, hills and rock formations remained. Every action of theirs had a consequence on the shape or form of the landscape which remained as a sign or evidence of their action.

The Spirit Ancestors took many different forms; some were anthropomorphic, others had the shape of plants or animals, while still others were inanimate objects such as rocks. They were not, however, bound by the constraints of the everyday world: if they were trees, they could walk, and if they were stones, they could speak. Furthermore, they could change their shape and form. In this way the Spirit Ancestors were able to transcend the boundaries of the everyday world, dissolving the distinctions between animate and inanimate forms and between one species and the next. As well as creating the form of the world they gave it order by naming the species of plants and animals that they saw on their journeys, and by establishing rules of behaviour and cultural practices that they expected the human groups who succeeded them to follow.

Creation – The Djungguwan Ceremony

In the next creation narrative, the Gumatj Nations detail how their Clan groups were formed and the rules that govern their culture, language, relationships, ceremonial life, obligations and responsibilities came into being.

Once the Creator defined the order of the Gumatj Nations world, the Creator through our Ancestral Spirits instructed them to live according to the rules they had made. In the case of the Dhuwal moiety, the Djang'kawu sisters, two female Spirit Ancestors, created the first members of the respective Dhuwal moiety clans by taking them from their own bodies, together with the sets of sacred objects associated with the land. Similarly, for the Yirritja moiety the creation myths are more localised and less explicit, but the link with Ancestral creativity is still acknowledged. The founding human Ancestors of each Clan group were instructed by the Creator through their Spirit Ancestors in the performance of ceremonies associated with the land. For example, they were taught the songs that the Ancestors had sung, that told the events of their journeys and they were shown how to make the ceremonial objects, grounds, physical artwork etc.

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The Cultural Authority of Aboriginal Women

The role of Aboriginal women in traditional society was one of great importance and regarded with great respect by Aboriginal men as the balance of spiritual and cultural relationships is critically important and must be maintained. Aboriginal women hold significant roles within their community as senior law women, keepers and holders of sacred knowledge and the wisdom teachers on Country.

The societal structure of Aboriginal Nations is founded on an egalitarian base where Aboriginal women have their own cultural and religious authority of 'Women's Business' equal to that of 'Men's Business'. In 'Women's Business' Aboriginal women are keepers of sacred knowledge relating to particular ceremonies and rituals. Aboriginal women share and participate in leadership,

9 Cf. Anne Pattel-Gray: *Through Aboriginal Eyes*, p. 157.

decision making, and importance is given to their cultural authority and equal representation on elder councils, where they share equally the administration of customary law and other important decisions that are mutually beneficial to the collective. Aboriginal women's role is not one in which they are dependent or dominated. "It is a role of independence, responsibility and authority wherein they are enhanced as women".¹⁰

The basis of Aboriginal women's authority in Aboriginal society is very complex and applies equally to the men. When undertaking research within Aboriginal communities it is important to note that one does not ask an uninitiated young woman about important ritual matters as young women do not know the content of the secret law and it is extremely inappropriate to ask questions relating to these matters. It is important to understand the different levels of knowledge and the perception of the system. The senior women have greater knowledge, are regarded as the repositories of Ancestral Narratives and are responsible for managing customary law. Customary law as understood by Aboriginal women embodies both the governing rules which are supported by religious restrictions and regulates relationships and laws that govern a person's behaviour. A major portion of customary law is secret, and the power and jurisdiction are held by the senior women and men elders and the rights, responsibilities and obligations of the law, as articulated by the Ancestors are organised through highly complex kinship systems. The law is learnt by children through Ancestral stories, and the rules are taught at the same time, as are the restrictions which support them. One of the central functions of customary law in Aboriginal societies is to maintain law and order and balanced relationships in a manner acceptable and deemed equitable to the language group. Our Spirituality and cultural identity are carved into the very land that was bestowed upon us by our Ancestors. Our lifeways are rich in tradition, and our society is based on an egalitarian structure where women and men's business are equal, and the balance of power is critical to our spiritual lifeways.

Aboriginal women have religious and spiritual relationships with the land that are only accessible to women where certain ceremonies and rituals are enacted at particular times of the year and where young girls are taught important knowledge associated with the Spirit Ancestors. Children watch the behaviours within their extended family group and learn by imitating them, being instructed by family members and learning from them. Girls are instructed by their extended female family members and the boys by their extended male family members. The instructional societal system was most formalized in the separate initiation process of girls and boys into the religious ceremonial and spiritual aspects of language groups which is often referred to as the 'rites of passage'. Through the initiation process the girls and boys are instructed on various Ancestral Narratives, ceremonial songs, dances and the induction of the girls and boys into the sacred ceremonial life of their language group, which was and still is very formal and considered to be of significant ceremonial importance. Also, the girls and boys were and are still taught more specific abilities relating to the everyday

10 Diane Bell, Pam Ditton: *Law: The Old and The New*, p. 14.

social and economic skills such as gathering, hunting, artifact making – tools, weaving and learning the tribal obligations and responsibilities were taught in a formal way. Nothing was left to be ad hoc with the tuition of their children.

The religious and spiritual importance of land is of great significance for Aboriginal women, as this has substantial impact on their social and economic life. Land is the source of life as Mother Earth sustains us, both physically and spiritually as it is the essence of our being, and the existence of our identity. The centre of Aboriginal religion is the spiritual connection to Country and its focus is the re-creation and preservation of Ancestral Narratives and to act as a catalyst in revitalising these Ancestral Spirits and this connection. We, Aboriginal women see our past mergers into our present which influences our future as we are always mindful of our Ancestors and our connection to Country. This relationship between Aboriginal women to animal and place is symbolized through the totemic aspect of religious life. In Aboriginal Ancestral Narratives there are both patriarchal and matriarchal Ancestral Spirits who through our Creator Spirit acted in the creation of our humanity and world. These spirit stories are told by women and are given great importance in the authority of women and their religious rites and practices. Diane Bell writes about the Kaytej women's relationship with Country: "Their relationship to land is being constantly reaffirmed through the use and the obvious fertility of their Country. This is of economic, religious and psychological importance".¹¹

Aboriginal women hold certain places as sacred to only women and these sacred places give importance and legitimacy to the power, authority and respect held by women and within Aboriginal social structure there are areas allocated for only females and the same for males. Young girls, single and widowed women find a safe place away from the humbug of men and the broader social demands.

Diane Bell speaks of her experiences in Warrabri while undertaking her research with Warlpiri women and attending the 'yawulyu', her first women's ceremony and the women's place called 'jilimi'.

"The yawulyu and the jilimi embody much that is dear to women: both provide visible proof in the wider society of women's separateness and independence. It is from the jilimi that women's ritual activity is initiated and controlled, and it is in the jilimi that women achieve a separation from men in their daily activities. A refuge, a focus of women's daily activities, an area taboo to men, a power base, and expression of women's solidarity, the home of the ritually important and respected women, the jilimi is all this and more".¹²

Aboriginal women were and are still independent and autonomous members of their communities and their role was different from the men but fundamentally they jointly shared and maintained complementary roles where law was and is considered unchanging and all-powerful strength within their lives. Both men and women play an important role in teaching and sustaining this law. The basis of women's authority rested upon ritual knowledge and expertise, rights in land and seniority. Mary Graham describes this relationship to land,

11 Diane Bell: *Daughters of the Dreaming*, p. 81.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The land is a sacred entity, not property or real estate; it is the great mother of all humanity. Dreaming is a combination of meaning (about life and all reality), and an action guide to living. The two most important kinds of relationships in life are, firstly, those between land and people and, secondly, those amongst people themselves, the second being always contingent upon the first. The land, and how we treat it, is what determines our human-ness. Because land is sacred and must be looked after, the relationship between people and land becomes the template for society and social relations. Therefore all meaning comes from the land.¹³

The Ancestral Narratives depict the time our Spirit Ancestors created our world, and these stories were and are still handed down through our oral traditions. For Aboriginal women our belief is that the spiritual, natural, sacred and human world are part of one vast unchanging network of relationships which can be traced to the great Spirit Ancestors. The spiritual lives of Aboriginal people today and the ancient era of creation are enacted in ceremonies, rituals, songs and dances.

The spiritual significance of these Ancestral Narratives has been and is still passed on from generation to generation by our elders. Songs, accompanied by clapsticks, relate the story of those early times and bring to the power of the Spirit Ancestor to bear on our life today. The Ancestral Narratives are our understanding of the world and its creation that inform us of this time and embed in us our laws and are the beginning of knowledge, from which came the laws of existence. For survival these laws must be observed.

Sadly, the role and function of Aboriginal women were to be greatly impacted by the British invasion, colonisation and missionisation. Eurocentric cultural values such as patriarchy and misogyny combined with racism would lead to the erosion their authority, power and independence.

The Impact of Colonisation

Over the past two and half centuries the Aboriginal nations of Australia have faced invasions, forced colonisation, the theft of our lands, genocide both physical and cultural, the oppression of racist colonial powers, violence, and subjugation from the West.

The denial of Aboriginal peoples' humanity in the face of colonial greed to take what did not belong to them through whatever means were necessary and to destroy and persecute Aboriginal people as they, the Colonisers, deemed them inferior and demonised every aspect of their humanity, spirituality and religious culture because it had no value to them. Rowley notes:

The categorical imperative of the missionary allowed for little compromise; and colonial administrations at best, tended to see themselves as extending the boundaries of the Kingdom of God as well as the power of the nation state. This quite fundamental intolerance, by discounting the native systems of belief, paved the way for more debased ideologies of colonisation.¹⁴

13 Mary Graham: *Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldview*, pp. 106.

14 Charles D. Rowley: *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, p. 11.

This racist impact and destruction of Aboriginal Nations, worldview and cultures throughout Australia is still felt to this very day as their racist oppression is still perpetuated upon the life we live. The theft of our Aboriginal lands and the forced removal of our Aboriginal people from their traditional homelands; the genocide of hundreds of thousands of our Aboriginal men, women and children; the rape of our men, women and children; the theft and forced removal of our Aboriginal children and the institutionalization of generations upon generations of our children; the cultural genocide committed against our cultural traditions by the state, church and academia.

The non-human terms with which Aborigines were labelled now became codified and legalized. The Aborigines were to have no rights at law except in the person of their protector. They could be moved bodily from one place of abode to another, forbidden to move from the new abode, forbidden to enter the new abode if partially white, forbidden to move south of a certain arbitrary 'leper line', forbidden to own their own land, forbidden in many cases to rear their own children, unable to marry without permission, and even forbidden to decide how to spend the paltry wage they were sometimes allowed to earn. No longer was the prejudice against Aborigines a result of personal social interactions; it had become institutionalised – the very structure of the law had written into it discrimination against the Aboriginal race.¹⁵

The Australian government created laws that denied Aboriginal people their humanity and that subjugated, imprisoned and oppressed them and the church as an instrument of the government which tried to crush our spiritual and cultural practices. Laws were imposed that made Aboriginal languages outlawed, Aboriginal people were rounded up and imprisoned in compounds maintained by both government and church and the academic world claimed Aboriginal people to be nothing more than the missing link in evolution.

There were several factors such as the period of 'enlightenment', and the emergence of 'scientific racism' that were of significant influence during Western colonial expansion that shaped Western treatment of Indigenous people and this correlation appears to be a critical aspect in the establishment of Western racism.

The most obvious one was colonial, capitalist exploitation itself with its flagrant violence and usurpation of natural assets such as land and mineral or agricultural resources, and the exploitation of indigenous labour. The overwhelming factor in this exploitation, of course, was the slave trade.¹⁶

The period of 'enlightenment' and 'scientific racism' formed the bedrock of the Australian Eurocentric attitude of superiority, patriarchal values and tainted their view and cultural bias which permeated all social and political structures, policy and systems which influenced and dominated Western Christianity. "The historical coincidence of exploitation, rationalization and a scientific basis for denying humanity to enslaved or exploited peoples provides the foundations for Western institutional racism".¹⁷

The application of this racist ideology¹⁸ translated by successive Australian governments in the form of racist institutionalization saw the construction of

15 Keith R. McConnochie: *Realities of Race*, p. 81.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

18 Cf. Anne Pattel-Gray: *The Great White Flood*, p. 312.

legal policies being placed on Aboriginal people that denied them all rights except those given to their protector. The white male Protector literally dominated every aspect of an Aboriginal person/people life. The Protector could forcibly move any Aboriginal person/people from one place to another where they were held against their will and forbidden any right to leave. An Aboriginal person/people was forbidden to own land and forbidden to raise their own children in most cases their children were taken from their mothers and sent to various government and church run institutions and in most cases never to see their mothers again, unable to marry without permission of the white male protector and forbidden to spend their measly earnings if they were lucky to receive any. In most cases the white male Protector would remove all young and strong Aboriginal men from the community leaving only the old men and little boys. This left Aboriginal girls and women extremely vulnerable to white male sexual violence and abuse. "Europeans kidnapped black children, or received them, with remarkably clear consciences".¹⁹ Australian historian Henry Reynolds states,

Aboriginal children were kidnapped in all parts of Australia. Boys as young as five and six were taken to be 'bred up to stock work'; girls only a little older were abducted to work as servants and to double as sexual partners. The trade in children probably began in the first half of the nineteenth century and developed rapidly during the settlement of north Australia between 1860 and 1920 [...] two [white] Europeans had stolen two boys, locked them in a hut and then taken them to the gold diggings to sell. He [a squatter] feared the practice would continue 'because it pays so well'.²⁰

If this was not disturbing enough the missionary Lancelot Threlkeld documents other accounts of barbaric colonial violence of little Aboriginal girls:

heard at night the shrieks of Girls, about 8 and 9 years of age, taken by force by the vile [white] men of Newcastle [...] There are now two government stockman that are every night annoying the Blacks by taking their little Girls.²¹

Threlkeld documents another account of colonial violence and sexual attack

describing a grotesque massacre of a group of about thirty Aboriginal people by stockmen: 'the stockmen came, ripped open the bellies of the blacks, killed the women, took the children by the legs and dashed their brains out against the trees, they then made a triangular log fire to burn the bodies, and reserved two little girls, about 7 years old for lascivious purposes and because they were *too small* for them they cut them *with knives*'.²² [emphasis in original]

These horrific acts of violence happened all over Australia and Aboriginal women did everything to protect their children but to no avail as their digging sticks were not enough to defend themselves from the sexual violence and physical abuse of the white men of the colony. Lorna Lippmann shares another incident,

Dame Mary Gilmour [...] saw an aboriginal man and his wife bathing in the river. A passing white settler, on his way home from an unsuccessful rabbiting expedition, raised his gun and shot the woman, for no reason other than for 'sport'.

19 Ibid., p. 19.

20 Henry Reynolds: *Frontier*, p. 74.

21 Lancelot Threlkeld: *Memoranda of Events at Lake Macquarie*, p. 88.

22 Lancelot Threlkeld: *Report of the Mission to the Aborigines at Lake Macquarie, for 1837, pp. 1832-1844.*

When the husband with a cry of anguish went to his wife's assistance he also was shot and killed.²³

Aboriginal women suffered extremely horrendous treatment by the White invading society. They suffered such physical violence as being beaten, or worse, having their waterholes, sugar and flour poisoned, and even being shot down like dogs.²⁴ It is well documented that White men committed atrocities against Aboriginal women, such as repeated assaults, pack rapes and enslavement.²⁵ If the Aboriginal women and young girls were unlucky enough to survive such savage attacks – when the men had finished with her, or rather when she had ‘served their purpose’ – the men then shoved spears into her vagina until she died.²⁶ Women whom this was perpetrated against ranged in age from grandmothers to very young girls.

The blood runs deep throughout our billabongs in Australia and the cries of Aboriginal people can still be heard today as all of this happened within living memory and not in some distant time. Aboriginal women speak about the violent abuse they either witness or experienced over the decades.

As the decades rolled on the colonial violence became less obvious, but the Coloniser would find new ways to get rid of us with high level of incarceration, the taking of our children and the marginalization of our people. The goals became the institution where high numbers of Aboriginal deaths and police violence became the new norm, and our human rights still denied and racist laws and practices are still perpetuated against Aboriginal people. Racism, patriarchy and misogyny permeated are areas of colonial society and its influence is visible in church behaviour and academia.

Academic Racism

Many Australian academic researchers held a fascination about Aboriginal people and their primary focus of study was into the cultural and religious practices and societal structures relating to only Aboriginal men. Most research undertaken has been predominately white males who brought a Western cultural bias that was not only racist but misogynistic and who held no importance for the role, function and authority of Aboriginal women. White Western men did not recognise the importance of their own women in their society, as they had no authority and white women were excluded from all decision making and they were simply property to own and dominate as this was accepted as the norm in their culture. So, it is no surprise that this was the looking glass in which the Coloniser viewed all women and added to this view was the racist lens that saw Aboriginal women as even less than their own women. Because of the Western cultural bias which held no value for their own women this influenced historical

23 Lorna Lippmann: *Words or Blows*, p. 23.

24 Cf. e.g., Bruce Elder: *Great Events In Australia's History*; Noel Loos: *Invasion and Resistance*, pp. 57 f., 61.

25 Cf. Henry Reynolds: *The Law of the Land*, pp. 70 ff., 73 f.

26 Cf. e.g., Jan Roberts: *Massacres to Mining*, p. 19.

research which saw Aboriginal women being largely overlooked in most major research and this comes as no surprise because most missionaries and anthropologists were white males. Their research was more than often viewed through Western cultural biases which tainted their view on Aboriginal women from a racist, patriarchal and misogynist lens. Aboriginal women were either ignored or thought to have no relevance to societal structures and leadership. The Eurocentric male view was the man is the head of the house and leaders, so Aboriginal women were delegated to the lowest rank in society.²⁷

Through colonial expansion racism became socially significant in the building of Eurocentric structures and institutions where racism being the founding factor to define social stratification that was and still is beneficial for themselves and allowed exploitation of Aboriginal people. Keith McConnochie states,

The historical coincidence of exploitation, rationalization and a scientific basis for denying humanity to enslaved or exploited peoples provides the foundations for Western institutional racism [...] It appears likely that the Christian religion, with its intolerance of religious diversity, and the intensity of missionary activity it encouraged, may have provided a sense of moral virtue to the colonizer; after all, the locals were being enslaved and civilized for their own good. They may have lost their land and their culture, but in return they stood to gain a mansion in Heaven.²⁸

Their cultural blindness delegated Aboriginal women to subordinate roles with no cultural authority so there is very limited research depicting the significant status, resilience, strength, and religious authority and senior leadership of Aboriginal women.

This would leave Aboriginal women extremely vulnerable to the racist attitudes and actions of the white dominate society.

The Resilience of Aboriginal Women

In some way being ignored enabled Aboriginal women to play a bigger role in community as they became the protectors, food providers, the strong matriarchs of Aboriginal society. Through the period of segregation and then assimilation Aboriginal men were forcibly removed from their families and communities and sent to work hundreds if not thousands of miles away from their land as indentured labourers. This left the old people, women and children defenseless and vulnerable to the whim of racist patriarchal and misogynist government policy in which the church participated in the implementation and denigrating practices that re-enforce their dominance and power over the lives of Aboriginal women.

For so long, Australian history has been told by the dominant colonial powers and the story they tell is one of peaceful settlement and about a land that was 'Terra Nullius' which has since been exposed through the High Courts of Australia as a lie. The treatment of Aboriginal people has been kept a secret and

27 For further research, see Anne Pattel-Gray: *The Great White Flood*, p. 312.

28 Keith R. McConnochie: *Realities of Race*, pp. 44f.

certainly not told in any educational system or included in any curriculum and has kept Aboriginal voices silent until now.

Aboriginal women soon took charge of their situation and they become the stalwarts of their rights and their resilience which is captured in so many books written by strong Aboriginal women over the decades documenting their hardship and the treatment they have had to endure. The literature of Aboriginal women such as bibliographies by Merlan (1988), Horton (1988) and Hooton (1990) reveal a wave of Aboriginal women's life stories. Autobiographically based narratives began in the late 1970s and gained momentum with publications such as Oodgeroo Nunukul 'Stradbroke Dreamtime' (1972), Margaret Tucker 'If Everyone Cared' (1977), Monica Clare 'Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl' (1978), Ella Simon 'Through My Eyes' (1978), Shirley Smith and Bobbi Sykes 'Mum Shirli' (1981), Ida West 'Pride Against Prejudice' (1987), Marie Kennedy 'Born a Half Caste' (1985), Glenyse Ward 'Wandering Girl' (1988) and 'Unna You Fullas' (1991), Ruby Langford 'Ginibi's Don't Take Your Love to Town' (1988) and her two other publications 'Real Deadly' (1992a) and 'My Bundjalung People' (1994a), Della Walker and Tina Coutts 'Me and You' (1989), Ellie Gaffney 'Somebody Now' (1989), Patsy Cohen and Margaret Somerville 'Ingelba and Five Black Matriarchs' (1990), Doris Pilkington 'Garimara - Caprice: A Stockman's Daughter' (1991) and 'Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence' (1996), Mabel Edmund 'No Regrets' (1992), Alice Nannup 'When the Pelican Laughed' (1992), Evelyn Crawford 'Over My Tracks' (1993), Dulcie Wilson 'The Cost of Crossing Bridges' (1998), Doris Kartinyeri 'Kick the Tin' (2000), Veronica Brodie 'My Side of the Bridge' (2002) and Sue Anderson 'My Ngarrindjeri Calling' (2008), Jackie Huggins 'Auntie Rita' (1994), Rosemary van den Berg 'No Options. No Choice!' (1994), Anita Heiss 'Who am I? The Diary of Mary Talence' (2001), Fabienne Bayet-Charlton 'Finding Ullagundahi Island' (2002), Tara June Winch 'Swallow the Air' (2006), Larissa Behrendt 'Home (2004),' Terri Janke 'Butterfly Song' (2005), Jeanine Leane 'Purple Threads' (2011), Dylan Coleman 'Mazin Grace' (2012) and Marie Munkara 'Every Secret Thing' (2009).²⁹

Most of these Aboriginal women I have had the privilege of knowing personally are women of great strength and leadership. They would have a significant influence on my life and shape the woman I would become. These Aboriginal women would also have a profound impact on the lives of other Aboriginal women which would break the long intergenerational silence in the telling of their lived experiences. These publications would challenge white Australia's account of history and begin the process of Aboriginal women reclaiming their cultural authority and rights.

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