

'GIVE ME BACK MY NAME': THE 'CLASSIFICATION' OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN COLONIAL SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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There's a word for it
And words don't mean a thing
There's a name for it
And names make all the difference in the world.
David Byrne 1985

1. INTRODUCTION¹

In recent years, the indigenous people of Australia have begun critically to reflect on the categorisations and names imposed on them by Europeans. An example of this activity is the following statement by the Koorie linguist, Eve Fesl (1993:xiv), in the introduction to her book on the social history of indigenous languages of Australia:

An examination of the history of British colonialism and slavery throughout the world reveals that one of the first acts in the process of oppression has been the de-identification of the intended victims and a replacement of their names with labels such as "indian", "aborigine", "native", "black" or "nigger". Less concern is likely to be expressed for the oppressed or murdered if they are unknown. There is also a sense of ownership when a name is used by someone. The general noun "aborigine" has been used to replace our names which the colonisers never had the courtesy to use. I am, in this book, therefore and have in my personal life refused to answer to "aborigine" as a proper noun. At the national level I see myself as a Koorie (which means "our people"), and I shall use Koorie in this national sense throughout this book to replace the label. When speaking of a specific group of Koorie people I shall use their name. (When speaking of the general area from which I come, I refer to myself as a Murrie; when I am with my father's people I am a Gangulu; and I am a Gubbi Gubbi when with my other's kin.) It is interesting that many Anglo-Australians verbally attack me for having the audacity to dispense with their label - almost without exception they have tried to rationalise their objection by saying that "aboriginal" people won't be able to understand or will be confused or won't like it.

The labels which Fesl rejects were largely the product of 19th century practices. She and many indigenous Australians prefer terms of their own choosing. Since settlement by Europeans, a pan-Aboriginality has developed that could never have existed before. It is in the eastern states of Australia where the broadening of Aboriginal identity is perhaps the most advanced. This is apparent in the social construction of a pan-Aboriginal identity based on

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usage of the term 'Koori' (or 'Koorie') to mean all people of Aboriginal descent, in opposition to 'Gubba', a name used in some parts of Australia for all non-Aboriginal people with predominantly European ancestry.

Miller (1985), a Victorian Aboriginal writer, argues for the Australia-wide adoption of 'Koori'. Although he acknowledges that its usage is not compatible with the former existence of a large number of Australian languages, he claims that it is needed to replace what he considers to be the 'derogatory connotations' of the term 'Aboriginal'. He also suggests that the use of 'Koori' would honour the Eora people of Sydney, whose language was the source of this word, for they were the first Aboriginal people to feel the full impact of European settlement (Miller 1985:vii). Elsewhere, this pan-Aboriginal term is showing few signs of being adopted, possibly because the term was for a long time, and to some extent still is, associated with a state regional identity. For instance, in South Australia, 'Koori' is simply recognised as meaning a Victorian or southern New South Wales Aboriginal person. Here, 'Koori' is treated in opposition to terms such as 'Nunga' for southern South Australia, 'Nyungar' for southern Western Australia, and 'Murri' for Queensland and northern New South Wales. The pan-Aboriginal context exists for all Aboriginal people, by the fact of their opposition against white people. Nevertheless, in areas located outside the eastern states and which have strong regional Aboriginal identities, adoption of 'Koori' to mean all Aboriginal people has, so far, been unsuccessful.

In this paper we shall examine the names and epithets that Europeans applied to the Aboriginal people of South Australia, particularly during the nineteenth century. The work began with a survey of colonial newspapers and expanded to include literature and government publications. It is concerned more with 'popular' perceptions of Aborigines than with 'scientific' accounts. The value of such a survey lies in what it reveals about the changing European constructions of Aboriginal people evident in the 'labels' applied to them.

2. THE INDIGENOUS INHABITANTS OF AUSTRALIA

A survey of colonial literature indicates that the collective nouns most often used to describe the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia were *Aborigine*, *native*, and *black*. Of these, *Aborigine* and *native* were the most common and most formal, that is to say, the most emotionally neutral, terms. Greater formality was invoked by combining these words: *Aboriginal inhabitant*, *Australian Aboriginal*, *Australian black*, *Australian native*, *Aboriginal native*. The tautology *Aboriginal native* was the collective noun preferred in courts of law. The preferred 'core' term in the early years of settlement was *native*, but by the end of the century *Aborigine* had become more common, however, the shift in balance was only marginal and *black* was used throughout as a respectable alternative.

With the passage of time and growing 'colonial experience' more 'familiar' terms were employed. *Black*, although used in the same 'neutral' or formal sense as *Aborigine* and *Native*, nonetheless had a generally more informal sense. It was not uncommon, for instance, for a journalist when writing in generalities to use the term *Native* or *Aborigine*, but when referring to specifics—to events or individuals—to use the term *black*. Following earlier usages in other Australian colonies, *blackfellow* became increasingly popular as an informal term. The term 'blackfellow' made its first appearance in NSW Pidgin English in 1801. In a detailed investigation of *fella* in Pidgin English, Baker (1995:1) reports:

The first hint of a new role for *fellow* is to be found just 13 years later. A British prisoner had escaped and the army officer responsible for him went in pursuit accompanied by an Aborigine tracker. After two or three days, they saw the figure of a man far ahead of them and, after observing the way he moved, the Aborigine exclaimed *no blackfellow*.

(1) NSW 1801 *no black fellow* (Grant 1803:91: "that is not an Aborigine")

There are few pidgin data available from NSW in the first two or three decades but, from the 1820s, it is clear that *black fellow* and *white fellow* were the normal terms used by Whites and Aborigines in referring to each other, and that such usage was spreading as other parts of Australia began to be settled (see examples 2-5).

(2) NSW 1823 *black-fellows, when they died, would jump up, or rise again, white-fellows, and that white-fellows would jump up black-fellows*. (Lang 1847:415).

(3) TAS 1824 *Hanging no good for black fellow. Very good for white fellow, for he used to it*. (Melville 1959, 1:33).

(4) WES 1829 (leeches are) *very good for white fellow* (Wilson 1835:259).

(5) WES 1833 *no black-fellow no queeple* (Moore 1884:163: 'Aborigines don't steal').

By 1847, both *black fellow* and *white fellow* had been attested in all Australian states (including Northern Territory).

As regards South Australia, the earliest documented use is in 1838 in Bull: 'black fellow no throw big one spear that long way' (1884:84). In the same volume (p.152 referring to the year 1841), we find: 'White man plenty growl and then he shoot old man grandfather.' Another term for white man is *Massa*, again reported for the first time in 1841: 'by and by, you see, Massa, me 'pta' all night.' [= eat] (Eyre 1845, vol 2:30)²

The following report on the conflicts between local Adelaide and Murray River 'Aborigines' (*South Australian Register*,³ 24 April 1844) illustrates a number of interesting points about the developing language use:

After this summary manner of settling old differences, whether right or wrong, the cry was "What for policemen do this? When white man fight in Adelaide, black fellow say nothing. When black fellow fight, policeman come break spears, break shields, break all; no good. What for you no stop in English?" "But what for you fight," I asked. "What for? Me tell you," replied King John, "but no man what for we fight. Before white man come, Murray black fellow never come here. Now white man come, black fellow come too. Encounter Bay and Adelaide black fellow no like him. Me want them to go away. Let them sit down at the Murray, not here. This is not his country. What he do here? You tell Captain Grey to make Murray black fellow go away, no more fight then. Adelaide and Encounter Bay black fellow no want to fight; but Murray black too much saucy. Let him stop in his own country." At the conclusion of this speech, all responded "very good." It seemed to be the sentiments of all, and it was the cause of their intended battle; and I think that either the Murray blacks ought to be sent away to their own country, or that a proper understanding be effected

² Another variation of 'master' is still apparent in the contemporary language in southern South Australia: 'mathawi', reportedly meaning 'big boss' (Clarke, 1994b).

³ SAR (*South Australian Register*) is used for all textual references, even though the name of the newspaper changed several times throughout the years referenced here.

between the belligerent parties. Unless this is done, there will sure to be fights and affrays.

We note:

- (a) The asymmetrical use *white man–black fellow* in King John's speech. This possibly reflects the masculinity of the frontier: white men versus Aboriginal people of both sexes.
- (b) The difference between Pidgin English and English. Pidgin *blackfellow* becomes *blacks* in the English language news items.

The word *white fellow* is encountered first in Askew (1857:55)

They soon let me know, in tolerably good English, what they thought of me. The black gins kept calling out as I passed each "whurlie", – "Ah! white fellow, limejuicer", (which is a term used in all the colonies to newly arrived emigrants). "White fellow, no good. White fellow, too much plenty gammon"—and other similar expressions.

The asymmetry in the emergence of the expressions *black fellow* and *white fellow* is also documented for NSW, where (according to Troy 1994) *black fellow* was first documented for 1803 and *white fellow* for 1827.

By about 1850, *black fellow* had become the most common label by which Aboriginal people referred to themselves, as is evidenced for the established use of this term in South Australian Pidgin English. An example is found in Snell's diary entry for 27 December 1850:

Made a sketch of the hut for the hut keeper to send home in a letter and then started in company with a lot of blacks who undertook to pilot us as far as a place called the little Gorge - on the way I had some conversation with one of them respecting a superstitious practice of theirs respecting Opossum bones. You see, said he, s'pose one black fellow kill-um 'possum go 'way leave 'em bone on ground, then 'nother one black fellow pick'um up and wrap em in rag, long o' grease and pitch, and red ochre well, by'm bye plenty stink and then blackfellow go sick, sing out "oh him got my bone". Well bye and bye other one black fellow burn em bone long o'fire and then black fellow plenty tumble down, crack a back. (Snell 1988)

It is notable that some of the earliest uses of *blackfellow* in colonial literature were recorded uses by Aborigines themselves (*South Australian Register*, 24 April 1844). However, this 'pidgin' sense was lost as it became more and more commonly used.

Darkie, an American term for African-American, was in use in Australia by the 1840s. The *Australian National Dictionary* (Ramson 1988:193) gives its earliest usage as New South Wales in 1845. A letter by a policeman, printed in the *South Australian Register* on 15 July 1848 is the earliest example we have found in the South Australian literature. Like *blackfellow*, it could be a term of familiarity and 'colonial experience'. It appears to have been more commonly used than the literary record would suggest. Christina Smith, for example, indicates its use among pastoral workers in the Lower South East after the 1840s. On one occasion she quoted a local settler telling her that she was too kind 'to the darkies' (Smith 1880:54), and in another instance, she recorded a local stock keeper's advice that dogs were the best method to 'manage the darkies' (p.63). The context indicates a pejorative, hostile use of the term. By the 1880s, however, its use was becoming more acceptable and was increasingly evident in the colonial press. An article about Tommy Walker, a prominent Adelaide Aborigine during the 1890s, employed the term *darkie* with a sense of patronising familiarity (*Adelaide Observer*, 15 January 1898).

Nigger, like *darkie*, was an adopted American term, the *Australian National Dictionary* giving its earliest recorded use in Australia as 1845 (Ramson 1988:434). The pastoralist J.F. Hayward (1929:89), who lived in the far north of South Australia in the 1860s, often used the term in his reminiscences; he wrote, for instance, about his 'campaigns against the niggers'. In a letter to the *South Australian Register*, dated 8 February 1865, J. B. Hughes, a settler sympathetic to the Aborigines, wrote: 'The settlers or overseers generally too readily believe the tales against the "niggers" as they style them in the Far North...'. The passage suggests that the usage was somewhat unusual, or characteristic of the region. The word *nigger* was not commonly used in the colonial press until the 1880s.

The names and linguistic habits of North American Indians too were attributed to South Australian indigenous people. It is quite unlikely that *squaw* would have been used (see remarks on *gin* and *lubra* below) and the terms *scalp* and *big lot pain* are suspect:

Arrived at the whirleys, Pat's master called to one of the blacks who understood English, and told him what he wanted.

'We understand', said the black, 'big bird tumble down, never tumble up again, white feller want scalp, black feller do it very well: what white feller give?' added he.

'Oh, time enough when I see how the work is done', said the gentleman.

'You give us tucker,' said another of the party; 'squaw very bad, tumble down sick; big lot pain, very ill, want good tucker.'

'No doubt,' said the party address; 'but if two of you come that is enough. I do not require the whole party' (A Colonist 1867:94).

It is also interesting how the same writer translates the expression: *old woman plenty tumble down* into stereotypical Negro English "Our Moder dead" (p.95).

The following account from the *Adelaide Observer* (12 December 1914) suggests both that the term 'nigger' is used by ignorant whites and further that black people resent it. Of course, the writer of this piece treats Aboriginal objectives as a joke rather than a serious matter:

In return for chopping the domestic wood, carting water, and doing little odd jobs at the station, 'Johnny Murphy', a burly yet tired native, was kept in food, clothing, tobacco, and given a few shillings to boot by the Federal Government. When the new Swedish cook arrived (replacing another who had been dismissed for consuming Worcestershire sauce as a morning pick-me-up) he was certainly not educated up to the importance and social standing of the local aborigines. He said to us on the morning of commencing his kitchen duties: 'Vat you call dat big 'alkin' joint of a nigger vat brings in de vood and vaters?' 'That dark gentleman is Johnny Murphy', we replied. 'He is highly respected by his tribe, and I hope you will show him the deference which his social position among the wurlies demands.' The new cook shoved his head out through the small open kitchen window and yelled thusly to Johnny Murphy, who was languidly discussing a cooked sheep's head at the woodheap, while a dozen other natives eyed him anxiously and hopefully. 'Shonny Murphy, you big black nigger, come 'ere and take de bucket for some vater.' Johnny withdrew his face from the sheep's ditto and looked across at the Swede with astonishment depicted on the small portion of his countenance not hidden by his copious cataract of whiskers, but did not answer. 'You 'ear me, you old scamp' cried the cook. 'My cripes, I stiffen you mit a gridiron if you don't come, you black scamp'.... Johnny stood up and with outraged dignity fizzing all over him replied "What you bin talkem likey dat? 'What for you bin speakem me all same me common feller black man? Me no all same common feller black man; me workem alonga Gov'ment me Fedel

servant!' This declaration staggered the cook, and he at once became civil. Johnny therefore, did not write out his resignation.

The term *blackboy* is documented for NSW not earlier than 1895 and we find the first occurrence of this label for South Australia in J. C. Smith's diary for the years 1872/3 in the MacDonnell Ranges (entry for 20th November 1873), and a few scattered uses are encountered subsequently, in the *South Australian Register* (for example 19 August 1911) or Joan Lupton's diary for the year 1938 of her train journey to the far north of Australia (p.31): 'Dick, the master of ceremonies where the black boys are concerned.' In southern Australia, grasstrees (*Xanthorrhoea* species) have been commonly called 'blackboys' since early last century (Ramson 1988:60). This is probably due to its appearance: a tall, narrow stalk protruding from the tussock being suggestive of an Aboriginal man with a spear in hiding behind a bush.

During the 1880s a local illustrated weekly, *Lantern*, published satirical cartoons which occasionally featured Aborigines as their subjects. In the same period it also published cartoons of the American 'Sambo' stereotype⁴—presumably lifted from the British press (Figures 1 and 2). The interesting feature of the cartoons is that the depictions of Aborigines began to take on characteristics of the 'Sambo' stereotype (Figures 3 and 4). It is certainly no coincidence that 'black-face' vaudeville entertainment was all the rage in Adelaide theatres at the time (Figure 5).⁵ The depiction of the Aboriginal called Logic, in the cartoon 'A logical conclusion', clearly draws from this style of theatrical representation (Figure 4).⁶ This (con-)fusion of Aboriginal and African-American stereotypes, in both popular language and pictorial representation, underscores how marginal Aborigines were to the experience of the urban culture that produced such representations.

On this point, it might be observed that Aborigines were rarely a topic of discussion in *Lantern*. After the 1860s, as the southern frontiers quietened, and the perception of Aborigines as a 'dying race' became more entrenched, Aborigines seemed to recede from public consciousness. These conditions created a vacuum in which 'local' stereotypes, for a period at least, could be replaced by a generic stereotype.

While the word *savage* was sometimes employed to mean 'the original inhabitants' in the same sense as *Aborigine* or *native*, it usually had other connotations. In an anthropological sense, *savage* was used as an antonym of 'civilised'. In 1840, for instance, Governor Gawler was contrasting savagery and civilisation when he wrote of 'the true principle upon which a nation should proceed in colonising a province, once the exclusive abode of barbarous nations, or savage and erratic tribes' (*South Australian Register*, 4 December 1840). Almost sixty years later an *Advertiser* (21 December 1897) editorial used the term in the same sense:

Advancing civilisation claims and exercises an inherent right to carve a way for itself, and the monopolising of a continent by a comparative handful of savages could not be accepted as a permanent and equitable arrangement.

4 The stereotype persisted for some considerable time. A much more recent manifestation is a Western Desert man called Sambo (Bolam 1929:92).

5 Over the course of the 1880s advertisements for 'blackface' stage shows appeared regularly in *Lantern*. See, for example, 'Tom Hudson's surprise party - the white eyed musical kaffir', *Lantern*, 14 January 1888:8.

6 *Lantern*, 19 December 1885:12.

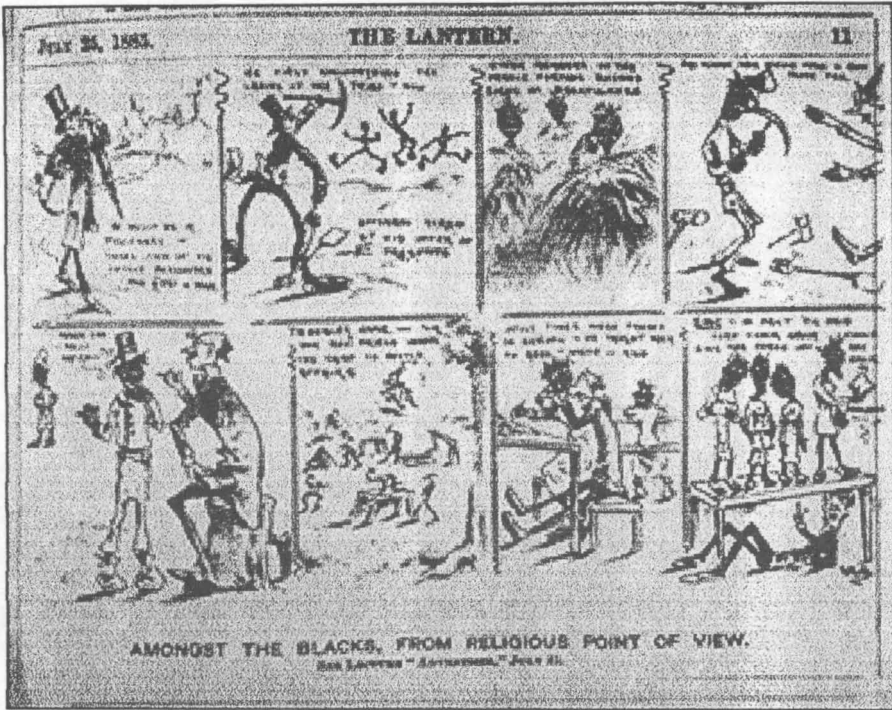


FIGURE 3: AMONGST THE BLACKS, FROM RELIGIOUS POINT OF VIEW, LANTERN, 25 JULY 1885 (Courtesy of the Mortlock Library of South Australia)

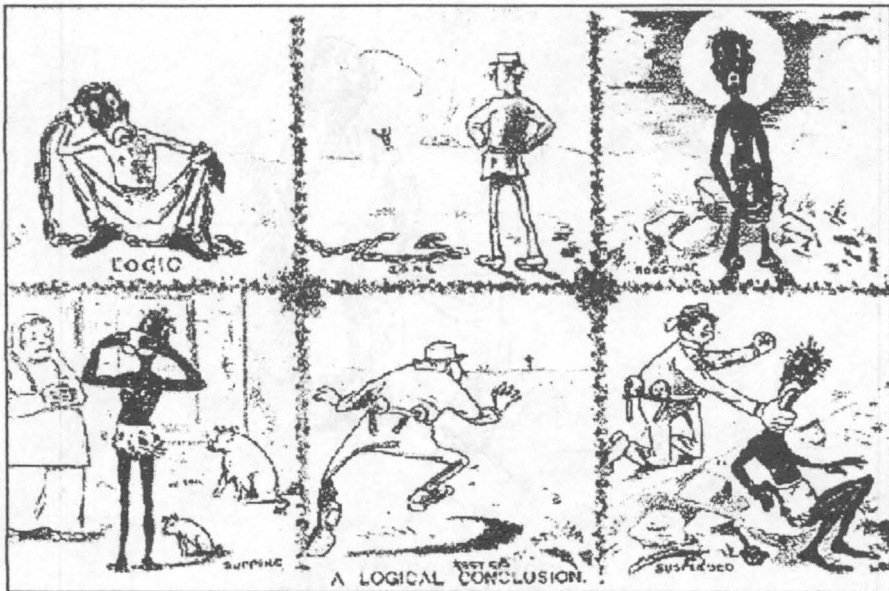


FIGURE 4: A LOGICAL CONCLUSION, LANTERN, 19 DECEMBER 1885 (Courtesy of the Mortlock Library of South Australia)



FIGURE 5: TOM HUDSON'S SURPRISE PARTY - THE WHITE EYED MUSICAL KAFFIR, LANTERN, 14 JANUARY 1888 (Courtesy of the Mortlock Library of South Australia)

In this sense, *savage* was used to mean racially or culturally backward, primitive, low in the 'Great Chain of Being' or the scale of evolution. Closely allied to the anthropological usage of the term is the sense in which it was used to evoke the exotic. A diarist in the 1840s wrote of 'the wild, the savage, the plaintive Corroborry' (Cawthorne, 11 February 1844). In accounts of frontier violence *savage* was used to stress what was regarded as the inherently 'cruel', 'ruthless' or 'treacherous' nature of the Aborigines. Typical of this usage is the following passage from a discussion of the Aborigines in 1852: 'The general characteristics of the savage—cruelty, vindictiveness, and treachery are not wanting in the tribes of Australia' (*Adelaide Observer*, 14 February 1852). In these contexts the term conveyed the more modern sense of *savage* as violent, heinous, cruel, and so forth. The idea of the 'noble savage' was familiar to most Europeans in colonial society, but when it was invoked at all it was usually in a satiric sense (for example *Adelaide Observer*, 31 July 1858).

More influential probably was the influence of the so called four-stage theory in the 18th century (see Meek 1976; Borsboom 1988), in which humans are allocated a developmental stage according to their mode of subsistence: Borsboom comments:

By this time [= early 19th century], an important geographical shift had taken place. In many writings the Australian Aborigines had taken over the role of the Ignoble Savage from the American Indians. Unlike their American counterparts, the Aborigines hardly ever had the honour to feature as Noble Savage. By the time Europe had learned about the existence of the Aborigines, the four-stage theory of the Enlightenment was well established and evolutionism was on the verge of being born. Although discoveries elsewhere in the Pacific had given a new impulse to the conception of the Noble Savage, mainly the Tahitians and Hawaiians were classified as such. Smith, 1985, distinguishes between 'soft

primitivism' (the afore-mentioned islanders) and 'hard primitivism', of which the Aborigines were regarded as exponents.

From classical times onwards the inhabitants of the antipodes had been depicted as what has been called above 'Plinian races', namely as monsters with inverse human characteristics. The first European eyewitness reports from Australia did not exactly mention monsters, but to the Dutch, as well as to the early English explorer Dampier, the Aborigines (new Hollanders) represented the most 'miserable' people on earth who had nothing to offer. In a way they possessed inverse human characteristics, like the Plinian races. They were naked, and reportedly had no language and no fixed habitation. Even James Cook - who comes closest to a Noble Savage conception of the Aborigines - admitted that they '...move about from place to place like wild Beasts in search of food' (quoted from Turner Strong 1986:180). The judgment that prevailed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century has more affinity with Dampier's description than with Cook's.

Turner Strong (1986:181), who gives an analysis of the position of Aborigines in European social thought up till 1845, notes in this respect that a '...few sympathetic appraisals of Aborigines appeared in journals of exploration and colonization, especially after 1830, but these foundered in general disdain'. Some decades earlier, Lord Monboddo had expressed the view that the New Hollanders, as described by Dampier, were illustrative of the 'link between humans and the orangutang; here humans (Aborigines) had advanced only slightly beyond the animal world.' (Barsboom 1988:427)

3. 'TRIBAL' OR GROUP NAMES

Throughout the colonial period it was uncommon for Aboriginal tribal groups to be referred to by indigenous language names. Through the work of protectors and missionaries, the government was aware of political, linguistic and territorial divisions among Aborigines, but it had no desire to recognise, nor deal directly with, any of those indigenous political entities (Foster 1993:155-174). In the first generation of European settlement, Aboriginal culture tended to be defined negatively, as a series of absences and omissions, rather than positively, as a people with a different culture. Measured against the model of 'civilisation', the Aborigines were regarded as having no leaders, no land ownership, no gods, no moral code, and so forth. It was as though to employ an indigenous name was to recognise and impart solidity to an indigenous group. When it was necessary to distinguish one group of Aboriginal people from another, geographical labels were usually employed. In the early years of settlement, for instance, the Aborigines whose territory included Adelaide, were the 'Adelaide blacks', or the 'Adelaide tribe'. The Aborigines from the River Murray, in the area of Moorundie, were the 'Moorundie tribe' and so forth. Geographical names also reflected the often transitory significance of local groups in particular areas. For instance, the 'Saltwater blacks'—Aboriginal groups from the region of the Lake Eyre Basin—became 'visible' during the 1870s and 1880s because of the trouble they caused in the Flinders Ranges when they travelled south to collect ochre. For the southern settlers, for this brief period, the 'Saltwater Blacks' meant trouble, possibly the loss of stock or supplies. It is clear that Aboriginal social structure in the earliest years of European settlement was far too complex to be easily divided by colonists into large groups that mirrored European 'states'.⁷ Even in the 20th century, the model of rigid language/land-owning groups that

⁷ An exception is the Parnkalla vocabulary of Eyre Peninsula by C. Schurmann (1844).

anthropologists, such as Tindale (1940, 1974), called 'tribes', has largely been rejected by scholars (Clarke 1994:52–81).

We note that some of the group labels became used by indigenous people in their Pidgin English, an example being *Murray black fellow* in the 1844 quotation given above.

Some Europeans recorded Aboriginal names for specific language or cultural groups. In Clamor Schurmann's published works (1846 and in a brief article in the *South Australian Colonist* of 10 March 1840) he recorded group names for the region from Adelaide to Encounter Bay and later for the Port Lincoln district, but none entered into contemporary colonial parlance. The failure to employ indigenous names reflects the relatively low political status of these groups, in the eyes of Europeans. The nuances of Aboriginal political structure would hardly have seemed important to the colonisers who wanted to change them. The illuminating exception is the *Milmenrura* tribe. The *Milmenrura* were the group alleged to have massacred the survivors of the *Maria*, which had been shipwrecked on the southern coast of the colony in 1840 (Jenkin 1979:57). Almost immediately the settlers were referring to the 'notorious Milmenrura tribe', and even 'Milmenrura nation'. Their notoriety strengthened by their alleged involvement in the murder of other Europeans at an earlier date (p.56). What really pushed the Milmenrura into the spotlight was the debate over Gawler's decision to sanction the summary execution of the Aboriginal people charged with involvement in the massacre. Gawler, and his apologists, claimed that the Milmenrura constituted a 'savage nation', owing no allegiance to the Crown—a state of affairs that justified the use of martial law (*South Australian Register*, 19 September 1840). Without getting into the technicalities of the debate, the 'Milmenrura nation' was a political convenience for Gawler, employed to defend himself against accusations that he had acted illegally in sanctioning the execution of British subjects—the Aborigines. Gawler's argument was disowned by the Crown, and publicly so when George Grey arrived to replace him (*South Australian Register*, 29 May 1841). Importantly, the colonists had very little notion of who the 'Milmenrura nation' were, either of their territory, leaders or laws. From the colonists' perspective, the *Milmenrura* were, to put it prosaically, 'those Aborigines, associated with a certain region of the southern coast of South Australia, implicated in the massacre of certain shipwreck survivors'. The *Milmenrura* were perhaps the only nation in history to be defined by the act of massacring shipwreck survivors. The important point is that the sense of opposition created, for a brief time, a named Aboriginal group defined in political terms.

The revival of ethnographic interest in Aborigines from the 1870s witnessed an increasing number of Aboriginal groups referred to by indigenous names: notably the 'Dieri' (Gason 1874), the 'Booandik' (Smith 1880), and the 'Narrinyeri' (Taplin 1873). Many of these 'tribal' terms appear to have come into being through the increased interaction between Aboriginal groups that were formerly socially and physically separated (Clarke 1991a:54–58; 1994a:74–81). European settlement, therefore, has created categories of Aboriginal social structure that previously had little or no chance to express themselves. Scholars were able to describe 'tribes' that, as names, were new to the historical literature. However, these indigenous names were slow to enter common parlance. Newspaper articles describing the Point McLeay Mission settlement still referred to the *blacks*, or the *natives*, rather than to their tribal or cultural name, the *Narrinyeri*. The Aborigines were, at this point, perceived to be a dying race, the studies of them were for the purpose of recording something of a 'primitive culture' that would soon be lost. However culturally interesting, colonial society

refused to regard these groups as sufficiently significant to warrant the use of indigenous identifiers.

4. TERMS DISTINGUISHING SOCIAL CATEGORIES

European settlement from 1836 impacted upon Aboriginal people in a variety of ways; some tried to 'stay out', others found themselves on missions, working on pastoral stations, living in fringe camps or, indeed, moving from one context to another. Europeans employed a variety of epithets to describe the various social categories Aborigines were perceived to occupy. One of the basic, and one that survives today among both white and black Australians, is *wild blacks*. From 1840, Judge Cooper of the Supreme Court made a distinction between individuals of 'wild and savage tribes' who had had no contact with Europeans, and those who showed some cognisance of European ways (*South Australian Register*, 19 September 1840). Cooper was the Judge who advised Governor Gawler that the *Milmenrura* were not British subjects and might be regarded as a people, or 'nation', outside ordinary British law. Using the *Milmenrura* as an example, he stated his case this way (Colonial Secretary's Office, GRG 24/1/1841/131):

...the Milmenrura tribe...are a wild and savage tribe whose country, although within the limits of South Australia, has never been occupied by settlers - people who have never submitted themselves to our domination, and between whom and the settlers there has been no social intercourse.

Wild blacks, as a social category, were more than just a legal creation, most settlers distinguished between the *wild blacks* and those who were in regular contact with colonial society. The *wild blacks*, almost by definition, existed on the 'other side of the frontier'. A variety of synonyms were used to describe this category of Aborigines: *wild natives*, *wild blackfellows*, *bush natives*, *untamed savages*, *untutored natives*, and *myall* (a term originating in NSW Pidgin English).

During the frontier years in the various districts of the colony, the idea of *wild blacks* probably evoked some sense of fear, after all, it was the *wild blacks* who stole the sheep, plundered the stores and assassinated the isolated shepherd. This sense of fear is expressed, for instance, in O'Halloran's report of the expedition to the Murray River:

The cruel tribe we are now surrounded by are very numerous, and have, doubtless, become emboldened by having defeated three successive parties of Europeans and having also escaped punishment from any detachment (*South Australian Register*, 10 July 1841).

However, as the frontier areas of the colony shrank and most of the Aboriginal people Europeans came into contact with were living on pastoral stations, missions, or in fringe camps, *wild blacks* increasingly took on romantic, even nostalgic, connotations. In evidence before the 1899 Select Committee inquiring into the Aborigines Bill, a number of witnesses distinguished between *wild blacks* and *civilised* or *semi-civilised blacks*. A sheep farmer, for instance, noted 'I would rather deal with a wild blackfellow than with many civilised blackfellows' (Select Committee, 1899:18). As early as 1865 a similar distinction was made by a northern settler when he observed that the 'principal depredations so frequently committed are not done by wild blacks, but by those usually harboured about stations' (*South Australian Register*, 7 September 1865).

In 1861 Mary Rainberd and her children were murdered at Kapunda by a group of four drunken Aboriginal men. The event marked a symbolic turning point in the European perception of Aborigines. One newspaper editor observed (*Adelaide Observer*, 16 March 1861):

...it will be found that the miscreants who perpetrated this crime belong to a class of blackfellows compared with whom the ordinary native is a civilized man - a class who hang about the townships of the interior, and who when not drunk keep themselves from starving by beggary and theft.

As the passage indicates, *semi-civilised Blacks* were those Aborigines living in camps within the settled districts, on the fringes of towns or stations, or near places where the government distributed rations. In popular imagination *semi-civilised blacks* were said to have acquired all the vices of civilisation with none of the attendant virtues and, in this context, were regarded as even more dangerous than *wild blacks*. As a newspaper columnist wrote in 1861:

Many say that the present generation is far worse than the last—that the vices of civilization have been grafted on the vices of barbarism, while the virtues of the savage have been altogether unaided by the virtues of Christianity (*South Australian Register*, 5 July 1861).

Of all the social categories Aborigines were placed in during the nineteenth century, to be *semi-civilised* was to be at the bottom of the pile. Gillen (Select Committee 1899:99) expressed a colonial truism when he said: 'The blackfellow in his savage state is infinitely superior to the semi-civilised natives who haunt the towns all over Australia'.

The terms *wurley natives* and *camp blacks*, while approaching the meaning of *wild blacks*, had other connotations. In 1870 the missionary Matthew Hale wrote of his fears that his inmates at Poonindie, Aborigines who were being instructed in how to live 'good Christian lives' in 'civilised' surroundings, might be 'enticed back into the bush to live again with the Wurley natives' (published 1889, p.69). *Wurley natives* and *camp blacks* were popular descriptions of the Aborigines who lived on the fringes of the mission and while not subject to its institutional control were provided with food and supplies for menial tasks.

The meaning of the phrase *civilised native* varied somewhat according to the observer and the context. At one end of the scale, a *civilised Native* was someone living and working in the manner of a European. In 1861 Henry Cottrell who, we are informed, was 'most certainly civilized before he was christianised' (*Adelaide Observer*, 20 July 1861) was held up as a paragon of the 'civilised native'—he not only farmed land in the Mount Barker district but he was a regular church goer. Thus, in a broad sense, a *civilised Native* was someone who had been educated in a European fashion and lived a European lifestyle. Despite this, the use of *civilised natives* was often synonymous with *semi-civilised natives*. A central Australian storekeeper giving evidence to the 1899 Select Committee said of the mission educated Aborigines:

There is no doubt that the niggers are brought up very nice, and they are treated jolly well too, I reckon. They can sing and talk well. Cattle killing goes on just the same, however. Say the civilised blacks go out 100 miles, they will not spear the cattle themselves, but they get the wild blacks to do it for them. The civilised boys are too cunning to kill. (Select Committee, p.63)

Appearing before the same committee, another witness noted that the evidence of 'half-civilised or wholly-civilised natives' needed to be treated with more caution than that of a

wild native, presumably on the basis that they were 'all the more cunning for their education' (p.7).

Being 'civilised' and 'intelligent' also presupposes the ability to speak standard English. This view remains constant over the years. Consider:

Marataya was examined through Coodmatcha, a young intelligent native, who spoke English well, and stated, that before the murders took place he used always to be with Nulta, and travelled about with him as his mate. Nulta was a very bad blackfellow, always growling every day. He had killed a great many blackfellows, and had killed his own father." (*South Australian Register*, 24 November 1846)

Similarly, Bolam (1929:93) introduces Wong-un-ma, 'a very intelligent lad, who acquired English in an incredibly short time.'

Whilst a good knowledge of English is often interpreted as indicative of 'cheekiness' on rare occasions, it is seen as empowering its speakers, as the following report in the *South Australian Register*, dated 28 June 1915 demonstrates:

MR. VAUGHAN AND THE ABORIGINE.

Speaking at the annual meeting of Minda Home, on Saturday afternoon, the Premier, Hon., Crawford Vaughan related 'a little incident' which had come to his notice. A certain member of the legal profession invaded the domain sacred to the aborigines, and endeavoured to persuade a native in a certain political direction by pointing out certain constitutional problems to him in pidgin English. The native looked up at him, and said in almost perfect English. 'What you mean is this. That our Constitution is framed upon the American model, whereas it ought to be framed upon the Swiss' (laughter). 'I think that lawyer got the biggest setback he ever had' said Mr Vaughan 'and if I tell you that he was my brother you will know I am not taking any liberties.

The epithet 'dusty gentleman' (*South Australian Register*, 14 September 1921) is a backhanded compliment, suggestive of pretentiousness rather than 'genuine' gentlemanly qualities.

In the early colonial period *wild blacks* were generally regarded as morally and culturally degenerate and the ideal of 'Enlightened colonialism' was to produce *civilised blacks* capable of taking their place in white society. Missionaries fully expected to bask in reflected glory when their charges demonstrated their rejection of the 'old ways' and their facility in the ways of civilised society. By the late colonial period the advent of evolutionary anthropology had reversed the emotional polarity of this conception. In 1898 the scientist J.B. Cleland advocated fieldwork among the Aborigines of central Australia on the grounds that these people were 'less likely to be mixed with other races':

In other words, in studying the purest examples of Australia aborigines, the scientific investigator would be studying as purely local productions as would be found in the respective flora and fauna (*Adelaide Observer*, 8 October 1898).

To the anthropologist Frank Gillen, they were 'interesting barbarians' who, for the sake of science, should be protected from encroaching civilisation (Select Committee, 1899:97). Consider the contrast in the following passage:

From the civilized natives practically nothing can be learnt concerning aboriginal lore and the primitive customs of the race. Their instinct of imitation is as strong as that of a child, and they take their notions from white men without being aware that they are doing so; but, amidst the almost unexplored regions of

Central Australia, which Messrs. Spencer and Gillen will visit, the real ideas of the blacks, as they have existed from time immemorial, may be found intact (*Adelaide Observer*, 17 September 1898).

Thus science created a distinction between *wild blacks*—the 'real blacks'—whose culture had existed from 'time immemorial', and *civilised/semi-civilised blacks* who had no culture.⁸ This construction has underpinned the work of Australian anthropology for much of the twentieth century and shaped the popular image of Aborigines.

While strictly speaking, the term *half-caste* means the progeny of parents from different racial backgrounds, in the Australian context it implicitly meant someone of part-Aboriginal descent. In using the term no one would ever have taken it to mean 'half-caste white'. It was not until about the 1860s that *half-castes* began to be recognised as a distinct category within the colonial population. In 1866 a newspaper editorial in support of a proposed mission on Yorke Peninsula, drew attention to the plight of the Aboriginal children in the district, observing:

Many of these poor children are half-castes, and there is something sad in the thought that the children possessing our blood, and with our blood something of the vigour and quickness of our race, should be doomed to such a life as the aborigines of these lands live (*South Australian Register*, 17 November 1863).

It is interesting that in the early colonial period interracial relationships, while perhaps objected to on moral grounds, were not especially opposed on racial grounds. As the passage above indicates, the 'social plight' of the *half-castes* was regarded as a problem, but not their racial make-up. The government, in fact, encouraged racial intermarriage, and, by extension, assimilation, as early as the 1840s by providing grants of land to European men who married Aboriginal women (Foster 1993:189–190). However, as evolutionary anthropology began to codify ideas of race in the late colonial period, and as the ideal of 'racial purity' acquired greater influence, *half-caste* not only implied immorality, but biological impurity and inferiority. The hardening attitudes are evident in an editorial discussion of the murders carried out by the Governor brothers in New South Wales in 1900 (pp.336–337). Employing the pseudo-Darwinian language of the day the writer argued that 'by a process of unnatural selection the half-caste in Australia is evolved, and this condition must inevitably lead to degeneracy' (*The Advertiser*, 1 November 1900). In the same article the author also observed:

Travellers have often noted that the half-caste generally inherits nearly all the vices of each side of his parentage and very few of the virtues. The pride and domineering instincts of the white are conjoined with the craftiness, treachery, and lack of self control of the blacks.

What is interesting here is that the language once employed to describe the *semi-civilised black*, is now used for the *half-caste*, the difference being that the mechanism by which these contradictory characteristics are passed on is genetic rather than cultural.

One consequence of the emergence of a 'part-Aboriginal population' is that it challenged the prevailing view that the Aborigines were 'a dying race'. By the 1890s, while it was still generally believed that the *full-blood Aborigines* were dying out, it was now being conceded that the part-Aboriginal population was increasing. This perception was very important in the dramatic shift of government policy away from integration and toward segregation.

⁸ In the contemporary speech of southern Australia, the 'wild blacks' are mythical spirits who embody the attributes of the 'old people', that is the pre-European culture (Clarke 1994b:129–131; 1994a).

Segregation would 'protect' the Aboriginal population in their last days and 'rescue' the part-Aborigine people from the degradation of camp life.

5. THE FAMILY OF METAPHORS

It is illuminating to briefly consider the flowery metaphors sometimes used to describe Aborigines. Metaphors that played on the notion of autochthonous origins were very common; Aborigines were the 'sable sons of the soil', the 'natives of the soil', or the 'dusky sons of the soil' (*South Australian Register*, 3 January 1861; 26 June 1875; 15 January 1898). In this construction, Aborigines were literally the offspring of the earth, not the owners of the land, but veritable products of it. A variation of this is the developmental metaphor of Aborigines as the 'swarthy children of nature', 'the hapless children of the wild' or the 'children of the desert' (*South Australian Register*, 19 November 1857; 20 July 1861; 27 September 1880; 18 November 1899). These are images that reinforce the notion of benevolent paternalism because children, of course, need parents or guardians to guide them. Europeans who discussed Aboriginal issues with some sympathy, drew on metaphors which created a closer familial relationship: Aborigines were not their 'children', nor their 'sons', but their 'brothers': their 'dark brethren', 'dusky friends', 'helpless' or 'sable brethren' (*Adelaide Observer*, 9 December 1843; 8 January 1866; 2 September 1899). Such writers often belonged to missionary organisations, and were implicitly evoking the image of the 'one brotherhood of blood', the Christian notion that all men were born equal in the eyes of God. The terms used to refer to them, of course, were very different. Stow, in a letter to the Governor (*South Australian Register*, 19 April 1840) refers to 'our excellent friends, the German missionaries.'

Perhaps the most common category of metaphor is connected to the belief that the Aborigines were dying out. Here the metaphors are coloured by a mixture of pity and disgust and act to distance the subject by stressing their racial otherness and at times problematising their very humanity. Aborigines were the 'feeble remnant of a ruined race', an 'ignorant and degraded race', the 'remnant of this truly pitiable race' or simply this 'poor degraded race' (*Adelaide Observer*, 5 July 1856; 1 October 1862; 13 January 1866). No familial metaphors here, no 'poor degraded brothers', no 'ignorant and dying children of nature'. What parent or sibling would be so callous as to stand back and, with no more passion than pity, watch the death of their own flesh and blood? The distancing implicit in dying race metaphors often went further than this, Aborigines were frequently 'these poor creatures', or 'these poor helpless creatures' (*Adelaide Observer*, 6 December 1862, 18 September 1874). Such language not only excluded them from the family and the race, it hinted that they were not even members of the same species. However, Europeans could also be defined in the early literature as outsiders to the ordered processes of colonial life. For instance, in a fictional account of the interaction between sealers and Aboriginal people on Kangaroo Island before official settlement, they are both called 'hourang-outangs' to stress their lack of civilisation (Cawthorne 1926:21-28).

6. APPROPRIATED ABORIGINAL TERMS

A number of expressions descriptive of Aboriginal people reached South Australia via the Pidgin English that developed in Sydney. Two particularly widespread labels are *gin* and

lubra for 'woman'. *Picaninny*, though not derived from an Aboriginal language again was established first in Aboriginal Pidgin English of New South Wales.

Gin (jin, djin), from the Sydney language, was first documented in New South Wales around 1800 (see Troy 1994:527) in the meaning female or wife.



FATHER: "Polly, what are you doing with that gin bottle?"
POLLY: "Oh! Father, mamma said that poor blackfellow had lost his gin, and I'm going to give him a drop of yours".

FIGURE 6: ABORIGINE AND GIN, LANTERN, 15 DECEMBER 1888
(Courtesy of the Mortlock Library of South Australia)

Lubra, according to the same source, is documented first in the Bathurst district in the 1840s and is said to be 'kuntungera dialect for gin or woman' (Troy 1994:598). Both words are documented for South Australia from the time of first contact. One notices a gradual shift in meaning from generic female to black female.

In a very early reference to local women, Moorhouse (*South Australian Register*, 25 September 1841) refers to 'about one hundred blacks with their women and arms'. The term *lubra* is encountered in the same publication for the first time in 25 May 1844 in a report of a court case: 'The native...lifted the spear in an oblique direction close before her, and said "lubra give me bread"'. The term *lubra* here refers to a European woman, and it is used in a quotation in Pidgin English. In the same year (*South Australian Register*, 31 July 1844), we find: 'Jimmy and Mary, a native man and his *lubra*, were charged with having struck and ill-treated John Garan, milkman.' Here *lubra* refers to a black woman and is used in English rather than Pidgin. Up to the mid 19th century, the meaning of *lubra* occasionally also was spouse. Among such examples of this meaning, the following one from Snell's diary (20 May 1850) illustrates this point: 'They also told us that they had no "Lubras", i.e. husbands.' Snell, in a footnote, observes: "'Lubra" was more commonly used at this time to

refer to “woman” or “wife”.’ However, the colour-neutral meaning of *lubra* persists. In the *South Australian Register*, 3 May 1852, we found the following extra from a court hearing:

She endeavoured to induce them to go away by saying that she had no flour to give them; to which one of several spokesmen replied ‘me no want plour, white lubra fery good. ***’ Immediately afterwards, they obtained entrance by forcing the door. They then deposited their spears in a convenient place, and commenced a dance around the terrified female. Their alarming gesticulations and mysterious movements were accompanied by unintelligible but alarming expression, and the woman fled from amongst them into an adjoining room, from which she produced a loaded pistol, and suddenly discharged it in their presence. She had previously endeavoured to induce them to quit the hut by saying that her husband would soon be home; but one of them replied, ‘No, no, me see him at Wellington; him go to Port Pilip’.

And a similar use is documented in Hussey (1897:29):

Long after wood was carted to town for sale the natives proffered their services to cut it up for a small consideration; and to obtain this employment they presented themselves at the doors and windows of the early settlers with some such application as this: - ‘Lubra, me cut wood; you give me black money and picanninie bit of baccy’; again, ‘You bery good lubra, me bery hungry; you give me some bullocky and bread, me cut wood.’ Sometimes they were bold enough to ask for white money, and as it was known that they could not sound the letter ‘s’ without a lot of spluttering, the offer was made by some who were in the secret, ‘You say ‘split sixpence’, me give you white money.’ With such a tempting offer they would try their very best, but they could not get further than ‘pit tixpence’; and of course the bargain was broken, much to their chagrin and disappointment.

Bolam in 1929 continues to use *lubra* to refer to both Aboriginal and white women as in page 122: ‘I once said to a black whose lubra had died recently...’ and (p.112): “‘Toby, my white lubra lose ‘em brooch’.” The last sentence indicates that by that time the unmarked meaning of *lubra* was ‘black woman’. Bolam also uses *gin* as in (p.133): ‘A gin had been rewarded for some slight service in one of our cottages.’

We would like to note that Aboriginal self-reference employs the term *lubra* as for instance in the statements by various witnesses in the famous Willshire case (1891) in the early 1890s: “Am donkey’s lubra, me been sleep along camp, Chiuchewarra and all about lubra been sleep along a me...” (p.46) “Am Roger’s lubra, native name Irra minta...” (p.47)

The word *gin* was first documented in South Australia in 1837 in Backhouse (1843:516) in a reference to Adelaide: ‘One of them (gins) noticed Bridget Hack kissing her little son...’ and a few years later in Dutton (1846:330) ‘...his ‘gin’ will ply the ‘yamsticks’ and dig from the soil.’

Askew (1857:84), makes the following unflattering observation: ‘The Adelaide gins are considerably uglier than the men, especially those that are married and have children, (or pickaninnies).’ In the reminiscences of Hammond Tilbrook (vol.1:178) ‘three young black gins’ are mentioned in connection with events taking place in 1864-5 but later in the same reminiscences the author (vol. 5:433) quotes a Pidgin speaker: “two lubra come along-a - this way today.” The expression *gin* predictably gave rise to a fair amount of panning. An example of this is found in a cartoon printed in *Lantern* on 15 December 1888 (Figure 6).

Piccaninny is a term employed to refer to children in many pidgin languages, including the Portuguese-based ones where it was first encountered. It was first documented in

Australia for NSW in 1816 and has since spread to virtually all English-related pidgins and creoles.

The first reference to this word in South Australia comes from the mixed whaling/sealing community of Kangaroo Island. W.H. Leigh, surgeon of the Australian company ship *South Australian* reports on his visit to Kangaroo Island around 1836:

He then took me into the wood, and, in a lonely wigwam under the bushes was this mighty chief's seraglio. He said a few words, when a noise was heard within, and a bush or two being withdrawn, he introduced me to his illustrious Sultana, by saying, 'Him good Doctor, - him love picanini.' I felt the force of his appeal, and waved my cap and bowed to them, saying, 'Good lubra! white man love good lubra!' At this they all laughed. (1839:145)

Angas (1847:55) refers to 'native children', but subsequently he describes a woman who 'was wrapped in a round grassmat, which supported her picaninny at her back'.

Wells, in his diary entry of 12 November 1853, uses *piccaninny* in both the English and Pidgin text:

Afterwards the lubra (that is woman) with her piccaninny (that is child) came to me with a pitiful visage, and asked me if the 'lubras and their piccaninnies would be burned, for she said, 'they steal em no sheep'. And out of compassion to her, I said, no, him no burn em lubras, when she replied my lubra (her husband) 'him no steal em sheep'. But it was 'dis one blackfellow' 'dat one blackfellow' - not her innocent lubra, - as if I could propitiate the big one Master not to burn them. This seemed to pacify her, and she ceased crying, for every now and then she kept saying 'Me no more catch em pish (fish)', 'Me no more want tuckout' (food) 'Me no more want bacca' - 'Me and piccaninny be burned' 'Oh dea' 'Oh dea'. But she went away with a lighter heart because lubras and their piccaninnies were not to be burned. (p.351).

The word *picanniny* subsequently was extended to mean little, small, as in Hussey's reminiscences of the early colonial life in Adelaide (1987:29): "Lubra, me cut wood; you give me black money and picanninie bit of baccy"

Similarly, in the 1840s Penney uses the term, 'Picaninni Murray' to distinguish this group from the 'Big Murray' people (Clarke 1991b:94). Jessop remarks on the prevalence of the word in both senses around Adelaide (and this quotation reinforces what was said about the early meanings of *lubra*):

It seems strange, that the word *piccaninny* should be used both by blacks and whites, and not a native word, when speaking of children. It is singular also that the same word *lubra* should be applied to both husband and wife, and be used by either when speaking of the other. The former word is very popular amongst them, and is applied indiscriminately to everything, to denote little or small. (Jessop 1862:47)

Like *lubra*, *piccaninny* was not clearly a racially marked item and it is used to refer to European children or young people, throughout the history of South Australian Pidgin English. Milner and Brierly (1869:177) report the following reaction of the Point MacLeay Aborigines to the Duke of Edinburgh's visit in 1867-68: 'Goolwa blackfellow big one glad see im Queen picaninny.'

The labels *lubra*, *gin* and *piccaninny*, when considered from a historical perspective share a fairly neutral, non-racist origin, but over the years acquired more and more negative connotations. They end up being non-reciprocal terms used to refer to members of socially

subordinate groups and, in the case of *lubra* and *gin*, racial slurs. The ubiquity with which Aboriginal women were referred to as *lubras* or *gins* in the Australian vernacular might be seen as reflective of the socio-sexual politics of the male-dominated Australian frontier.

We would also like to state that racism is manifested in the wider situational context rather than in the choice of a particular lexical item. In support of this claim, we would like the reader to consider a passage where *black woman* contrasts with white *lubra*, without thereby diminishing the inherent racism and sexism (Stephens 1889:480):

Sir Roger de Coverley being a visitor to the colony and the lion of the hour, a corroboree on a large scale was arranged in his honour, not a hundred miles from Hindmarsh Island. Wishing to give an additional zest to the performance, the Hon. Roderick Random requested the black women to undrape and perform an antique dance representing innocence without her clothes. The reply came sharp and crisp, 'What for white-fellow wantum black woman dance likeum that? You askum white lubras jump about mid no clothes: you hear what she yabber yabber.' Mitford, one of Australia's greatest humourists, published an apology in words something like the following: 'It was evidently a misapprehension on the part of the native woman, due no doubt to her want of a correct knowledge of the English language. We are in a position to state, that the Hon. Roderick did not ask the native women to dance in a state of nudity. He simply requested them a favour to their illustrious guest, to kindly dance to a *new ditty*; hence the unfortunate mistake.

7. GIVEN PROPER NAMES

A theme we cannot develop here in full is the widespread practice of the European colonists not to address their Aboriginal neighbours by their own traditional names, but to give them English ones. These new given names are either serious (for instance, a signal conversion to Christianity), simply convenient (such as 'station' names), or, in the majority of instances, demeaning nicknames that emphasise the subordinate social position of their name bearers. Many examples are found in the literature surveyed, and this practice is common for most other European colonies. We shall list only a few examples and would like to suggest that this practice deserves a separate more detailed study.

In preference to using Aboriginal names, Europeans often anointed Aborigines with European names such as Jack, Jacky, Jimmy, Jemmy, Bob or Bobby, Tommy, Mary or Maria, Betsy, Charlie, and so on. Indicative of the status of those who received them, many of the names were in the diminutive form, characteristic of the European practice of referring to children by the diminutive form of their given name. To distinguish one 'Jacky' or 'Bob' from another, a defining prefix was often attached to the name. Many of the prefixes referred to the country or location of the individual: for instance, Encounter Bay Bob, Onkaparinga Jack, or Spring-cart Gully Jemmy (*South Australian Register* 17 March 1838; 1 August 1840; 12 September 1853). At other times the prefix defined the individual by a physical characteristic. Simpson Newland's description of three prominent Aboriginal men at Encounter Bay during the 1840s bears out the point; Big Solomon, a 'prominent headman of the whale fishery' is described as 'an immensely powerful fellow, considerably over 6ft in height, and reputed to be the strongest man in the district save one' (Newland 1895:5), One-armed Charlie got his name because of a mutilated limb (p.6), while Shaking Jack was 'so called from being affected by the palsy' (p.7).

How the giving of European names reflects both European power and the namer's contempt for Aboriginal people can be seen in the following scene described in Snell's diary from 12 July 1850 at Milne Point on the Yorke Peninsula:

After dinner, I paid a visit to the blacks at their worleys and fraternized with them over some of their fish—they corroboree'd after their fashion and I sung them lots of English songs with which they appeared much pleased and they tried to imitate them. I was requested to give 'white fellow names' to the children and I christened them according to their appearance, 'Belly ache', 'Potbelly', 'Spindle Shanks', 'Duck legs', 'Flat nose', 'Goggle eyes' and so forth. The lubras were some of them very goodlooking and they wanted names too so I gave them 'Morning Star', 'Queen of Beauty', 'Water Lilly', 'Snowball', etc. etc.

(Snell 1988)

During the early years of colonisation in the districts south of Adelaide, Wilkinson (1848: 336) claimed:

The blacks living among civilised people very readily adopt any European Christian name, or in fact any word that they may be called by a white man requested to name them. Thus I remember women named Monkey, Cockeye, Pretty Sally, Grumble, Long Mary, etc.; and men named Jim Crow, Paddy, Long Jack, Jumbo, Encounter Bay Bob, Rapid Bay Jack, etc.

Similar puerile examples of name giving are encountered in many sources and this practice persisted well into the 20th century.

It is clear from the above accounts that Aboriginal people were often willing participants in receiving a European name. For instance, a long-time resident of the southern Fleurieu Peninsula stated that when she was a child, she and her playmates often came across Aboriginal people who had come into the townships around Myponga and Yankalilla:

The piccaninnies were pretty and plump, and were carried in a blanket-sling on the mother's back. If we patted the babies and gave them sweets or fruit, the gins would show their pleasure in broad grins. They would enquire our names and on being informed, would adopt them for their children, much to our annoyance.

(Welden 1936:51)

Earnest Giles, writing of his explorations on Eyre Peninsula in the 1870s, records a similar desire for European names:

These natives all seemed anxious that I should give them names, and I took upon myself the responsibility of Christening them. The young beauty I called Polly, the mother Mary, the baby Kitty, the oldest woman Judy, and to the old man I gave the name Wynbring Tommy, as an easy one for him to remember and pronounce.

(Giles 1889, vol. 1:99)

The European names adopted by, or given to, Aboriginal people, were sometimes anglicised homophones of their Aboriginal names, as Giles illustrates in the following passage:

Old Jimmy's native name was Nanthona; in consequence he was always called Anthony, but he liked neither, he preferred Jimmy, and asked me to always call him so (pp.102–103).

The European names of Aboriginal people sometimes derived from specific associations with individuals. Jemmy Moorhouse was the name of a young Aboriginal man, educated at the Native School in Adelaide, who sometimes worked as an interpreter for the government (*South Australian Register*, 17 April 1851). His name clearly comes from his association with the Protector of Aborigines, Matthew Moorhouse. Netterie acquired the European name

Billy Poole from his association, in the early 1840s, with the surveyor William Poole (*South Australian Register*, 14 August 1855).

It became common for Aboriginal people associated with pastoral stations to acquire the surname of the family who owned the property. Matthew Moorhouse (Aborigines Department, Outward Correspondence, State Records GRG 52/1, 5 March 1847) commented upon this after visiting the Mount Remarkable district in 1847:

I find that all the natives are known about the various stations by the names of the proprietors of runs and to a European this is more easy than adopting a native name and especially as they divide themselves into Groups according to the dialect they speak. All the natives living on Mr. Hawker's runs are called Hawker's Blacks and those on Mr Hughes runs, Hughes Blacks etc., they are well known by these names.

The acquisition of such names does not necessarily imply a biological link to the European family. However, other Aboriginal people were given, or adopted, the names of Europeans that had fathered children with Aboriginal women, often illegitimately.

Following the precedent established in the eastern colonies, South Australian colonists adopted the practice of conferring regal 'titles' on certain Aboriginal people: King, Queen, Prince and Princess. These regal terms probably state the perceived importance of particular Aboriginal people from the European perspective, although possibly with some indigenous influence. The use of monarchistic terms to designate significant identities in the Aboriginal population predates official European settlement in 1836. In the 1830s, the sealers based on Kangaroo Island had established relationships with some mainland Aboriginal groups. Two of the people who regularly visited them on the island were King Con and Princess Con (Clarke 1994b).⁹

Perhaps the best known 'Kings' in colonial South Australia were Mullawirraburka, generally known by the colonists as 'King John', and Kertamero, or 'King Rodney' (Gara 1995). Both men were leaders among the Kaurna people and the regal designations given them by Europeans was clear acknowledgment of the fact. 'King John', together with 'Captain Jack', another prominent Kaurna man, were made honorary constables in 1838 and given staves and other 'marks of authority' by the Governor. In 1840 Protector Moorhouse (Colonial Secretary's Office, GRG 24/1/381/1840) compiled a list of seven men who he considered suitable candidates for a proposed Native Police Force, presumably on the basis of their influence among their people, the list included King John, Captain Jack and King Rodney. These men, and others given the designation of 'King', were often referred to as 'chiefs' of their tribes. However, it would be wrong to assume that the individuals given these titles were the only recognised leaders within their tribes, or even the most important ones. Regal designations might have been acquired for reasons other than an individual's perceived or actual authority. In the 1850s, William Wells, a shepherd working on the Coorong, recorded a meeting with an Aboriginal man who introduced himself as 'King Henry' - 'a youngish man and...one of the smarter and best looking natives I have seen' (1851-55:297-298). According to Wells, 'King Henry', whose demeanour is described as 'imperious', got his name from an 'English gentleman'. In this instance the regal epithet appears to describe the man's personality rather than reflect his authority.

⁹ This name, sometimes spelled as 'Conдой' or 'Kondой', may be related to the term *kondoli* (whale), which had totemic significance in the Encounter Bay region.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europeans sometimes used the terms King and Queen to indicate respect for elderly Aboriginal people—even if it was mocking respect. An example of this is the Ngarrindjeri man, Pollapalingda, who was known by Europeans as Tommy Walker. As an elderly man in the 1890s, he was a notorious figure on the streets of Adelaide, well-known for his drinking habits, begging and sharp tongue (*Adelaide Observer*, 13 July 1901:43). In this period he was often referred to as King Tommy Walker (p.43). While, for Europeans, the title undoubtedly conveyed an image of ridiculousness (a drunken fringe-dweller *and* a member of 'royalty'), it still indicated a sense of respect for age and influence (Tommy, for instance, played a role in organising his compatriots for the annual distribution of blankets and other rations). Another important point is that Tommy used the title himself to indicate his seniority (p.43). In this sense, as used by Aboriginal people, the term 'King' became an Aboriginal-English equivalent of 'Elder'.

Aboriginal people, as well as Europeans, recognised advantages in the adoption of European names. English names were easier to pronounce and remember for English colonists than the Aboriginal given names, and the adoption of these names made the local Aboriginal population more familiar to them. Furthermore, the often patronising or demeaning names that Europeans gave to Aboriginal people served to symbolically reinforce the asymmetrical power relationship between the groups. As it was Aboriginal practice to have several names (for example Meggitt 1984:278–279), varying according to social context, the acquisition of European names might have been regarded as a natural extension of this—a fact that might explain the enthusiasm of some Aboriginal people to acquire European names. Indeed, there may even have been a continuity in the style of name giving, such as names based on an individual's physical characteristics, or place of origin.

8. CONCLUSION

This survey of the 'labels' that white Australians have applied to Aboriginal people has served to map the changing relationship between the two groups. As Fesl (1993:xiv) points out, one of the first acts of the coloniser is to 'de-identify' indigenous people. This is evident, for instance, in the reticence to use indigenous group names: to do so would have implicitly acknowledged the existence of the 'Other' as a definable political entity. The colonisers, however, did more than 'de-identify' the indigenous people of Australia, they 're-identified' them in a way that served to legitimate the inequalities of the relationship.

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